

CHARISMATISM



**Biblical Answers to Frequently Asked Questions
on the Charismatic Phenomenon**

Jeffrey Khoo

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Q&A

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by

Jeffrey Khoo, PhD

Principal, Far Eastern Bible College

Far Eastern Bible College Press

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Charismatism Q & A: Biblical Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on the Charismatic Phenomenon

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To

MY PARENTS

Rev & Mrs Stephen Khoo

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Foreword

Charismatism Q & A: Biblical Answers to Frequently Asked Questions on the Charismatic Phenomenon by Jeffrey Khoo is the crystallisation of lessons on the subject taught at the Evening Classes of Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore.

This is a timely subject in light of the Charismatic Movement that has spread to this part of the world. Charismatics also declare that they believe the Bible is God's infallible, inerrant Word. So, they must be willing to be scrutinised under the searchlight of Holy Scripture.

Dr Khoo has brought the subject under closest examination in that light by a meticulous, exegetical study of the relevant Scripture passages. An unbiased student following that careful study, "precept upon precept, precept upon precept" (Isa 28:10) cannot help but come to the same conclusion as the author.

I highly commend this book for the study of every earnest seeker of the Truth. "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth" (2 Cor 13:8). Amen.

Timothy Tow
Singapore
September, 1998

Preface

“Say hallelujah! Say it repeatedly. Say it quickly. Let your tongue roll.” When my hallelujahs became an unintelligible string of lu’s, le’s and la’s, the American revivalist who baptised me with the Spirit exclaimed, “Praise the Lord! You are speaking in tongues!” Is this truly tongues?

“My throat is terribly sore. I need healing.” With her left hand on my head, and right hand at my throat, she cried out, “In the name of Christ, be healed!” She then asked, “How do you feel?” “Still sore,” I replied. She did the same thing. Only this time her grip on my throat was tighter. Nothing happened. I still felt sore. This Indian evangelist claimed that God had given her the gift of healing. Why wasn’t I healed?

“Satan, you foul spirit, I drown you in the blood of Christ.” The woman, writhing in agony, gasps for air. She was demon possessed. After an exhausting night of exorcism, she remained demon possessed. Why didn’t the evil spirit leave? Did Jesus lose this battle? What happened?

Charismatism has not failed to raise doubts and questions in the minds of its observers. What is the second baptism of the Holy Spirit? What is tongues-speaking? What is faith healing? Can God speak to me through visions and dreams? Can a Christian be demon possessed? Can I raise my hands to praise the Lord? Can I dance in church? These are all legitimate questions, but where are the answers? Only God’s Word—the Holy Scriptures—can provide us with answers.

There is therefore a real need to study the Bible diligently and carefully. Especially in these last days, when there are a lot of false teachers running loose, no Christian can do without a thorough grasp of the Scriptures. The Lord has already issued the warning, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt 24:24–25). If we do not want to be deceived, we need to know God’s Word well. We need to make sure that our beliefs and practices are in accordance to the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is our

supreme and final authority in faith and practice. Embrace charismatic if it is biblical. But if it is not, then expose it, warn against it. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils. . . . Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim 4:1,15).

May the Holy Spirit guide you into all truth.

Jeffrey Khoo

Chapter 1

The Charismatics and Bible Interpretation

There are many good books on charismatism, but very few start off with a critique of its method of interpreting Scripture. A critique of charismatic hermeneutics should be done at the very outset. If we can prove that the charismatic method of interpreting Scripture is fallacious, then we have made our case against their doctrines and practices. A building with a weak foundation will not and cannot stand (cf, Matt 7:24–27). It will be shown that the charismatic movement is built not on rock but on sand.

Why is Bible Interpretation Important?

It is essential to consider how charismatics interpret the Bible. This is because in discussing charismatism, we are discussing the Bible, and what it says concerning its doctrines and practices. It goes without saying that our practices are based on how we understand the Scriptures. The question is: Have we understood the Scriptures correctly? What makes certain practices right, and others wrong? How can we be sure about what is right and what is wrong? Can the charismatics be right after all? Or are we correct in warning against modern-day charismatic teachings and practices? It all boils down to how we read and study the Scriptures. So it is important for us at the outset to understand what Scripture is all about, and how to study it.

The Nature of the Word of God

Let us first of all deal with the nature of God’s Word. The Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16). When we read the Bible it is not man’s words that we are reading but God’s Word. As Paul said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” The Bible is literally “God-breathed.” As such it is no ordinary book. It is an extraordinary, supernatural book. It is the sole authority of our faith and practice. Our

doctrines and practices should not be based on human opinions, traditions, or experiences. Our doctrines and practices must be founded on and governed by God's Word. Opinions, traditions, experiences have very little authority outside of God's Word. Only God's Word is fully and absolutely authoritative, and its authority is independent of human opinions, traditions, and experiences.

It is required of every Bible student to interpret the Word of God correctly. In the Old Testament, we find Ezra not only reading, but also giving the sense or meaning of the Scriptures, thus causing the people to understand the Scriptures (Neh 8:8). In the New Testament, we find the Apostle Paul exhorting young Pastor Timothy to do the same: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). The Bible has only one meaning. It is our duty to study the Bible to understand what it truly means. There is a need to interpret the Scriptures accurately.

Principles of Bible Interpretation

Knowing how to interpret God's Word accurately is particularly necessary when dealing with the charismatics. How many times have you tried to explain what God's Word means only to hear the retort: "Well, that is your interpretation?" This happens especially when one's interpretation or explanation is unacceptable to the other. So how should we interpret Scripture? What are the principles of interpreting Scripture?

The Analogy of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith presents the biblical approach to Scripture interpretation: "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly" (I.9). This approach of using Scripture to interpret Scripture is also known as the analogy of faith or the analogy of Scripture. No other book is infallible as the Bible is infallible. As such, the Bible is its own infallible authority and commentary. Note that the Westminster Confession also states that there is but one meaning to the Scriptures: "the true and full sense of any Scripture . . . is not manifold but one."

Scripture Interprets Scripture

The Bible interprets itself. For an example, turn to Daniel 2:31–45. In verses 31–35, we have the vision of Nebuchadnezzar, and in verses 36–45, we have Daniel’s interpretation of the vision. God gave the vision and its meaning. There is therefore no question about what the vision means, and we ought not to create meanings other than that which God had intended. Another example would be Isaiah 7:14. Here we have the wonderful prediction of the virgin birth of the Messiah. Who is He? When was it fulfilled? Matthew 1:22–23 explicitly tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled in none other than Jesus Christ at the time when Herod the Great was king (Matt 2:1).

Interpreting Scripture in Context

In the interpretation of Scripture, context is important. What is context? Context is that part of the text that leads up to and follows the text in question. Many false teachers claim to base their doctrines on the Bible. But under close scrutiny, we find that many of these “proof-texts” are really taken out of context. For example, an atheist can claim that the Bible supports his view that there is no God. He can cite Psalm 14:1 which does say, “There is no God.” But this statement when read in its context means something quite different: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” When we quote someone, we want to quote him within context. Nobody likes to be taken out of context, including God!

Scripture Does Not Contradict Scripture

In Bible interpretation, Scripture must not be made to clash with Scripture. If my interpretation of a certain verse or passage of Scripture goes against what is clearly taught in other verses or passages of Scripture, then my interpretation must be wrong. For example, Jesus said in John 14:28, “my Father is greater than I.” If I interpret this to mean that Jesus is a lesser god than God the Father, then I would be contradicting other statements where Jesus equates Himself with God (cf, John 1:1, 8:58, 10:30). Moreover, we have many passages from other parts of Scripture that speak of the absolute deity of Christ (eg, Acts 20:28, Phil 2:5–11, Col 2:9). A single text that appears to go against many other passages of Scripture must be interpreted in the light of the majority. In this case, majority wins. The obscure text must be read in the light of the clear.

Theology Guides Interpretation

We must not forget theology in our interpretation of Scripture. The body of faith has once for all been settled in the canonical Scriptures comprising just 66 books. It is essential for the Bible interpreter to know Christian Theology well. He must be very familiar with the doctrines taught in Systematic Theology under the basic headings of Theology Proper, Biblical Anthropology, Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. Theology serves as a fence to keep us from going astray or off the mark in our interpretation of Scripture. For example, Mark 16:16 reads, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” If I come to the conclusion that this verse teaches that a person must not only believe in Christ, but must also go through the waters of baptism in order to be saved, then I would be going against the whole tenor of Scripture which spells out in no uncertain terms that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, and not by works (Rom 1:17, 5:1, Eph 2:8–9, Titus 3:5).

Charismatic Twisting of Scripture

When interpreting Scripture it is important to realise that the Apostles were infallible in their preaching and writing of the Holy Scriptures (1 Thess 2:13, 2 Pet 1:20–21, 2 Tim 3:16), and in their administration of the churches (Acts 5:1–11, 19:13–17, 2 Cor 13:2–3, Gal 1:8, Jude 17). A failure to appreciate this may lead a Bible interpreter to conclude that the Apostles were wrong in those areas of their ministry which seem contradictory. For example, there are charismatics who in an attempt to prove that signs and wonders are necessary for evangelism say that Paul failed in Athens because he merely preached the gospel without performing miracles. This led him to change his method to that of signs and wonders when he was in Corinth, which brought success. The text used to support this is 1 Corinthians 2:4 where Paul said, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Today’s Wimber-style power evangelists often quote this text to support their method of doing evangelism. This view of the Apostle Paul and 1 Corinthians 2:4 is erroneous because the Apostles were infallible in their ministry of the gospel. Moreover, that Paul had made a mistake in Athens receives no scriptural support whatsoever. In the light of Acts 17–18, it is evident that there was no difference in the way Paul went about preaching the gospel

in those two places. Luke in Acts 18 tells us that Paul in Corinth went to the synagogues and there “reasoned,” “persuaded” (v4), and “testified” (v5) to the Jews and the Greeks that Jesus was the Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:17–18, Paul clearly states that the simple preaching of the gospel of Christ is the power of God, not signs and wonders (see also Rom 1:16). This was exactly what Paul did previously in Athens. There was no change in his evangelistic method.

