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**The Charismatic Movement:
Testing Its Truth-Claims
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Introduction

The charismatic movement can be characterized by two major claims:

- (1) The miraculous gifts of the apostolic period are still available.
- (2) The Christian after salvation may receive the fullness/baptism of the Holy Spirit as a 2nd blessing, usually characterized by speaking in tongues.

The spread and impact of the movement in modern times:

Began about 1900, leading to several distinct Pentecostal denominations, usually labeled "old-line Pentecostalism."

About 1960, it began to spread into other denominations, there labeled "neo-Pentecostalism" or the "Charismatic movement."

By now, most Christians have friends or relatives involved. My own situation: I have a brother, sister-in-law & their children in a neo church; the Southern Baptist church where I grew up is going liberal, but some of the conservatives still there are Charismatic, my mother has been influenced.

On any Biblical way of judging salvation, there are many believers in the movement; this, however, does not prove they are right.

Correct theology is important to everyday life.

Example of a couple coming for marriage counseling: they believe they have been completely sanctified, so how can either one of them be wrong in the dispute they are having?

An overview of this series:

Not going to try to examine all aspects of this movement, nor all Scripture related to the same.

Rather, we will try to look at three of the more prominent gifts claimed by Charismatics, testing them in the light of Biblical parallels and tests (so the series title).

These three gifts or areas are:

- (1) Prophecy
- (2) Healing
- (3) Tongues

We will take these in the order of ease of testing, from most easily tested to least (which is the order given above).

Biblical Warrant for Such Testing:

Do we have any right to test these claims? Wouldn't that show a lack of faith? Isn't there a danger of blaspheming the Holy Spirit?

We have explicit commands of God to make such tests:

1 John 4:1: test the spirits (note context)

1 John 4:1 (NASU) Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 Thess 5:21: examine everything carefully (again, note context)

1Thess 5:21 (NASU) But examine everything [carefully]; hold fast to that which is good;

Prophecy

Claims by Charismatics Today

This is the area where orthodox non-Charismatics are most alarmed, as acceptance of additional revelation since New Testament times (and during Intertestament times) has invariably led to heresy.

Most Charismatics seem to distinguish their own prophecy from Scripture, and treat their own prophecy as comparable to that of local prophets seen in the NT, e.g., Agabus (Acts 11:28; 21:10), Philip's daughters (Acts 21:19).

But, note that David Wilkerson's *Vision* makes strong claims, both implicit and explicit (unnumbered pages = 6, 7, 9, re/ Paul, Habakkuk, Peter, Daniel; page 13 re/ Noah, page 68 re/ not preaching but prophesying).

Scriptural Tests for Prophets

(1) Doctrinal: Deut 13:1-5; Gal 1:8-9; 1 John 4:2-3

Deut 13:1-5 (NASU) "If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the Lord your God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. 5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the Lord your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, to seduce you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from among you."

Gal 1:8-9 (NASU) But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

1 John 4:2-3 (NASU) By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the [spirit] of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

These tests apply to tongues and healing also.

They are not a problem for all Charismatics; nor should the fact that some heresies are Charismatic prove that all are from the devil.

(2) Predictive: Deut 18:20-22

Deut 18:20-22 (NASU) "But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' 21 You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' 22 When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."

100% accuracy demanded; note also the penalty for failure.

Charismatic Attitudes toward False Prophecy

Their attitudes are often biblical when dealing with cults, etc.

e.g., articles by Charismatics re/ Jeane Dixon, other psychics

But evasive when dealing with problem in their own midst:

Some techniques used by them to explain away false prophecy:

- (1) Deny that message was supposed to have been prediction from God: note the danger, even in non-Char circles, of using phrases like "thus said the Lord," "the Holy Spirit told me," "God showed me" which imply special revelation.
- (2) Attempt to reinterpret the prophecy to fit the events.
- (3) Claim that prophets are not infallible in the Church age:
Using 1 Cor 13:8 to mean "prophecy will fail (to be fulfilled)"
Using 1 Cor 14:29 to mean everyone must judge whether prophets speak from God (even true ones, because not all their predictions are from God)
Using the common evangelical concept of doing something "in the flesh" to excuse false prophecies without discrediting the prophet
- (4) Claim that the gift of prophecy must be developed through trial and error (1 Cor 14:31)

Actually there is a strong tendency to ignore false predictions in Charismatic circles (e.g., Don Basham, *True and False Prophets*, never discusses unfulfilled predictions in the whole book!)

