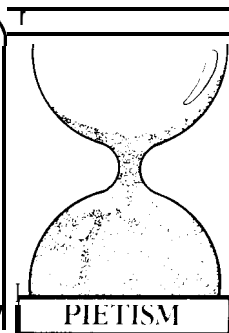


# Dispensationalism in Transition

(Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence")



Vol. VIII, No. 4

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April, 1994

## CHARISMATIC CONFUSION:

### Part 1: The Nature of Tongues

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In 1989 Reconstructionists took a series of public floggings from defenders of old-school dispensationalism. The self-appointed public defenders were Wayne House, Tommy Ice, Dave Hunt, and Hal "1 988" Lindsey. Of course, each flogging was administered without proper trial – and apparently without much research.

House and Ice, desperately seeking means of tarring and feathering a straw man, accused Reconstructionists of undue charismatic links. My writings were among those cited in *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse* as representative of Dominion Theology. As most of my readership knows, Greg Bahnsen and I responded with *House Divided: The Collapse of Dispensational Theology*.

I do not want to resurrect a book as dead as *Dominion Theology*. But I do want to make this passing reference to it as a case in point for a new series. I have had a number of friends and opponents inquire about the charismatic link. So in this series I will kill two birds with one stone: I will analyze the charismatic question (specifically regarding tongues) as a theological issue, while demonstrating that dispensationalism (widely adopted by charismatic) lacks the theological tools to stand against charismatic influence. This series is not meant to rebuke charismatic; it is meant to rebuke dispensationalists. Nevertheless, I do hope that my charismatic brothers will be challenged to reconsider their involvement in a movement I believe to be in error.<sup>1</sup>

#### Charismatic Growth and Dispensational Theology

According to the December, 1979, *Christianity Today* Gallup Poll, 19 per cent of all adult Americans (over 29 million persons) consider themselves to be "Pentecostal" or "charismatic" (*Christianity Today*, Feb. 22, 1980, p. 25). The charismatic movement is one of the most phenomenal religious movements of our time in terms of growth rate and influence. It is reported that even 16 per cent of Presbyterians deem themselves to be charismatic (Ibid.). These statistics have only increased in the decade since, as books on the subject and "Charismatic Interest" shelves in Christian bookstores demonstrate.

Although the same poll indicated that only about one-sixth of those who claim to be charismatic actually speak in tongues, it is, nevertheless, apparent that tongues-speaking (or glossolalia, as it is technically known) is certainly one of the most distinctive features of the movement.

In this study I will investigate the Scriptural data regarding three fundamental issues relating to glossolalia: (1) The

Nature of Tongues, (2) The Purpose (or Function) of Tongues, and (3) The Transience of Tongues. These three issues must be resolved for both a proper understanding of the biblical phenomenon as it occurred in the apostolic era, and an adequate spiritual evaluation of the charismatic movement as it occurs today.

As we will see, the covenantal, preterist theology provides a coherent understanding of the appearance and passing of tongues.<sup>2</sup> I find it difficult to understand how dispensationalists could resist charismatic influence. Their theology of the "last days" – as initiated by the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel – and their interpretation of Acts 2:16ff set them up for charismatic expectations.

Acts 2:16-21 reads: "But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams, and on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy, I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and notable day of the LORD. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'"

How can a dispensationalist fault the charismatic in light of this passage? His theology and date-setting lend themselves to glossolalia. But let us get started. In studying biblical glossolalia it is necessary to consider its nature in terms of both its form and its content.

#### The Nature of Tongues

*The Form of Tongues in Scripture*. Basically there are two standard positions as to the biblical form tongues-speaking. One is that tongues are ecstatic utterances. These utterances are regarded as simple rhapsodic, incoherent, spiritual ejaculations of prayer and praise possessing neither formal structure or logical content. Frequently adherents of this view (the majority view in contemporary charismatic circles) speak of tongues as a "heavenly language," thereby distinguishing it from mundane human speech.

