

Newsletter, January 2015

In this newsletter we shall briefly discuss charismata utilizing excerpts taken from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book II, Chapter 14.1 and 14.2. Charismata, which can be defined as an extreme emphasis on various sign gifts, constitutes a broad movement across the entire spectrum of today's churchianity often accompanied by the perpetual health and prosperity delusions that we discussed in last month's newsletter. While we can only discuss the charismatic movement in its present form in this brief newsletter, its modern origin and exceptional growth is set forth in its proper historic context in *CRC Book III*, Chapter 18.7. Although this preoccupation with divine gifts is most prevalent within Pentecostal and Apostolic churches, it is far more widespread than that. Charismata can be found to some extent in Roman Catholicism and within all major Protestant denominations and autonomous churches. Moreover, the old occult religions, "new age" occult emulations, as well as many so-called Christian cults embrace charismata in one form or another.

The word "charisma" (from which we coin the word "charismata") comes from the Greek word *charis* that means "grace" or "favor." However, the charismatic movement does not emphasize the broader meaning of "grace," but rather a narrower interpretation of "favor" or more specifically "sign gifts." Sign gifts were special gifts that were given to a few in the early church as a means to authenticate the Gospel message through various miracles that were obviously only possible through a divine act of God. So many of these miracles are recorded in Scripture that it is no longer necessary to see them performed first hand to authenticate the truth of the Gospel. Notwithstanding, the charismatic movement is made up of those who place a strong emphasis upon divinely bestowed personal gifts or powers claiming that they widely exist in certain churches today – especially as we approach the end times leading up to the second advent of Christ.

Speaking in tongues, more technically referred to as "glossolalia" (discussed below) is the primary gift that those of the charismatic movement practice extensively. Along with glossolalia, the interpretation of glossolalia into English or another vernacular is said to be practiced by still others as a personal sign gift. In addition, other supernatural phenomena and powers of various sorts are also claimed, occasionally including predictive prophecy that extends or exceeds that found in Holy Scripture. Some are said to have the power of "the discerning of spirits" – a special gift or supernatural ability to determine if a spirit is good or evil. The charismatic also believes in invoking the "gift of ritual healing" as a divine right of believers (cf. Newsletter December 2014; *CRC Book II*, Chapter 14.3) as well as the power to cast out evil spirits. The continued practice of various aspects of charismatic phenomenon, especially glossolalia, is considered necessary for the full participation of the faithful and are ritualistically exercised in all of their assemblies on a regular basis.

Charismatics are for the most part fundamental in their profession that the Scriptures are the literal Word of God although their approach to the study of the Bible is somewhat narrow and limited because of their charismatic preoccupation. Some of these churches idolize the *Authorized King James Version* of the Bible (*AKJV*) as being directly inspired by God. King James of England only authorized the translation; he did not personally translate it under divine direction as some charismatics appear to believe. It was translated by a group of English church scholars from available Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of that day. The *AKJV* translation of 1611, with minor amendments, has stood a severe test of more than four centuries as "The Bible" for many devout believers, such that we cannot find any serious fault with it as a reasonably sound translation of God's Word. Nevertheless, the Bible must always be carefully interpreted with a view to understanding the inspired Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek autographs, which underlie any sound translation (cf. Newsletters April and May 2013).

The charismatic is also often characterized by a great stress on holiness of living, which is something that we should all seek to attain through God's grace and diligent regard for Holy Scripture (cf. 2Co. 7:1). Nevertheless, excessive stress on personal holiness as an end in itself, which is to be accomplished through efforts of the flesh, contributes to a false sense of self-righteousness. It leads one into a petty legalism of works rather than full acceptance of salvation by grace alone (cf. Ep.2:8,9). This fleshly approach to achieve holiness becomes a back-door salvation-by-works philosophy thus covering over the message of free grace and the liberty in Christ that true grace affords us (cf. Ga.5:1). It can become a form of legal bondage similar to that established by the excess sundry laws fabricated by the Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' days on earth. A boastful "I don't smoke, drink, or chew" morality tends to become a religion unto itself as strict dress codes, unusual and restrictive diets, and other fads begin to occupy the minds of the adherents more than the things of God. This is

