

3. The gift of tongues
  - a. Definition of the Issue

In Thomas R. Edgar's *Miraculous Gifts Are They For Today?* (pp. 108-110) we read the following:

The fact that the present-day charismatic stress is often referred to as the "tongues movement" demonstrates the centrality of the "speaking in tongues" to this viewpoint. Nichol, who supports the charismatic movement, states that every Pentecostal believer believes in healing and a postconversion baptism by the Holy Spirit which is demonstrated by speaking in tongues. In addition to the main Pentecostal groups, there are other groups and individuals who stress speaking in tongues. This situation is complicated by the fact that not all agree on what is involved in speaking in tongues.

Therefore, one of the main questions to be answered concerns the nature of the New Testament spiritual gift of tongues -- that is, what was the genuine gift of tongues? Then we must answer the question, "Do today's alleged tongues seem to be the same?" Other items, such as the purpose for the gift of tongues and the proper use of tongues, must also be studied in order to determine whether today's "tongues" fit the Biblical description. The primary issue is to determine if the tongues of today are genuine.

Some will wonder why this is necessary. After all, many sincere Christians have engaged in the activity known as speaking in tongues. They claim that it is the spiritual gift described in the New Testament. In addition, many theologians and preachers have given their approval to the practice of speaking in tongues. However, in addition to the normal need to examine religious practices to see if they conform to Scripture, there are certain factors which demand that a study be made. The primary factor is that there is disagreement between large sections of the church concerning the nature and practice of this gift. Although mainline Pentecostals all agree that the gift of tongues is necessary as a sign of the postconversion "baptism of the Spirit", they do not agree on the nature of the gift. Some believe that it is a heavenly language not known to man; others believe that it is miraculous ability to speak foreign languages. The other charismatics, known as neo-Pentecostals, also disagree on the nature of tongues; in addition they disagree on whether it is a "sign", disagree on the necessity to speak in tongues, and often stress the private or devotional use of tongues in contrast to the public exercise.

The charismatics are a veritable tangle of different opinions on the nature and practice of tongues-speaking. They agree only on the issue that this gift is available today. This disagreement alone is enough to require a thorough study of the gift of tongues, since the charismatic proponents have never come