Charismatism and Experience

The fundamental fallacy in the charismatic method of interpreting Scripture is its promotion of experience over against Scripture as the primary basis for faith and practice. Instead of reading their experiences in the light of Scripture, charismatics subject the Scriptures to their experiences. It is not an overstatement to say that charismatics base their faith and practice not on the Bible but on an extra-biblical source, namely, their experiences. Their experiences have blurred them from the truth taught in the Scriptures. (A clear example would be Rev Alfred Yeo’s article, “Me, Slain By God?” in *The Singapore Evangel* [Apr–Jun ’95]: 13–14, where he argued for the slaying of the Spirit based solely on his experiences. No scriptural verses were cited except one, Acts 1:13, and that, inaccurately.)

A typical charismatic argument against relying on Scripture alone as the basis for all our faith and practice is this: “I don’t need the Bible to tell me what is right or wrong; I have the Holy Spirit, and you have no business questioning my spiritual experiences if you yourself have never experienced them yet.” Is this a valid argument? Actually the above statement is quite contradictory and unbiblical. We *do* need the Bible to tell us right from wrong. The Apostle Paul, for example, commended the Berean Christians for searching the Scriptures daily to ascertain whether the things he taught were true or not (Acts 17:11). This vital need for searching the Scriptures is even more acute today. Paul had warned, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:3–4). In order to protect ourselves from being deceived by false teachers, Paul instructed Timothy to know the Scriptures “which are able to make thee wise . . . All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16–17).

Is it correct to say that since I have the Holy Spirit, I do not need the Bible? No, it is not correct at all to say that. The Holy Spirit does not work independently of God’s Word. The Holy Spirit works through God’s Word. The Word of God is called the Sword of *the Spirit* (Eph 6:17). The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of Truth (John 15:26). Jesus said, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). The Truth of God is not found in experiences but in the Word of God. Jesus said, “Thy Word is Truth” (John 17:17).

The problem with charismatic hermeneutics is that it is not based on Scripture but on sentiment. The operating principle is not “I know this is true because God’s Word says so,” but “I know this is true because I feel so.” “It must be right because I feel good about it.” Indulging in sinful pleasures may make us feel good, but that certainly does not make it right.

In saying that experience should not be the primary basis of our faith and practice, I am not saying that experience is unimportant in the Christian life. I believe the Christian religion is a religion of experience. The Bible is replete with accounts of both joyful and painful experiences of God’s people in their spiritual pilgrimage. The Scriptures tell us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind (Luke 10:27). When we give of our substance to the Lord, we are told to give cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7). We are told to weep with them that weep (Rom 12:15). Experiences are part and parcel of Christian living, but they are not the basis for establishing biblical truth. Experience must be subject to Scripture, not vice versa.

Having established our principles of Bible interpretation, let us now answer the many questions we have on charismatism.

Chapter 2

Questions about the Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Third Wave

Who are the Pentecostals, and what is Pentecostalism?

“Pentecost” literally means 50. It refers to the Jewish festival of the Feast of Weeks or Feast of Harvest that is celebrated on the 50th day or 7 weeks after Passover (Exod 34:22, Deut 16:10). It was one of three festivals when all Jewish men were required to appear in Jerusalem with their gifts and offerings (Exod 23:14–17).

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His Apostles to wait in Jerusalem for “the promise of the Father” viz, the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). Soon after, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit in the form of cloven tongues of fire came upon the disciples (Acts 2:1–3). They were filled with the Spirit, and spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4).

Modern Christians who believe that this outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is not a one-time event, but can be repeated and experienced today are called “Pentecostals.” They teach the need for a second baptism of the Holy Spirit. Tongues-speaking is the sign of the second baptism. Everyone, they say, ought to earnestly seek this baptism, and speak in tongues.

Historically, it all started in 1901 at Bethel Bible College founded by Charles Parham in Topeka, Kansas. The tongues-speaking phenomenon started when one of Parham’s students—Agnes Ozman—spoke in tongues, reportedly Chinese, after receiving the baptism of the Spirit.

In 1906, tongues-speaking broke out in the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California, pastored by William J Seymour—a black holiness preacher. This Azusa Street revival, so-called, catapulted Pentecostalism onto the world stage. Azusa Street became the Mecca for those seeking the Pentecostal experience. From Azusa Street, Pentecostalism spread throughout the world. The Assemblies of God

(AOG) became the largest Pentecostal denomination. The Holiness or Higher Life Movement or Keswick Convention promoted the Pentecostal experience. The Keswick conferences organised by the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship were particularly influential in Singapore in the 1970s and early '80s.

Who are the charismatics, and what is charismaticism?

The word “charismatic” comes from the Greek *charisma* which means “a gift.” In a special sense, it refers to the gifts of the Spirit (Rom 12:6, 1 Cor 12:4,9,28,30). In the late 1950s, the term “charismatic” was used by Donald Gee to distinguish Pentecostalism as a denomination from Pentecostalism as a movement (ie, the Neo-Pentecostalism). Pentecostal practices (second baptism of the Spirit, tongues-speaking, faith healing, etc) were no longer just found in the Assemblies of God (AOG), but have now broken into the mainline denominations (Anglican, Baptist, Brethren, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc). The Roman Catholic Church was influenced as well. This eventually led to the breaking down of the barriers that separated Protestants and Catholics. The charismatic movement served as an ecumenical catalyst. Well-known charismatics include Larry Christenson, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, Oral Roberts, and the latest sensation—Benny Hinn.

What is the Third Wave?

The term—“Third Wave”—was coined by C Peter Wagner of Fuller Theological Seminary in 1983. Pentecostalism was the first wave of the Spirit’s moving at the turn of the century. Charismaticism which arose in the '50s was the second. John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Church, described the new movement “as an opening of the straight-line evangelicals and other Christians to the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that the Pentecostals and charismatics have experienced, but without becoming either charismatic or Pentecostal.” In other words, Wimber and followers want to be Pentecostals or charismatics without the stigma.

The Third Wave differs from its predecessor in that it sees no need for a second baptism of the Spirit, and does not require everyone to speak in tongues. Wimber calls his movement the “Signs and Wonders Movement” in order to distinguish it from the charismatic movement. It stresses “power evangelism.” Wimber says the world will only come to

know Christ through signs and wonders. Other well-known leaders of this movement are Paul Cain, a self-styled “modern day prophet,” and Jack Deere who was sacked from the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary when he joined Wimber. This movement later degenerated into what is known as the “Laughing Revival” started by Rodney Howard Browne—“Holy Ghost Bartender.”

Chapter 3

Questions about the Holy Spirit and His Work

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity. “In the unity of the Godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son” (WCF II:3).

As stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Holy Spirit is a person. He is not a force or an influence as viewed by the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Jesus Himself regarded the Spirit as a person. He is called “Comforter,” and not “comfort” (John 14:26). He is called “another” Comforter (John 14:16), ie, He is another person like Christ. As a person, the Spirit has a mind (Rom 8:27), intellect (1 Cor 2:10–11), emotions (Eph 4:30), a will (1 Cor 12:11, Acts 15:6–11), and the ability to intercede (Rom 8:26). As a person, He can be lied to (Acts 5:3), resisted (Acts 7:51), grieved (Eph 4:30), blasphemed (Matt 12:31), and insulted (Heb 10:29).

The Holy Spirit is God Himself. He possesses all the attributes of deity. He is all-knowing (1 Cor 2:11–12), all-present (Ps 139:7), and all-powerful (Ps 104:30, Job 33:4). He was involved in the creation of the world (Gen 1:2), in the incarnation of Christ (Luke 1:35), in the inspiration of the Scriptures (2 Pet 1:21, 2 Tim 3:16). He is the sevenfold Spirit of God (Isa 11:2) who has existed since eternity past, and will exist into eternity future (Heb 9:14). He is of the same essence as the Father and the Son. He is Jehovah (Acts 28:25–27 cf, Isa 6).

Although the Holy Spirit is same in substance, and equal in power with the other Persons of the Trinity, He is subordinate to them in role and function. There is a functional hierarchy within the Godhead. The Son is

under the Father, and the Spirit is under both the Father and the Son (John 14:28, 1 Cor 11:3). God the Father sent God the Son into the world (John 3:17, 17:8,18), and God the Spirit is sent by both the Father and the Son (John 15:26). The Son glorifies the Father (John 14:13), and the Spirit glorifies the Son (John 16:13–14).

What does the Holy Spirit do?

The Holy Spirit does the work of conviction: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8). He convicts man of sin, and points him to Christ as the only way to true forgiveness and righteousness.

The Spirit also does the work of baptism by indwelling those who believe in Christ (1 Cor 12:13). He does the work of filling when the believer submits himself for sanctification (Eph 5:18, Gal 5:16). He dispenses the spiritual gifts to believers for the edification of the church (Eph 4:11–12). He Himself decides which gift(s) a believer should have (1 Cor 12:11).