but a carnal approach to religion not an avenue to proper Christian conduct. It is impossible to whip the flesh into submission to the Spirit because, although the human soul is saved through faith, our mortal flesh remains under the condemnation of death (cf. He.9:27a). Soon, this external code of ethics becomes dogmatically mandated, such that it becomes more important to the life of the person who is caught up in it than his or her personal faith and trust in Christ. Pride follows along in the train of a self-imposed pseudo-holiness as competition takes place among like-minded believers. The constant struggle against arbitrary rules of conduct can make one mean-spirited and unloving toward those who are free of self-imposed rules of conduct through the liberty they have gained in Christ. True Christian love for ones neighbor degenerates into an overwhelming desire to convert others to a legalistic way of thinking in order to enclose them within a prison of regulations, not a genuine desire to see the lost delivered from the terrible condemnation of sin through the blood of Christ. Believers caught up in this false teaching may come to doubt their own salvation if certain contrived rules of conduct cannot be perfectly adhered to in their personal lives.

Some charismatics fall into a category commonly referred to as the “Jesus only” movement. The teaching of this movement is very similar to that of some ancient gnostics (cf. *CRC Book I*, page 349) who considered the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be mere modes of the same divine being and person. At the risk of oversimplification, modalism considers Jesus as once having been the Father who came to earth entirely as Jesus who, following his death, is now the Holy Spirit who indwells man. Therefore, a charismatic may say that they believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but actually deny an eternal Godhead consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as individual persons subsisting in unity as one divine being. This separates them from any who would use the word “trinity” or “person” in connection with the Godhead (cf. Newsletter January 2014). Many followers, of the “Jesus only” teaching, also prefer the term “Jesus person” rather than “Christian” to describe themselves as another way in which to distinguish themselves from historic mainstream Christians.

Having generally described the charismatic, accepting that much variation exists in individual groups and churches, let us now take a look at glossolalia itself. This activity, as it is widely practiced, is often referred to as the “tongues movement” or the “Pentecostal movement” since this gift is seen to have been first given on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Ac.2:4). Pentecost is extensively examined in *CRC Book II*, Chapter 14.1 followed by a full discussion of other places in Scripture where glossolalia is mentioned or may be incorrectly implied by some in Chapter 14.2. (A free PDF copy of *CRC Book II* is available on this website by clicking on the tab *About Books* and clicking on the *Read Book II* button at the bottom of the page). The technical term “glossolalia” is taken directly from the Greek and means literally “tongue speaking.” *Glosso* means “tongue” (or language), and *lalia* means “to speak.” Glossolalia, also called the “gift of tongues” as it is practiced by the charismatic worshiper today, is variously considered to be a form of mindless prayer or a highly emotional form of worship. It is exercised extensively by certain groups such as those within Pentecostal and various Apostolic churches. However Glossolalia, as is charismata in general, is not limited to a few denominations and groups but can be found to some extent within individual church assemblies of practically all denominations and persuasions. Although many men are caught up in glossolalia, women are particularly vulnerable to this delusion because of their more trusting and susceptible nature that is inherited from Eve (cf. Ge.3:1-6,13).

Only three words are used in the Greek text that are translated “tongue” in the *AKJV* translation of the Bible, which is widely used by those who practice glossolalia. Those words are:

1. *Dialektos* used in Acts 1:19, 2:8, 21:40, 22:2, and 26:14. This word means “a mode of communication,” or specifically a “language” or “dialect.” “Dialect” is the modern English word that comes from the Greek word *dialektos*.
2. *Heteroglossos* used only in First Corinthians 14:21. This word means “other tongued,” that is, “a foreigner,” or one who commonly speaks another language.
3. *Glossa* used in all other verses of the New Testament where the *AKJV* translation is “tongues.” This word literally means “tongue” and by strong implication a “language” – in particular an unlearned language in which a supernatural origin may be implied.

The English word “language” is found only once in the *AKJV* translation of the New Testament. It is found in Acts 2:6 where it is translated from the Greek word *dialektos*. The fact that the word “tongue” and the word “language” can often be used interchangeably may be observed by comparing Acts 2:6 with Acts 2:8 where both words are *dialektos* in the Greek text. “Tongue” and “language” are therefore synonymous.