Some Examples of Failure in Charismatic Prediction

David Wilkerson in *The Vision* (1973), page 16:

Best years ahead, but stock market plummets

Scot Ross in *Scott Free* (1976), pp 119-120:

Girl in auto accident to recover, but she dies

Don Basham in *New Wine* magazine for Jan 77, page 29:

In his own experience, he hears 8 to 10 times as many erroneous predictions as valid ones!

Conclusions

1. Charismatics are not using Biblical tests toward false prophecy in their own circles (imagine not using any tests re/ false doctrine).
2. Charismatics are not taking the Biblical attitude toward false prophecy in their own circles (e.g., in church discipline; imagine not using discipline in church for other *capital* sins).
3. It does not appear that the Charismatics have the supernatural gift of prophecy.

Healing

Charismatic Claims

The matter of healing is somewhat less testable than is prophecy:

1. You need medical expertise to diagnose a person's condition before and after.
2. Many physical ailments are either caused by or aggravated by the mind; doctors distinguish organic and functional problems.

Charismatics agree with non-Charismatic Christians that God can and does heal in answer to prayer.

They differ in claiming:

1. God wants you well, so only your lack of faith prevents healing.
2. Charismatics often emphasize gifted healers, such as Kathy Kuhlman, Oral Roberts, A. A. Allen, etc.

Scriptural Characteristics of Healings

1. They were often "not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26)
See Mark 1:45; Matt 15:30-31; John 11:47-48; 12:9-11; Acts 4:16-17

Mark 1:45 (NASU) But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news around, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere.

Matt 15:30 (NASU) And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them [those who were] lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. 31 So the crowd marveled as they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.

John 11:47 (NASU) Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him [go on] like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."

John 12:9 (NASU) The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. 10 But the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death also; 11 because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

Acts 4:16 (NASU) saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 "But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name."

2. The healings were not restricted to just certain kinds of diseases:

Matt 4:23 (NASU) Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

Matt 8:16 (NASU) When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill.

Mark 6:55 (NASU) and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. 56 Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.

3. The healings were typically produced quickly:

Only one seems to occur in stages:

Mark 8:22 (NASU) And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. 23 Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked

him, "Do you see anything?" 24 And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see [them] like trees, walking around." 25 Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and [began] to see everything clearly.

A few occurred as the person is obeying Christ's command:

John 9:6 (NASU) When He had said this, He spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and applied the clay to his eyes, 7 and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went away and washed, and came [back] seeing.

Luke 17:14 (NASU) When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they were going, they were cleansed.

4. The healings produced complete results:

Matt 8:14 (NASU) When Jesus came into Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and waited on Him. (Peter's mother-in-law is immediately up and working.)

John 5:5 (NASU) A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying [there], and knew that he had already been a long time [in that condition], He ^said to him, "Do you wish to get well?" 7 The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me." 8 Jesus ^said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk." 9 Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and [began] to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. (The lame man is immediately walking and carrying a load.)

5. The healings were permanent. We don't mean that the people never got sick again or that they didn't eventually die, but Jesus' enemies were not able to use this against him.

Acts 10:37 (NASU) you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed.

38 "[You know of] Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and [how] He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. (This suggests Jesus' reputation was good several years later among non-Christians.)

Healing in Charismatic Circles

1. The "healing meeting"

- a. A strong emotional atmosphere, a charismatic personality, suggestion, all conducive to curing psychosomatic illnesses and temporarily overcoming some other diseases by hysteria, hypnotic suggestion.
- b. Selection: healers regularly control those allowed on stage.

See Nolen, *A Doctor in Search of a Miracle*, 66-67.