What is the difference between the “baptism” of the Spirit and the “filling” of the Spirit?

The baptism of the Spirit is a *one-time* experience for the Christian at the time of conversion (1 Cor 12:13, Eph 1:13). The Spirit indwells the believer, and makes him part of God’s family (Rom 8:9,14). The filling of the Spirit on the other hand is a *repeatable* work of the Spirit in the life of the Christian after his conversion (Eph 5:18). It enables the submissive believer to live a victorious Christian life in obedience to God’s Word (Rom 8:4).

If the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one-time experience at the time of conversion, why then did the Apostles receive the baptism of the Spirit years after they were saved, at the time of Pentecost?

In Acts 1:5, Jesus told His disciples that they “shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days from hence.” The disciples must have already been baptised by the Spirit since they were already believers. Apparently, from Jesus’ words, they were supposed to be baptised a second time. On the basis of this incident, the charismatics argue for a second baptism or a second blessing. This argument is wrong because of a

failure to take into consideration the literary genre of Acts. Acts is primarily a historical book. As such, the narratives are descriptive, not prescriptive. Moreover, the period covered in Acts is transitory. Many of the events recorded were one-time, non-repeatable experiences. The historical context may not be neglected in our efforts to understand God's Word.

The "baptism" of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was technically not the "baptism" but the "filling" of the Spirit. Acts 2:4 tells us that they were "filled" with the Holy Spirit. The "baptism" of Acts 1:5 is defined as "filling" in Acts 2:4. This is understandable because the meaning of the Greek *baptizo* is broad. *Baptizo* can mean "to dip," "to sprinkle," "to immerse," "to cleanse," "to wash," "to fill," etc. How exactly a word is used is determined by its context. In this case, "baptism" means "filling." What the Apostles experienced at Pentecost was not the baptism of the Spirit as commonly understood (ie, the baptism that occurs at conversion), but the filling of the Spirit. This baptismal filling of the Spirit was not for salvation, but for service. It gave them the ability to preach the gospel in other languages. Thus the radical view by certain charismatics that one is not saved until he receives a second baptism of the Spirit is entirely false.

The Samaritans in Acts 8, and Cornelius in Acts 10 received the Holy Spirit after they were converted. Does this not show that the second baptism is required for salvation?

The "baptising" work of the Spirit in Acts 2, 8, and 10 must be read in the light of Matthew 16 where Jesus gave to Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Peter was entrusted with the duty of opening the gospel door. The Lord in Acts 1:8 told the disciples that the gospel door will be opened progressively in this order: "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." By the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter opened the gospel door at Pentecost when he preached to the Jewish multitude and 3,000 believed (Acts 2). Next, he laid hands on the Samaritans that they might receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8). Finally, he went to the home of Cornelius—a Gentile—who was gloriously saved under his ministry (Acts 10).

The Samaritans in Acts 8 did not receive the Holy Spirit when they believed in Christ. Why? There was a special reason. It is important to note that Philip who preached to them was not an Apostle, and thus had

no authority to baptise the Samaritan converts with the Holy Spirit. The Apostles were the divinely appointed leaders of the church. The Samaritans had to know this. If not, they might just form a breakaway Christian sect. The physical presence and ministry of the Apostles in baptising the Samaritans sought to impress upon the Samaritans their need to submit to the Apostles and their teachings. The Apostles themselves too had to know that the promise of salvation in the gospel was not only given to the Jews, but also to the Samaritans whom the Jews had despised.

In Acts 10, we find the gospel preached to Gentiles. Peter was prepared by God to bring the gospel to a Roman centurion by the name of Cornelius. Peter being a Jew would never have done this if not for God's intervention. When Peter preached Christ to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit fell on them. The visible display of tongues by Cornelius proved to Peter and his Jewish colleagues that God indeed is no respecter of persons; the Spirit is given to non-Jews also. The occurrences in Acts 2, 8, and 10 have one thing in common: they were all one-time events. They happened for a special pedagogical reason—to convince the Jews that the gospel knew no racial boundaries, and that it must be preached to all the world.

The events of Acts 2, 8, and 10 were unique. They are not repeatable. Even if there was a “second baptism” in Acts 2, 8, and 10, it is clear that such an experience is not meant to be normative. Proof: Cornelius and his household received only one baptism of the Spirit (Acts 10). Cornelius was immediately baptised by the Spirit when he believed. There was no second baptism. If there were a *consistent* pattern of second baptisms, then perhaps a normative experience may be argued for, but *there is clearly no absolute pattern*.

Understanding the uniqueness of the historical situation in Acts is crucial in ascertaining the meaning of the recorded events. The church was in a period of transition. It was a special time when the New Testament was in the process of being written, Jews were ushered into a new way of worship, and Gentiles were brought into the kingdom like never before. The Spirit operated in a special way to wean the infant church out of the old system and mindset (cf, Acts 19:1–7). Once the church had reached maturity with the establishment of normative church life, the special and spectacular features of the apostolic age were no longer necessary, and have since been withdrawn.

What is wrong with being “slain by the Spirit?”

The question is not whether being “slain” by the Spirit is right or wrong, but whether it is biblical; does the Spirit slay people? The Holy Spirit has a ministry of convicting people of sin, and of indwelling, filling, counseling, and praying for believers. Nowhere however do we find Him having a ministry of slaying.

It is interesting to note that in this charismatic phenomenon of being slain by the Spirit, people fall backwards. Often those who fall backwards also start rolling on the ground, and some go into uncontrollable fits or seizures. Can this be the work of the Holy Spirit?

Charismatics often cite Saul favourably as a biblical example of one being slain by the Spirit. In this incident the Spirit of God came upon Saul and he prophesied laying naked all day and night (1 Sam 19:23–24). The great Chinese pastor—Wang Ming Tao—has a good commentary on this episode: “Now, when Saul lay naked, he was not under the blessing of God but rather under His punishment to his shame. We should know that Saul at this time was long rejected for disobeying God. God had meantime anointed David king. God’s Spirit had departed from Saul and an evil spirit had come upon him. For envying David, he tried to kill him. David had to run for his life to escape Saul. At last he came to Samuel. When Saul came to know about this, he sent men to take David. But it turned out that three times men were sent to take him, three times, these men prophesied by the Spirit of God when they came to Samuel. They could not lay hands on David. Finally this Saul, monster of monsters, went himself to take David, but who could imagine that before he could get his quarry, he was overturned with disgrace. Not only did the Spirit of God cause him to speak but also meet with what the three messengers did not experience—for a day and a night he lay down naked. Not only should we not seek Saul’s experience but rather flee from it. . . . Who would imagine that among these seekers of charismatic gifts there should arise those who regard those fearful and shameful experiences for a pattern? To be teachers of the Bible without understanding is dangerous business” (Timothy Tow, *Wang Ming Tao and Charismatism*, 74–5). If Saul was slain, he was not slain by the Holy Spirit but by an evil spirit (cf, 1 Sam 16:14–15).

The Bible records a couple of instances of people falling backwards. In the Old Testament, we read how Eli the high priest fell backwards upon

hearing that the ark of the Lord had been captured by the Philistines due to the fault of his wicked sons. In his fall backwards, he broke his neck and died (1 Sam 4:18). God judged him for his sins as Israel's high priest. In the New Testament, we find the murderous mob looking for Jesus. When Jesus said "I am," they fell backwards (John 18:6). In light of these two incidents, it is readily seen that falling backwards is not cause for rejoicing but regret. If when confronted by the power of God, one falls backwards, then it is not a blessing but a curse—a sign of judgement. To fall backwards is thus not a good sign of one's spiritual state. All who fell backwards in Scripture were judged by God. All who fell backwards were unbelievers.

On the other hand, we have numerous accounts in the Bible of people falling forwards. Those who fall forwards, fall down to worship the Lord (Num 22:31; Matt 18:26, 29; Mark 3:11; Luke 17:16; 1 Cor 14:25). The biblical posture of obeisance is that of falling prostrate to the ground. If a person is indeed touched by the power of the Spirit, he will fall to the ground face down, kowtowing to the Lord, weeping and groaning for his sins. This was what happened in God-sent revivals during the time of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and closer to home, John Sung (read Timothy Tow, *John Sung my Teacher*, and *The Asian Awakening*; available at the FEBC Bookroom, 9A Gilstead Road, Singapore 309063).

Chapter 4

Questions about Tongues

What is the gift of tongues?

The gift of tongues is one of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:10). The gift of tongues is really the gift of language. It is the supernatural ability of speaking in a foreign language not learnt before. The Greek *glossa* (English: “glossary”) means “language.” Another word used to describe tongues is *dialektos* (English: “dialect”) (Acts 1:19, 2:6,8 cf, Acts 1:19, 21:40, 22:2, 26:14). When the Apostles spoke with other tongues at Pentecost, they spoke in the languages or dialects of the respective nationalities present, viz, Persians, Asians, Egyptians, Italians, Arabians among others (Acts 2:9–11). Their speech was not gibberish or ecstatic nonsense. The people who heard the words understood them (Acts 2:6,8). They said, “we do hear them speak in our tongues *the wonderful works of God*” (Acts 2:11).

Can the gift of tongues-speaking include angelic tongues (1 Cor 13:1)?