The other view is that tongues are a miraculous endowment of the Holy Spirit whereby a person can speak a foreign human language which he has never learned. Thus, such tongues utterances would be understandable to anyone who spoke the language uttered under the influence of the Spirit.

That the true form of tongues is that of structured, coherent, foreign, human languages is evident in the Scripture. Consider the following lines of evidence:

First, *the initial, definitive, first-occurrence of tongues was indisputably in the form of structured foreign languages*. In Acts 2 Luke records the first historical manifestations of the biblical gift of tongues-speaking. His record effectively nails down its true biblical form: "And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because they were each one hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and marvelled, saying 'Why are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born. We hear them in our tongues speaking the mighty deeds of God'" (Acts 2:6-8, 11).

This first occurrence is definitive of biblical tongues, For this very experience is the one prophesied by God through His prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32) and by the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:17; Acts 1:5).

Second, *subsequent episodes of tongues-speaking in Acts demonstrate conformity to the first occurrence pattern*. The very next express reference to tongues is found in Acts 10:45-46. (Some suppose tongues occur in Acts 8, but there is no express reference to such there.)

In Acts 10, the Lord sovereignly opens the hearts of Cornelius and his household to the truth of the Gospel. These people immediately exercise a gift identical to that in Acts 2: "And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also, For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God."

When this event is related to the Jerusalem Church, Peter reports that "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning. If God therefore gave to them the *same gift* as *F/e gave to us* also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:15, 17). Note that Peter carefully defines the nature of this event in terms of its identity with the Pentecost event. Clearly the Pentecost form of tongues serves as the paradigm for later manifestations of glossolalia.

Third, *all references to tongues-speaking in Scripture employ the same basic terminology indicating identity of form*. The Greek word for "tongues," which occurs in all instances of tongues-speaking, is *glossa*. The Greek word for "speak" in every instance is *laleo*. Since tongues are not re-defined

elsewhere, and since the same terminology as in Acts is universally employed, and since an obvious pattern is set early in Acts, we may safely conclude that the biblical form of tongues was constant: *tongues are foreign languages*,

But there is more evidence which we will consider next month. Stay tuned!

### Conclusion

As I analyze the tongues of Scripture, I will show that there is a fundamental dissimilarity to the contemporary phenomenon. This should tip us off as to the error of equating biblical tongues and modern charismatic experience. Of course, the dispensationalist may (and many do, John MacArthur, for instance) agree with us on this point. But for sake of completeness of study, I will set forth various issues necessary to understanding tongues,

### An Advertisement

I will be conducting a mini-conference entitled "Understanding Biblical Prophecy" in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Sunday, June 12th. I will be speaking at East Ridge Presbyterian Church (call 615-867-7295) giving the following studies: "Understanding the Christian Hope" (9:30 AM). "Understanding the Great Tribulation" (10:45 AM). "Understanding the Book of Revelation" (6:00 PM).

I will also be giving a sixteen hour course on Eschatology in Lakeland, Florida, July 11-13. For more information and registration, call: Ken Talbot at 813-644-1451.

I will be speaking at a major Reconstructionist conference, along with Greg Bahnsen, Gary DeMar, Joe Morecraft, R. J. Rushdoony, and others in Atlanta, Georgia, on September 30th and October 1st. For more information call Chalcedon Presbyterian Church: (404) 396-0965.

I speak every Sunday at my church (!). If you are ever in the Greenville, South Carolina area, come visit with us.

For a six message series on Tongues, order Tape Series #9 from me at: 46 Main St., Conestee, SC 29636, Cost: \$28. You may also want to get my *The Charismatic Gift of Prophecy: A Reformed Response to Wayne Grudem* (send \$9). Also available: six tape series on the Law (Set #21): \$28; seventeen tape set on eschatology (Set #5): \$68.

Please excuse the editorial "we," Mark Twain says the editorial we should only be used by editors, presidents, and people with tapeworms, I simply do not fit any of these designations

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