2. The "insufficient faith" principle – a tendency to teach that it is your fault if you are not healed, though it doesn't look like this explains the differences observed.
3. The "hidden healing" principle – if you have real faith, you will believe you are healed even if the symptoms don't go away. See Katie Fortune, "Receive All God Has to Give," 15; A. C. Gaebelein, *The Healing Question*, 106; *Washington Star*, 28 August 1973.
4. The Disappearance of Cures:
 - a. Gaebelein (95-96): a committee of 11 ministers, 8 doctors, 3 professors, 1 lawyer investigated the C. S. Price campaign in Vancouver, taking months to trace down 350 cases who professed healing at meetings: results: 5 healings verified, all psychosomatic type; 39 dead within 6 months; 5 had become insane; 301 remained sick
 - b. Nolen investigated meeting of Kathryn Kuhlman in spring of 1973 in Minneapolis; with cooperation of Kuhlman, Nolen was an usher, helping patients; 82 claiming healing at meeting agreed to cooperate in study; about a month later, only 23 showed up at interview; these showed improvement in bursitis, migraines, skin problems, varicose veins, multiple sclerosis, all known as diseases in which the psyche is important, or which tend to improve cyclically; found no evidence of miraculous cures; since none of the 5 claiming cancer cures returned, he wrote or visited all claiming such:
 - 1 died 12 days after meeting
 - 1 died 40 days after
 - 3rd had cancer still growing at press time
 - 4th still has cancer, not a malignant type
 - 5th had and has Hodgkin's disease, though presented at time as lung cancer.

Conclusions

1. Charismatic "healing" is highly selective. It seems to work best with psychosomatic diseases. Few coming to meetings claim healing of organic diseases. Among those who do, the cures have a strong tendency to disappear on later investigation.
2. Those claiming healing often refuse to accommodate further investigation, believing that to investigate is to show lack of faith. The hidden healing principle leads to misleading testimony during the actual healing meetings by those who have really never been healed.

3. The great faith-healers of previous generations have suffered from diseases and died like other humans. A. A. Allen died of sclerosis of the liver; Kathryn Kuhlman of cancer.
4. There is "a great gulf fixed" between Charismatic healing and that of the Gospel accounts.

Tongues

The Problem of Testability

There are about 5,400 known languages of earth.

The most versatile linguists rarely can handle over 100.

(Dr. Robert Dick Wilson, Princeton OT scholar, knew 45.)

The average person in the US knows one language, though he or she has often had some exposure to one more.

So there is a real problem of testing whether a claimed language is what it is said to be.

Some Scriptural Materials on Tongues

In Acts 2:4-11, these are known human languages. Apparently this is also the case in Acts 10:44-47; 11:15; 19:6; and 1 Cor 14:9-11.

Is 1 Cor 13:1 referring to an angelic language?

1 Cor 13:1 (NASU) If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have [the gift of] prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed [the poor], and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Note the context (vv 2-3): these are things Paul has not done.

Note also the origin of diverse human languages (Gen 11): would good angels have several languages?

Not all speak in tongues: 1 Cor 12:30

1 Cor 12:30 (NASU) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

Not nearly as worthwhile as speaking in a language the whole church understands:

1 Cor 14:19 (NASU) however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Problems in Charismatic Circles

There is a tendency to claim that most manifestations of speaking in tongues are angelic languages, unlike the Biblical situation; charismatic languages are not similar enough to be only one language.

There is a tendency to claim that tongue speaking is *the* evidence of Holy Spirit baptism.

Linguistic analysis of taped tongue-speaking shows that English-speaking tongue-speakers use the speech sounds of English.¹

These "languages" spoken show little evidence of grammatical structure.²

Comparison of recorded tongues with the interpretation show unequal length for tongue and interpretation,³ and different interpretations for identical phrases.⁴

Volunteers without tongue-speaking experience can spontaneously produce contrived speeches that experienced tongue-speakers cannot distinguish from the "real thing."⁵

Conclusions

1. As with prophecy and healing, the phenomena of tongues in the modern charismatic movement differ significantly from those recorded in Scripture.
2. Modern linguistic study suggests that tongue-speaking today is just a rearrangement of sounds native to the speaker rather than a different language.
3. Being far more difficult to test than prophecy or healing, it is harder to prove or rule out supernatural causes for tongues. Yet is it therefore of that much less value for proving the charismatic movement has any closer relation to God (or Satan) than other evangelical groups.

¹ E. Mansell Pattison, "Behavioral Science Research on the Nature of Glossolalia," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 20 (1968), 77-79.

² *Ibid.*, 79.

³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.