Modern-day tongues-speakers readily admit that they are not speaking in human languages. Their ecstatic utterances they say, are really angelic tongues. For support, they cite 1 Corinthians 13:1 where Paul mentioned the “tongues of angels.” But the question arises: What are the tongues of angels? What language do the angels actually speak? For sure, the angels do have the ability to communicate. In the Scriptures we find them speaking in human languages (Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek). Do they have a special language they use among themselves? The Bible does not say. And even if they do have their own peculiar language, who knows for sure what it is? Can those who claim to speak in the tongues of angels prove that their tongues are truly tongues of angels? If they are speaking in angelic tongues, is there a dictionary to tell us what the words mean? Is there a grammar to show us how the language works? Why in

the first place would the Holy Spirit empower us to speak in the language of angels (if there is really such a language)? To whom would we be communicating if we were to speak in angelic tongues? to angels? Angels are God’s messengers, not man’s. Nowhere in Scripture are we told to communicate to God through angels. When we want to talk to God, we pray directly to Him through Christ in the Spirit. God forbids us to pray to angels.

In saying that the tongues they speak are not human but angelic tongues, the charismatics reveal their misunderstanding and misapplication of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:1. Paul was not arguing for the existence of angelic tongues. Love, not tongues, is the theme of 1 Corinthians 13. In his attempt to drive this point home, Paul used a *hyperbole* (ie, an intended exaggeration) here. He was *not* saying that he could speak in tongues of angels (or that there is such a thing as tongues of angels), understand all mysteries, have all knowledge, or move mountains. He was simply saying that even if he could do all those things, but did not have love, he would be a big zero. To understand 1 Corinthians 13:1–2 other than this is to miss Paul’s point altogether.

There are those who say they speak in tongues of angels for personal edification. They “feel good” after speaking in tongues. The Greek word for “edify”—*oikodomeo*—literally means “to build up.” It speaks of receiving instruction for intellectual improvement or spiritual enlightenment. It certainly does not mean “to feel good” as popularly thought. Edification involves the understanding. How am I edified if I do not understand what angelic tongues are, nor what they mean? To borrow Paul’s words, “I am become a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1). It is no wonder Paul said, “I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (1 Cor 14:19). In light of this, we conclude that charismatic tongues are not foreign languages but self-generated gibberish.

Does not Scripture talk about two types of tongues: (1) known tongues in Acts 2, and (2) unknown tongues in 1 Corinthians 14?

Some charismatics argue that the tongues they speak today are not “known” tongues (ie, foreign languages), but “unknown” ones (ie,

ecstatic utterances) as found in 1 Corinthians 14. Is this a correct reading of 1 Corinthians 14?

It needs to be clarified that the “*unknown tongue*” (so KJV) of 1 Corinthians 14 is not ecstatic speech but foreign language. It is “unknown” in the sense that the spiritually gifted believer is able to speak in a foreign language he has never heard or learned before, and that it is unknown or unintelligible to the hearer who does not know or understand the language spoken. In ordinary circumstances, when a person speaks in tongues in his own native church, no man understands; only God understands since He understands all languages (1 Cor 14:2). Thus the one who speaks in tongues edifies only himself since without an interpreter or translator, he is the only one who understands what he is saying (1 Cor 14:4). Paul emphasised the importance of understanding, “Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (1 Cor 14:19). It is clear that the unknown tongue Paul referred to consists of “words,” not “sounds.” Ecstatic tongues-speaking produces a lot of sounds, but is gibberish and meaningless. That there is a legitimate form of tongues-speaking which is ecstatic is most foreign to Paul’s mind.

The main theme of 1 Corinthians 14 is the importance of understanding for edification. Edification (1 Cor 14:3,4,5,12,17,26) comes by way of understanding (1 Cor 14:2,7,9,14,15,16,19). Paul pointed out that prophesying is superior to tongues-speaking. The gift of prophecy is the gift of being able to foretell and forthtell the will and word of God. When the prophet speaks, he speaks to his own people in their own native tongue. The members of the church benefit from the words spoken because they are able to understand the message given. Paul makes this very clear with an illustration from music (1 Cor 14:7–8). Music is music only if there is a tune or melody. How does one expect to appreciate music when the pianist plays only a single note throughout, or a random string of notes that does not make up a tune? So unless one speaks in a language that others can understand, one is wasting one’s breath (1 Cor 14:9). Likewise, a language has vocabulary, grammatical forms, and syntactical structures. As Paul said, “There are . . . so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification” (1 Cor 14:10). When a person prays in tongues, he prays with his heart as well as with his mind (1 Cor 14:15). In other words, he knows what he is

saying and can identify the language he is speaking. A genuine tongues-speaker would be able to analyse the language he has spoken by identifying the different words he has used, and their respective meanings. The Holy Spirit is perfect. The gifts that come from Him are perfect. The tongues-speaker when endowed with the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language would be perfectly proficient in that language. He would be able to write out the content of his speech, list the vocabulary, and demonstrate the grammatical-syntactical relationship of the words. Are modern-day tongues-speakers able to do this?

For the gift of tongues to be beneficial to the congregation in general, the gift of interpretation is required. 1 Corinthians 14:27–28 says, “If any man speak in an unknown tongue, . . . let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.” Since our God is a God of order and not of confusion (1 Cor 14:33), it is necessary to conclude that the tongues-speaker understands what he says in order for him to confirm that the interpreter has translated his tongue correctly. Otherwise, false interpreters could easily arise to give a spurious message without being detected. Those who have the gift of interpretation also serve to check false tongues-speakers because if their speech is gibberish, they would be able to authoritatively dismiss it as spurious. Just as a prophet is judged by another prophet (1 Cor 14:29 cf, v32), the tongues-speakers are judged by the interpreters, and vice versa. If there were no such checks in place, there would be chaos, and deception would be rampant.

How do you reconcile Paul’s emphasis on the need to understand the tongues spoken, with his words in 1 Corinthians 14:2 where he says that the tongues-speaker “speaketh mysteries” and 1 Corinthians 14:14 where he says that when he prays in tongues, “his understanding is unfruitful?”

According to charismatics, the “mysteries” they speak through tongues are understandable only to God and not to man. Only God can decipher or decode these “mysteries.” If this is what the biblical word “mysteries” means, then it would be very similar to the mysteries of the pagan religions. Speaking ecstatically is not uncommon among the heathens. Their priests communicate to their gods in strange, undecipherable tongues.

The mysteries of the Bible are meant to be understood. Biblical mysteries are actually God's truths hidden in the past but now revealed in Christ (Col 1:26–27). These truths are meant to be known. Jesus said, "it is given unto you to *know* the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 13:11). Repeatedly, the Apostles in their epistles reveal and explain the mysteries of the kingdom in terms which all can understand (Rom 11:25, 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7, 4:1, 15:51; Eph 1:9, 3:3–4, 6:19; Col 1:26–27). Intelligibility and understanding are key concepts in the subject of tongues-speaking.

In 1 Corinthians 14:14, Paul is not saying that there is a spiritual gift of ecstatic tongues-speaking where the understanding is unfruitful. He is simply putting himself in the shoes of those who claim that their type of tongues involves only their spirit but not their mind. Those who make such claims should know that praying in the Spirit meant praying with understanding (1 Cor 14:15). A prayer language that is gibberish cannot be from the Holy Spirit.

Can the “groanings” of the Spirit in Romans 8:26 refer to an ecstatic form of tongues?

Romans 8:26 reads, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Some charismatics argue that the groanings of the Spirit here refer to ecstatic tongues-speaking. Can this be so? This is another example of taking the text out of context to make it mean what it does not mean.

The context of Romans 8 says nothing about the gift of tongues. Tongues-speaking is furthest from Paul's mind here. So, what is this groaning of the Spirit? The groanings are the Holy Spirit's intercessory prayers for the saints: “but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us . . . And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26–27). The Holy Spirit has a prayer ministry where He prays separately for Christians. Sometimes in prayer, we agonise over what to pray for because we are unsure of God's will in a particular situation. We are unable to express in words our deep desires. At this point, the Spirit takes over to make sure that what we ask for will be in accordance to God's will.

We also know that the “groanings” do not refer to tongues-speaking because in the earlier verses, the same word is used of creation: “For we know that *the whole creation groaneth* and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:22–23). Surely the groanings of creation cannot mean that creation is speaking in tongues! The whole creation is groaning because of the curse of sin (cf, Gen 4:14– 20). All Christians are groaning because of their daily struggle with sin. Paul expresses only too well what our groanings are in Romans 7:14–24, “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” The “groanings” are therefore the deep and inexpressible desires of the heart and mind. We long for the day of resurrection when God will deliver us completely from our sinful condition by giving us a transformed body like Christ’s (2 Cor 5:1–4). We long for the millennium, when Christ will restore His creation to its original Edenic glory (Isa 11:1–9). The heartfelt cry of all creation and all Christians is: “Lord Jesus, come back soon!”

Let it be reiterated that the groanings of the Spirit in Romans 8:26 have nothing to do with tongues-speaking.

Why is the gift of tongues a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22)?

In 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul says, “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.” This is not the first time the gift of tongues is mentioned as a sign. Jesus already said that

tongues are a sign in Mark 16:17. A sign functions as a pointer. It seeks to draw attention to something important or significant.

