

But then their performances perplex. Interpretations prove to be as stereotyped, vague, and uninformative as they are spontaneous, fluent, and confident. Weird mistakes are made. Kildahl tells how the Lord's Prayer in an African dialect was interpreted as a word on the Second Coming. An Ethiopian priest whom I tutored went to a glossolalic gathering which he took to be an informal multilingual praise service and made his contribution by standing and reciting Psalm 23 in Ge'ez, the archaic tongue of his native Coptic worship; at once it was publicly interpreted, but as he said to me next day in sad bewilderment, "It was all wrong." Kildahl also reports that of two interpreters who heard the same tape-recorded glossolalia, one took it as a prayer for "guidance about a new job offer" and the other as "thanksgiving for one's recent return to health after a serious illness." Told that there was a clash here, "without hesitation or defensiveness, the interpreter said that God gave to one interpreter one interpretation, and gave to another interpreter another interpretation." The interpreter's experience is that "interpretations" comes to mind immediately; in other words, such thoughts as impress themselves on the mind straight after the tongues have been heard are taken as being interpretations of them. The claim is that God gives the interpretations directly; and as with charismatic prophecy, for which a similar claim is made, so long as what is said is biblically legitimate, it stands irrefutable because it is uncheckable. One can see how empathy with a glossolalic speaker as a person, or with his or her tone of voice, or with the atmosphere of a meeting, could produce "interpretations" that would be relevant and would edify, particularly if the interpreter's mind was well stocked with Scripture truth to start with. But how such interpretations could directly express the meaning of sounds just heard, so as to be in effect translations from an unknown language into a known one, is harder to understand.

Without venturing to dismiss all interpretation as delusive on the basis of a few slips that showed, and while agreeing with Samaritan that the sense of group rapport which the glossolalia-plus-interpretation ritual creates may be valuable in itself, I think it would be hazardous to assume that here we have a restoring of the gift of interpretation of which Paul wrote. The evidence is just too uncertain.

Now some counter-questions must be asked about healing and prophecy.

Can charismatic healing ministries be convincingly equated with the healing gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28, 30? Surely not.

Can charismatic prophecy be convincingly viewed as the restoring of a New Testament sign gift? Surely not. . . .

Some conclusions are now in order. Here are nine.

1. SPIRIT BAPTISM. The common charismatic theology of Spirit baptism (common, at least, in the worldwide movement as a whole,