Today's practice of glossolalia is characterized by incomprehensible speech or chanting that comes about in an ecstatic manner usually attended with acts of high emotion and personal abandon. Natural inhibitions are thrown to the wind as the rational mind is placed in a neutral state to allow "spirit control" of the tongue. Some may dance, jump, throw up their arms, or fall down and roll on the floor. Some may faint, which is referred to by some charismatics as having been "slain in the spirit." The practice of glossolalia is also said to be accompanied by a warming or tingling sensation in the members of the body of the worshiper. The mind may go into a completely trance-like state, or it may remain remotely aware of surroundings as if one is standing in a fog. Some churches appoint individuals who are to remain apart from the activities in order to guard the modesty and personal safety of those who are engaging in this uninhibited abandon. It seems very strange that such precautions would be necessary to prevent a believer who is supposed to be under the power of the Holy Spirit from doing something indecent or harmful to themselves or others. We must wonder why the Holy Spirit would ever lead a believer into such dubious activities to begin with, and we must therefore seriously question whether these participants are in any way under the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is intimated that those engaging in glossolalia often speak in some little-known language that is spoken elsewhere on Earth, but that cannot be universally verified. Others refer to glossolalia as a language that is otherwise only spoken by angels, which of course could never be understood or verified by mere mortals. For the most part, the vocalization is incomprehensible but often rhythmic or even melodic. Still others engage in completely uncontrolled babbling that may simulate hysteria. This phenomenon can run the full range of seemingly intelligent and purposeful recitation of Scriptural verses, to false, trivial, or even blasphemous statements, all spoken through the mouth of the participant. Considering Chapters 12 through 14 of the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, which we examine in detail in *CRC Book II*, Section 12, it would seem that abuse of this earlier gift is taking place today in a way that is quite similar to that which was taking place in Corinth of Paul's day. The distorted form of "holiness" that many who claim this gift practice separates them not only from the general world of sinners, but also from the fellowship of other devout believers as well. This separatism is further enforced by the insistence of some charismatics that the only proof of the Holy Spirit indwelling an individual is through glossolalia. If one has not received the gift of "tongues," so they insist, he or she does not have the baptism of the Holy Ghost and is therefore not a genuine believer.

As we can see, the practice of glossolalia today is very divisive to the Church at large. The matter that must be carefully ascertained is who or what is controlling the person's tongue during glossolalia. Three explanations must be considered: 1) an activity of the Holy Spirit, 2) an anomaly of the human mind, 3) demon possession. In addition, there are also many who hypocritically counterfeit the gift and play along just to be members of the assembly. There is considerable evidence that "glossolalia" can be taught and learned apart from any need of spiritual intervention. It would be difficult indeed to remain a member of a church that insists on glossolalia as the only valid proof of being a true believer without exercising the gift oneself; therefore, many choose to fabricate the gift and in doing so draw still others into this divisive delusion.

It is highly unlikely that any of the church gatherings in which all speak the same language would ever have a valid need for a gift of diverse tongues since that would inhibit communion one with the other when we should instead seek full unity in the faith. Moreover, Christians are highly motivated to share their faith in Christ with the unsaved by the clear proclamation of the Gospel message, which is greatly inhibited by wild glossolalia (cf. 1Co.14:23). Therefore, those that truly speak in various languages by the power of the Holy Spirit today, if at all, are likely to be found in the extreme minority since a believer would only have a need of that gift on very rare occasions under very special circumstances. Possible instances in which the Holy Spirit could actually be the source of glossolalia would only be found on the foreign missions field or during extraordinary times when foreigners that do not speak our language are present. Even then, the gift must be needful in order to communicate the Gospel message to a person that God has chosen to receive it. While we must never deny that God has the power to do anything He determines to do at any time He wills, it seems apparent that the wild exhibitions of glossolalia we find today are not of God, but are mental aberrations, deceptive fabrications, and at times even motivated through worldly satanic influence. For that reason, we must diligently pray for any believers that find themselves caught up in this deceptive delusion that their faith will be prudently held within the soundness of a spiritually renewed mind not in an unstable excess of fleshly emotionalism (cf. Ro. 12:2; Tit. 3:5). © Arthur J. Smith, January 2015