So, what did Paul mean when he said, “tongues are for a sign?” A study of verses 20–21 will yield answers. In verse 20, Paul chided the Corinthians, “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.” In other words, Paul was telling them, “Know your Bible! Don’t you see the purpose of tongues?” Paul then drew their attention to the Old Testament. In verse 21, the Apostle quoted verses 11 and 12b of Isaiah 28. Isaiah was, at that time, warning the Israelites of impending judgement. The Israelites had repeatedly and stubbornly rejected the clear admonitions of the Lord through His prophets. Since they would not heed the Word of the Lord spoken to them in their own native tongue, namely, Hebrew, they would now have to hear it in another tongue—the Assyrian: “For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people” (Isa 28:11). They would be taken captive into another country, and would have to learn a new language starting with the ABCs: “For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:10). It was God’s word of judgement against the unbelieving Israelites.

In 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul was pointing out that the gift of tongues functioned as *a sign to unbelieving or disbelieving Jews* in the time of the New Testament. The Jews thought that they were the only people to whom God extended salvation. This was a misconception. The gift of tongues was meant to correct this erroneous idea. Consider Peter’s experience in Acts 10. The Lord wanted Peter to preach the gospel to Cornelius, a Gentile. As a full-blooded Jew, Peter would have nothing to do with a Gentile. But the Lord spoke to Peter in a vision commanding him three times to eat the food the Jews classified as unclean (Acts 10:11–16). This was to prepare Peter to minister to Cornelius, an unclean person in the eyes of the Jew. When Cornelius sent for Peter, Peter in obedience to the Lord went to see him, and the Scripture says, “While Peter yet spake these words the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed (ie, Christian Jews) were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God” (Acts 10:44–46). When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was summoned by the Council to account for his visit

to a gentile home. His fellow Apostles and Elders were angry with him because he preached the gospel to Cornelius—a Gentile. How did Peter vindicate himself? He told them the whole story of how God spoke to him in a vision, and how the Spirit led him to Cornelius’s house. Peter recounted, “As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). Peter saw Cornelius and his household gloriously saved. This was evinced by their speaking in tongues just as he and the rest of the Apostles had experienced at Pentecost. Peter went on to say, “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift (ie, the Holy Spirit) as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). What was the response of the Jerusalem Council who took Peter to task? “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Herein is the purpose of tongues—a sign to unbelieving Jews. To Peter and the Jewish saints who were at first unbelieving, it was a sign of confirmation that Gentiles are truly indwelt by the Spirit when they receive Christ.

Can 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 really be used to prove that tongues have ceased?

Yes, 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 is a most explicit passage on the cessation of the sign-gifts. Words of cessation, namely, “fail,” “cease,” “vanish away” are used. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”

Prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will eventually cease to exist. Before we deal with the cessation of tongues, let us deal with the cessation of prophecies and knowledge. Paul said that prophecies “shall fail,” and knowledge “shall vanish away.” The words “fail,” and “vanish away” are the same word in Greek namely, *katargeo*, which is a very strong word for cessation. It basically means “to destroy” (cf, 1 Cor 15:24,26). The word *katargeo* (“to destroy”) is written in the Greek passive. The passive voice indicates that something from the outside will cause prophecies and knowledge to cease. What is this external element? Verses 9–10 give us the answer: it is *to teleion*—“the perfect thing.” What is this “perfect thing?” It is the completion of the Canon (ie, the 66 books

of the Holy Scriptures). When Paul wrote his epistle to the Corinthians, the New Testament was in the process of being written. Once the New Testament is completed—the last book written—the gift of prophecy, and of knowledge will cease. All the truths that God wants man to know concerning Him are found in the Bible. It is sufficient and authoritative. It is God’s complete and final revelation to man (2 Tim 3:16–17, Rev 22:18– 19).

Now, how about tongues? Paul wrote that tongues “shall cease.” The word “cease” here is the Greek *pauo* which means “to stop.” Unlike the gifts of prophecy, and knowledge, which require an external element to cause their cessation, the gift of tongues will cease by itself (Greek middle voice). It will automatically fade away in the course of time when it has served its purpose. G F Rendal, formerly a charismatic, commented, “This purpose was fully achieved when it was fully admitted that the nations, as well as ‘this people’ (the Jews), benefited from Jehovah’s salvation. When this fact was universally believed, accepted and no longer contested by anyone, this gift was no longer needed. . . . Stars, as everyone knows, are visible and useful during the darkness of an unbelieving Israel who opposed the nations’ salvation. The gift faded out very simply when the Gentiles’ calling came to light. This is what finished off the last of my resistance” (*I Speak in Tongues More Than You All*, trans K Benson and V Dinsmore [Ontario: Believers Bookshelf, 1987], 80–1). The gift of tongues will be withdrawn when it has fulfilled its purpose as a sign to unbelieving Jews (1 Cor 14:22). Is there today a need for God to convince Jews that the gospel is also given to Gentiles? There is no need. No longer are Jews preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, but Gentiles to Jews!

Does history confirm the early cessation of tongues? The famous church father—Augustine—wrote in the fourth century, “In the earliest time the Holy Ghost fell upon them that believed: and they spake with tongues, which they had not learned, ‘as the Spirit gave them utterance.’ These were signs adapted to the time. For there behooved to be that betokening of the Holy Spirit in all tongues, and to shew that the Gospel of God was to run through all tongues over the whole earth. That thing was done for a betokening and it passed away.” The great sixteenth century Protestant Reformation and Revival, was not characterised by tongues-speaking, but powerful preaching. Luther, Calvin, and Knox did not speak in tongues. For further study on the cessation of the sign-gifts

based on the historical argument, read B B Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1972).

Can't the word "perfect" be referring to Christ or heaven instead of the Bible?

The word "perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 does not mean Christ or heaven. How do we know this? We know this by determining how the word is used in its context. Usage determines meaning!

1 Corinthians 13:10 says, "But when *that which is perfect* is come, then *that which is in part* shall be done away." It is very clear from this verse that there is a relationship between "that which is perfect" and "that which is in part." The "perfect" will cause the "part" to cease. The question we need to ask first is: What is "that which is in part"? The answer lies in verses 8–9. Verses 8–9 tell us that the things partial are "prophecies," "tongues," and "knowledge." All three sign-gifts are revelatory. They are supernatural gifts which communicate the Word and Will of God. Paul says that these revelatory gifts will eventually "fail," "cease," and "vanish away." They will one day cease to exist, or be withdrawn from use.

The next question we want to ask is: When will this happen? This will happen when "the perfect" comes (v10). Paul says that prophecies "shall fail," and knowledge "shall vanish away." The words, "fail," and "vanish away," are written in the Greek passive. By so writing, Paul is telling his readers that something from the outside will cause the gifts of prophecy and knowledge to fail and vanish away. What is this external element? The answer is found in verses 9 and 10, "For we know (ie, the gift of knowledge) in part, and we prophesy (ie, the gift of prophecy) in part. But when *that which is perfect* is come, then that which in part (ie, the gifts of knowledge and prophecy) shall be done away." There is a cause-and-effect relationship between "that which is perfect" and "that which is in part." It is clear from the context that the gifts of knowledge and prophecy are only temporary gifts, and not permanent. They will be removed once the perfect comes.

Now, what is this which is "perfect" that will cause the gifts of knowledge and prophecy to cease? The word "perfect" here is the Greek *to teleion* which literally means "the perfect thing." This perfect thing is inseparably linked to the revelatory gifts of prophecy and knowledge. The

cause-and-effect relationship between the perfect and the partial (ie, prophecies and knowledge) clues us to what the perfect is. The revelatory nature of prophecies and knowledge tells us that this perfect thing must of necessity be revelatory as well. It has to do with God's revelation. The Greek word—*teleion*—being adjectival functions to describe. Here it describes God's revelation. The revelatory gifts of prophecy and knowledge are partial, but this coming Revelation is perfect. The "perfect" is thus God's Perfect Revelation. When God's Perfect or Complete Revelation comes, the partial will be taken away. God has been revealing Himself to His people part by part through the prophets (cf, Heb 1:1–2), but there will come a time when He will completely reveal what He wants to reveal. When that happens, there will no longer be any need for prophecies and knowledge. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, the New Testament was in the process of being written. Prophecies and knowledge will cease when the New Testament is completed. When did this happen? This happened when the last book of the Bible was written and completed, namely, the book of Revelation. God confirmed its completion by issuing a very severe warning in the last chapter of Revelation, verses 18–19: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." This effectively sealed and finalised God's Perfect Revelation—the 66 books of Holy Scripture.

Now, we know that the word "perfect" in 1 Corinthians 13:10 does not mean the return of Christ because if Paul had that in mind, he would probably have used the clear and unambiguous "until he comes" which he did in 1 Corinthians 11:26, or "then the end will come" in 1 Corinthians 15:24. What is truly significant is the fact that the word "perfect" is used 18 times in the New Testament (Matt 5:48, 19:21; Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 2:6, 13:10, 14:20; Eph 4:13; Phil 3:15; Col 1:28, 4:12; Heb 5:14, 9:11; Jas 1:4,17,25, 3:2; 1 John 4:18), and not once does it refer to the second coming or to heaven. The word "perfect" is mostly used to describe spiritually mature Christians who live in accordance to God's Word. At other times, it is used specifically to describe (1) the will of God, (2) the wisdom of God, (3) the Law of God, (4) the love of God, and (5) the humanity of Christ.

Therefore, the “perfect” refers to a book, and not to a person (Christ), an event (His return), or a place (heaven). The Holy Bible is the perfect Word or Revelation of God. It is absolutely authoritative, and totally sufficient for Christian doctrine and practice (2 Tim 3:16–17). Revelation has ceased. Consequently, all temporary means of revelation, like the gifts of prophecy and knowledge, have been withdrawn. It is unbiblical to seek a word of prophecy or a word of knowledge today. We are to go straight to the Word of God to seek His will and wisdom.

One must also not neglect Paul’s careful argumentation on why love is supreme in 1 Corinthians 13. Paul chides the Corinthians for placing the supernatural sign-gifts at a level that is above the virtues of faith, hope and love. They got their priorities all mixed up. The gifts of prophecy, knowledge, and tongues are not as important as the virtues of faith, hope, and love. The sign-gifts are meant only for the apostolic age. They are temporary gifts, and will be phased out. What will remain and last throughout the church age are the Christian graces of faith, hope, and love. These virtues should be found in every Christian. The Corinthians should pay more attention to cultivating these virtues in their lives instead of fighting over who has the superior gift (1 Cor 12:1–21, 14:1–5). Of the three virtues, love is the greatest or most important because love will never cease. While faith and hope will both be realised or fulfilled at the time of Christ’s return, love being a divine virtue will last forever. “Charity never faileth” (1 Cor 13:8). Love is eternal, and that is why it is “the greatest” (1 Cor 13:13). Paul is exhorting the Church to pay most attention to love because we are going to need it for eternity (cf, Matt 22:36–40).

The word “perfect” therefore must mean the Biblical Canon—the 66 books of Holy Scripture. If we take the term “perfect” to mean the second coming of Christ or heaven, we will throw into disarray Paul’s careful and thoughtful argumentation in 1 Corinthians 13 on the superiority of faith and hope, and the supremacy of love over the temporariness and relative inferiority of the sign-gifts.

Does not the “now . . . then” clause in 1 Corinthians 13:12 refer to what will happen in the future when we are in heaven?

Charismatics argue that the word “perfect” in verse 10 refers to heaven or the eternal state. They understand this to be so in the light of verse 12, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face:

now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” They explain this verse to mean that we do not see heaven “now,” but we will see heaven “then” when we finally see Christ “face to face.”

It is important to understand that Scripture can only have one meaning. Verse 12 cannot mean both the Bible and heaven. In order to ascertain the meaning of a particular scriptural text, it is important for us to refer to other parallel portions of Scripture. We need to compare Scripture with Scripture by allowing the clearer portions to shed light on the less clear ones.

First, Paul used the analogy of a child to explain what the “perfect” is. He said, “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (v11). This analogy cannot be taken out of context. It must be read in the light of verses 8–10 which tell us that what we know partially through temporary modes of revelation (prophecy, tongues, knowledge) will eventually be replaced by the inscripturated revelation of God in His Word. This is clear from the words used in the analogy, viz, “spake,” “understood,” and “thought.” They refer to our speaking, understanding, and thinking of God’s Word. When the perfect Word of God comes, we will be speaking, understanding, and thinking about God and His Kingdom in the light of the fullness of both Old and New Testament Scripture. Just like an adult who has outgrown his childish ways of speech and thought, so God’s revelation when full and complete will result in the setting aside of the childish modes of revelation through visions, dreams, and voices (cf, Heb 1:1–2). The Church is past kindergarten. Now at university, do we still use beads to count our numbers?

Second, Paul used the analogy of a mirror: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” Again, in our attempt to understand this verse, we must not wrest it out of context (viz, vv8–10). The word “mirror” or “glass” (KJV) is used only one other time in the New Testament, in James 1:23. There it is used as a metaphor for the “perfect law of liberty” (Jas 1:25). The “mirror” thus refers to the Law of God—the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God like the mirror reflects our own image. The “face to face” here thus cannot mean seeing Christ face to face. The face that we see is not Christ’s but ours. When the perfect Word of God comes, “then shall I know even as also *I am known*” (1 Cor 13:12).

In light of this, the phrase “face to face” must refer to God’s direct way of revealing Himself in contrast to His indirect ways. The way God spoke to Moses, for example, will help us understand what is “face to face.” In Numbers 12:6–8 God said, “Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold.” From this passage, it is evident that there are two types of revelation: one direct and clear, the other indirect and obscure. God speaks to us most clearly and directly through His Written Word. As Calvin said, “The light of His Word, even Holy Scripture, is likened to a pair of spectacles. As old people with dim eyes brighten up immediately when given spectacles to read a book, so with the help of His Word, we obtain a clear view of the true God. All dark and confused notions of Him are thereby dispelled.” Thus, the phrase “face to face” refers to God’s direct revelation. The Holy Scripture is God’s direct and complete revelation to us.

In our prohibition of tongues, are we not going against Paul’s injunction, “Forbid not to speak in tongues” (1 Cor 14:39)?

Charismatics often use 1 Corinthians 14:39 against those who prohibit tongues-speaking today. The question we want to ask is: Have charismatics understood this Pauline injunction correctly? It is vital in Bible interpretation that we take into careful consideration the historical context of a passage. If we do not, then we run the risk of doing things that the Lord no longer requires us to do. For example, the Old Testament has many commandments concerning animal sacrifices. Do we offer such sacrifices in the church today? If not, why not? Aren’t these sacrificial laws applicable also to God’s people today?

The historical context is important in helping us understand why there is a difference between Old Testament and New Testament practices. The ritualistic requirements of the Old Testament were specifically given to the nation of Israel, and are not applicable to the Church in the New Testament. This is so simply because the Church is not Israel. The Church is not a national but a spiritual body of Christ. Moreover, Christ has put an end to all the Old Testament sacrifices by His one-time Sacrifice on the cross. God’s administration of the Old

Testament period is quite different from that of the New Testament. If we fail to see this, we run the risk of misunderstanding and misapplying God's Word.

Hence, we should view Paul's commandment, "Forbid not to speak in tongues," in the same way, that is, in the light of its historical context. It was in AD 55 that Paul wrote this. At that time the gift of tongues was not rendered inoperative since it still served its purpose (cf, 1 Cor 14:21– 22). So tongues should not be prohibited at that time.

Also, Paul might have been afraid that the Corinthians would go to an extreme by putting a total stop to legitimate tongues-speaking. He had just spoken strongly against the confusion of tongues-speaking in the church, and might have anticipated a radical reaction on the part of the Corinthians. To protect those who truly had the gift, the command, "forbid not to speak in tongues," was given. This injunction was applicable only to the apostolic period when the gift of tongues was still valid. We are no longer living in apostolic days. The ecclesiastical conditions of today are quite different from those in Paul's day. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8 said that tongues will cease, and they have indeed ceased a long time ago.

Can God give the gift of tongues in days of revival?

We have already discussed in the light of Scripture why the spiritual gift of tongues has been withdrawn from the Church and is no longer available to Christians today. Although it has been withdrawn, can God choose to give it during times of revival? God has said that tongues will cease, and they have (1 Cor 13:8). God will not contradict His Word by reintroducing tongues at this time.

Church history attests to the cessation of tongues. There were no outbreaks of tongues in genuine revivals of the past. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was the greatest revival since Pentecost. That period was characterised by powerful preaching and teaching, not tongues-speaking. Tongues were conspicuously absent. Closer home, the Asian Awakening in the days of John Sung saw much weeping for sins. Again, there were no tongues. As a matter of fact, John Sung himself spoke against the charismatics and their tongues-speaking. The Rev Dr Timothy Tow who went through the John Sung revival testified, "During all the 15 years of John Sung's ministry, there was not a single place where he ministered that the Holy Spirit had sent the gift of

tongues. As John Sung lashed out against the sins of the people, calling them to repentance and to a new birth through the blood of Christ, the phenomenon of revival was one of sincere tears of repentance and the resultant joy of sins forgiven. Many tears of confession of sins, one by one, were shed and the Cross warmly embraced. Quarrels in the Church were settled. Stolen monies were returned to the owners, and if not possible, given to the Lord's Treasury. Chain-smokers, even of opium, and drunkards, were delivered snap on the spot.

“Therefore, when so-called Holy Spirit Churches in North China demanded to speak in tongues as proof of a needed second blessing when their members had never bowed the knee in repentance of their sins to God, John Sung refuted them. Without sin being washed out from within, there was no possibility of the Holy Spirit filling them. The prerequisite of a filling of the Spirit is the cleansing of sins from our lives. In an unspoken positive reply to the charismatics, John Sung would preach two hours solidly out of the Bible. And what volume of power from God's Word was released in contrast with the cumulations of unintelligent, hollow sounds babbling from lips under a man-engendered compulsion. John Sung would ‘speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue’ (1 Cor 14:19). Often he would reason thus: Unless our sins are washed away, how could the Spirit that is Holy come in to fill us who are so unholy? And for cleansing there was none other, as he stressed, but the precious blood of Christ. John Sung choruses were centred on the Blood, but today's charismatic choruses, what are they? We believe in the old classical Gospel hymns and not these modern ones set to the tempo of jazz and rock. Tears of confession, not tongues in confusion!” (Timothy Tow, *The Asian Awakening*, 54–5).

Chapter 5

Questions about Signs and Wonders

What are the sign-gifts?

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed in Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, 28–30, and Ephesians 4:11. There are 21 different gifts: apostles, prophets, miracles, healings, distinguishing of spirits, prophecy, knowledge, tongues, interpretation of tongues, evangelists, pastors, teaching, exhortation, wisdom, faith, administration, ruling, service, helps, giving, and showing mercy. The gifts are of generally two types: (1) the natural or non-spectacular, and (2) the supernatural or miraculous gifts.

The sign-gifts are the miraculous gifts (cf, Mark 16:17–18). They are often called “signs and wonders” in Scripture (John 4:48, Acts 2:22, Rom 15:19, 2 Cor 12:12, Heb 2:4). There are two types of sign-gifts: (1) Work-signs (eg, healing, demon-casting, raising the dead, and the like), and (2) Word-signs (eg, prophecy, knowledge, and tongues). The Work-signs and Word-signs though distinguishable are inseparable. The demonstration of miracles is always accompanied by the revelation of the mysteries of the Gospel of Christ and of the Kingdom of God (Acts 3:1–26, 19:11, 20).

Are the sign-gifts meant for every Christian?

The sign-gifts were generally not bestowed on the ordinary Christian but on the Apostles who were special servants of God. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were known as apostolic signs. The Apostle Paul said, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12, Heb 2:4). The phrase “signs of an apostle” can be translated “signs *belonging to* an apostle.” These signs served as indicators. They pointed to the fact that the Apostles were uniquely ordained of God. These signs were specially bestowed upon the Apostles of Jesus Christ to authenticate their

ministry of the Word. They were their badges of authority. The Apostles were special messengers of God for they infallibly preached and wrote God's Word (1 Thess 2:13, 2 Pet 1:20–21, 2 Tim 3:16).

Are there Apostles today?

God had only appointed 12 Apostles. In the New Testament, they were often identified as “The Twelve” (Mark 3:14, Acts 6:2 cf, Acts 1:20–26). It is a fixed number. While pastor-teachers today receive their appointment from God through man by the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14), Apostles receive their appointment directly from God alone (cf, Gal 1:1).

Since the Apostles were special ministers of God, there are seven reasons why we do not and cannot have them today: (1) The Church was founded upon the Apostles (Eph 2:19–20); (2) the Apostles had to be eyewitnesses to the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 9:1, 1 Cor 15:7–8, Acts 1:21–26); (3) the Apostles were chosen personally by Christ Himself (Matt 10:1–4); (4) the Apostles had absolute authority over the affairs of the Church (Acts 5:1–11, 19:13–17, 2 Cor 13:2–3, Gal 1:8, Jude 17); (5) the Apostles were infallible in their preaching (1 Thess 2:13), and in their writing (Eph 2:20, 2 Pet 1:20–21); (6) the Apostles were authenticated by miraculous signs and wonders (Mark 16:17–20 cf, Acts 2:43, 5:12, 14:3, 15:12, 19:11–12); and (7) the Apostles have an eternal and unique place of honour in God's kingdom (Rev 21:14). Can anyone today have all the above qualifications? Obviously, none!

If the sign-gifts were meant only for the Apostles, then why did Jesus say that “these signs shall follow them that believe” (Mark 16:17)?

Mark 16:17–18 does not teach that *every* believer will be able cast out demons, speak with new tongues, heal the sick, take up snakes and drink poison without being harmed. Who were these “believers” that Jesus was talking to? The context clearly indicates that the “believers” were the Eleven—the Apostles (v14). Jesus chided them for being unbelieving. He then challenged them to believe His words. They were commanded to preach the gospel to every creature (v15). And as they do the work of evangelism, they will be given the power to do miracles (vv17–18). Verse 20 is the key to understanding verses 17–18: “And they (ie, the Apostles) went forth, and preached every where, the Lord

working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.” The signs were given to confirm or authenticate the ministry of the Apostles. This fact is corroborated by the Acts of the Apostles: Acts 2:43 reads, “And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the *apostles*;” Acts 4:33, “And with great power gave the *apostles* witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus;” and Acts 5:12, “And by the hands of the *apostles* were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” The Apostle Paul himself in defence of his apostleship wrote, “Truly the signs of an *apostle* were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12 cf, Acts 14:3, 15:12, 19:11). These signs were specifically signs of an Apostle. And since there are no Apostles today, there are also no such signs today.

What is the gift of miracles?

The gift of miracles is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:10 as “the working of miracles” (cf, 1 Cor 12:28–29). The gift of miracles is God’s empowerment upon a person to perform extraordinary acts of wonder that go beyond the laws of nature and normal human experience. The Lord Jesus Christ possessed the power to perform miracles. Peter testified that Jesus was “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you” (Acts 2:22). In the Gospels, we read of Jesus’ many miracles: His turning of water into wine (John 2:1–12), His calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 8:18, 23–27, Mark 4:35–41, Luke 8:22–25), His feeding of the 5,000 with five barley loaves and two fishes (Matt 14:15–21, Mark 6:35–44, Luke 9:12–17, John 6:3–14), His walking on water (Matt 14:22–33, Mark 6:45–52, John 6:15–21) etc.

The Apostles of Christ too had this supernatural ability to perform miracles. Paul himself said that the miracles were the authenticating marks of their apostleship: “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12). Jesus promised them the gift of miracles in His commission to them before His ascension: “They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them” (Mark 16:18). The Apostle Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake but suffered nothing from it (Acts 28:3–6). Besides this, Paul did many other miracles and wonders among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12).

Can Christians today perform the miracles that Jesus and the Apostles did?

The Bible clearly tells us that the gift of miracles was strictly given to special servants of God for the purpose of authenticating their ministry. Miracles were not common events in the history of Israel and of the Church. God granted this gift of miracles only on three special occasions: In the days of (1) Moses and Joshua (c 1450–1390 BC), (2) Elijah and Elisha (c 860–800 BC), and (3) Christ and His Apostles (c 30–90 AD). Miracles occurred during these exceptional days of Moses, of the prophets, and of Christ and the Apostles for the purpose of (1) introducing a period of divine revelation (the Old Testament was written in the time of Moses and of the Prophets, and the New Testament was written in the time of Christ and His Apostles), and (2) authenticating the messengers of divine revelation (read Exod 4:1–9 for Moses; 1 Kgs 17:23–24 for Elijah; John 10:24–25, Acts 2:22 for Christ; and 2 Cor 12:12 for the Apostles). God has ceased to reveal Himself in the same way He did in the biblical periods of the Old and New Testament. The Holy Scripture is complete, and none is to add to it (Rev 22:18). Since no more special messengers of divine revelation are sent out by God, it follows that there is no longer any need to authenticate them through miracles.

The gift of miracles has since been withdrawn. This is proven by the words of the early church fathers who testified to its absence. Chrysostom (4th century), for example, said, “Argue not because miracles do not happen now, that they did not happen then . . . In those times they were profitable, and now they are not . . . Of miraculous powers, not even a vestige is left.”

Why can't we organise miracle and healing rallies to reach out to unbelievers?

We cannot and we do not use “miracles” and “faith healing” rallies or services to evangelise the lost because the gift of healing is not meant for evangelism but *authentication*. This was taught by Peter when he told the crowd that the Lord Jesus Christ was “approved of God” by miracles and wonders and signs (Acts 2:22). The miracles and healings Jesus performed were to point to the fact that He was their promised Messiah. Paul told the Corinthians that his ability to perform sign-miracles which they had seen when he ministered to them proved that he was truly a divinely commissioned Apostle (2 Cor 12:12).

Sinners are converted not through miracles but through the preaching of God's Word. Paul said, "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom 10:17). Faith is not based on things seen, but on things yet unseen: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. . . . By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb 11:1,8). To those who argue that miracles will convince unbelievers of the reality of God, Abraham's answers to the rich man are noteworthy, "They have Moses and the prophets (ie, the Scriptures); let them hear them. And he (ie, the rich man) said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he (ie, Abraham) said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:29–31). Jesus fed the 5,000 miraculously with just 5 loaves and 2 fishes, but eventually "many . . . went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). Thomas was one of those who wanted to see in order to believe, and Jesus had to chide him, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Biblical evangelism is not characterised by signs and wonders but by the powerful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus set the pattern in Mark 1:32–38. Jesus did a lot of healing in Galilee, but when the people came the next day for more healing, He told His disciples, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth" (v38). The ministry Jesus conducted when He was on earth was a Word-ministry, not a Signs-and-Wonders ministry. The great commission Jesus gave to His disciples likewise had this emphasis: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19–20). Jesus did not say, "Go and heal;" He said, "Go and teach."

How can the gift of miracles be taken away today when Jesus promised that as believers we will do greater works than the ones He did (John 14:12)?

Jesus said in John 14:12, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and *greater works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." Jesus did many great miracles during His earthly ministry, even raising the dead.

However, these great works that Jesus did were merely physical, and only temporary. Those who were healed, or raised from the dead were not permanently delivered from disease or death. Lazarus, though raised from the dead by Jesus, had to die again. The disciples of Jesus did not surpass their Master in their miracles. They like Jesus also healed, cast out demons, and raised the dead (cf, Mark 16:17–20).

So what are these “greater works” of which Jesus spoke? The greater works must surely mean something beyond the physical and temporal. They must be works which are *spiritual* and *permanent*. Jesus said that His disciples will do greater works when He returns to His Father. This is because when He returns to the Father, He will send the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment” (John 16:7–8 cf, 14:16–17). Evidently, the “greater works” have to do with the works of the Holy Spirit through the believers of the New Testament age. When He comes, He will engage in a permanent ministry in the New Testament saints for He will “abide with you forever” (John 14:16). While the gift of miracles and of healing will eventually pass away with the Apostles when the New Testament is completed, the Holy Spirit will continue to abide with God’s people. The Spirit’s ministry of converting people from their sin unto salvation will prove to be a greater work than Jesus’ because the gospel will no longer be contained in Palestine, but will be proclaimed worldwide. The promise of “greater works” in John 14:12 ought to be understood in the light of Acts 1:8 where Jesus said, “But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Jesus’ gospel ministry on earth was confined mainly to the area of Palestine, but that of His disciples will be throughout the whole wide world. Jesus ended His personal ministry on earth with just about 500 disciples (1 Cor 15:6), but Peter in a single day, by the power of the Spirit at Pentecost, led 3,000 souls into the Kingdom (Acts 2:41). This must surely be the “greater works” that Jesus was talking about in John 14:12.

Does God perform miracles today?

The God of the Bible is an all-powerful God. Can He intervene in the affairs of man and do something that is out of the ordinary? The answer, of course, is Yes. In times of crisis or danger, the Lord can deliver His people in a miraculous fashion (eg, Acts 12:1–19). In the realm of providence, God works miracles directly from heaven in answer to the prayers of His saints if it is His will (Matt 7:11, Jas 5:16–18). There are no more miracle-workers like the Prophets and Apostles. God is the only Miracle-Worker, and He can work a miracle if He so desires.

Chapter 6

Questions about Faith Healing

What is the gift of healing (1 Cor 12:9)?

The gift of healing may be defined as the miraculous ability to restore the sick or handicapped to health and strength in order to authenticate the ministry of an Old Testament Prophet or an Apostle of Christ. The only explicit mention of healing as a gift of the Spirit is in verses 9, 28, and 30 of 1 Corinthians 12. In these verses, the term is used in the plural—“gifts of healing.” The plural is probably due to demon-casting being part of the healing ministry. Physical illnesses can be due to demon possession (cf, Matt 9:32–34, 17:14–21). Paul’s healing ministry in Acts 19:11–12 seems to indicate that demon-casting is tied to the gift of healing: “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and *the evil spirits went out of them*” (see also Acts 5:16). Demon-casting is apparently one of the gifts of healing. Physical healing takes place when the demons are cast out.

The gifts of healing empowered the Apostles to cure any form of illness, disease, or handicap caused by nature or by demons. When healing takes place, the person is completely restored to health and strength. When the demons are cast out, they leave the person altogether. There is no waiting period for the healing to take effect. The healing takes place instantaneously.

Does God bestow the gift of healing today?

The gift of healing is one of the sign-gifts of an Apostle of Jesus Christ. The sign-gifts were meant to authenticate the God-given office and ministry of the Apostles. These sign-gifts are listed in Mark 16:17–18. In verse 18, we are told that the Apostles “shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Such healings as performed by the Apostles were

instantaneous. That the healings were meant to authenticate the apostolic office is clearly taught in verse 20, “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and *confirming* the word with signs following.” In the book of Acts, the Apostles were the ones who did most of the healing. In Acts 3:1–10, we find Peter and John healing the lame man at the temple gate Beautiful. The Apostles Peter and Paul exercised their healing ministry in Acts 5:15, and 19:12 respectively. Repeatedly it is recorded that all such healings “were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43, 4:29–30, 5:12), or those specially commissioned by them (Acts 6:8, 8:6–7 cf, Acts 6:5–6). Since there are no Apostles today, there are no gifts of healing today either.

If miraculous healings are supposed to be instantaneous, how would you explain Jesus’ healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22–26 which was not instantaneous?

In Mark 8:22–26, we read: “And he [Jesus] cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored and saw every man clearly.” Usually, Jesus would touch the person, and he would be healed immediately. But here we find an exception where Jesus healed in two steps. It is important to note that there was no lengthy interval between the two steps. One followed the other in quick succession. The blind man was healed in a matter of minutes. More importantly, the healing was total—he received perfect eye-sight. Do we find this in modern-day charismatic healings? Often we see the same sickly ones visiting the so-called healer again and again, and even after several prolonged sessions, they are still not healed.

Is faith required for healing?

Charismatic faith healers who fail to heal usually put the blame on the sick by saying that they do not have enough faith. What a cruel thing to say! How could they tell? Perhaps they are the ones who did not have the faith. Maybe they did not have the ability to heal in the first place.

The Bible contains many accounts of Jesus healing all without exception, faith or no faith. Matthew 12:15 tells us that “great multitudes

followed him, and he healed them *all*.” In John 11, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Can the dead exercise faith? Surely not. Neither was it the faith of his sisters, for both Martha and Mary doubted that Jesus could raise him up that day (John 11:24,32). Jesus was grieved for their lack of faith in Him (John 11:33,38). Their lack of faith notwithstanding, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead.

The Apostles did likewise. In Acts 5:13, the multitude of sick and demonised people were brought to the Apostles, “and they were healed *every one*.” In Acts 3:1–9, we find a lame man sitting by the temple gate Beautiful begging for alms. He was not looking for healing, but for money. Peter and John did not have any money for him. But they did have the power of Christ to heal. Peter told the lame beggar, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). Peter then “took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” (Acts 3:7). Clearly it was Peter and John’s faith that resulted in the healing. The lame man had expected some small change from the Apostles, but he got much more than that—a healthy pair of legs. He was healed not because he had the faith. He was healed because Peter and John had the power.

In Acts 20:9–12, we have another instance where the healing was due not to the sick person’s faith but to the God-given ability of the healer. Eutychus fell off the parapet while the Apostle Paul was preaching. The fall was fatal. Eutychus being dead could not exercise faith, but he was raised up miraculously by Paul. If modern-day healers truly have the same powers as the Apostles, then why don’t they raise the dead? The answer is simple: They have no power whatsoever to heal, but are tricksters and charlatans!

Jesus healed thousands of people. How many of them had faith and followed Him to the end? The personal ministry of Jesus on earth resulted in only 500 disciples (1 Cor 15:6). What happened to the rest? We can safely assume that most of them eventually rejected Christ. For example, in Luke 17, Jesus healed 10 lepers but only one returned to thank Him. In response, Jesus said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole” (vv17–19). All ten were physically healed, but only one had faith. This one was physically and spiritually healed.

Is not healing part of the salvation package in the atonement of Christ?

Isaiah 53:4–6 (cf, Matt 8:16–17) is often used by the charismatics to argue that when we receive Christ as our Saviour, we are saved not only from sin, but also sickness. When Christ died on the cross, He bore our physical infirmities and sicknesses (quoting Matthew). There is healing in the atonement. Thus, Christians can claim from God His promise to heal. Is that a correct understanding of God’s promise to heal as taught in Isaiah 53?

God promised a Saviour in Isaiah 53. This Saviour will bear our “griefs” and our “sorrows” (Isa 53:6). What are the griefs and sorrows, and how did they come about? In answer, we need to go back to the fall of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Eve fell into sin, God pronounced a curse, “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy *sorrow* and thy conception; in *sorrow* thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, . . . cursed is the ground for thy sake; in *sorrow* shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:16–19). All human griefs and sorrows are due to sin. Our griefs and sorrows are just external symptoms of a more serious internal spiritual problem. In order to deliver us from our griefs and sorrows, Jesus had to deal firstly with the true disease which is sin. That was what the Saviour did, “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (Isa 53:7).

Matthew’s commentary on Isaiah 53:16 in chapter 8:17 of his Gospel is correct. When Matthew saw Jesus casting out demons and healing the sick, he said that this fulfilled Isaiah 53:16 for truly the griefs and sorrows were physical or earthly ones. What Jesus did pointed to a greater work He would do on the cross. His display of power to heal us from our physical sicknesses proved that He as the Messiah had the power to save us from our spiritual sickness which is sin. Peter tells us what Isaiah 53:17 means, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet 2:24). The healing

is primarily spiritual. We are healed spiritually because Jesus bore our sins on the cross.

In dying for our sins, Jesus also dealt with our bodily afflictions. Yes, Jesus did die to heal us physically, but this does not mean that all Christians are liberated from sickness and disease in this life. This is evident from the fact that even though Jesus has already saved us from our sins, our sinful nature is still not yet eradicated. Although we are new creatures in Christ, we continue to struggle with sin (Rom 7:14–21). We will only be totally delivered from sin and sickness when Christ returns. Writing to Christians, Paul said, “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:22–23).

Is it true that Christians who suffer from physical maladies are outside the will of God?

It is *erroneous* to say that it is *not* God’s will at all for Christians to fall sick or ill during their sojourn on earth before He returns. In the Old Testament, we find Job going through a lot of pain and suffering as a result of poverty and disease. God allowed it to happen in order to test the faith of His saint. Sometimes the Lord allows His people to go through pain and suffering in order to mature them in the faith. James commenting on Job tells us that there is virtue in enduring suffering, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord” (Jas 5:11). James told the Christians to endure suffering, “Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas 1:3–4).

Another example would be the Apostle Paul. Paul had very poor health. He described his physical infirmity as “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7). Paul prayed to the Lord thrice for healing, but He chose not to heal. The Lord, however, promised Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” The Lord gave him this sickness in order to prevent him from becoming proud (2 Cor 12:7). Paul’s response to God’s will is most exemplary, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in

necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor 12:9–10).

It is therefore not true that all Christians should always be free from bodily infirmities, and should never fall sick.

Does God heal miraculously today?

Yes, the Lord is the Physician of physicians. He can and does heal miraculously. But when He heals today, He no longer does so through intermediary agents like the Prophets and Apostles. There are no "faith healers" today. In ordinary circumstances, when we are sick we go to the doctor for treatment and medicine. God uses doctors today to help us with our physical infirmities. But in cases where the doctor is helpless, especially when the illness is an incurable one, God's people can pray, and God can intervene miraculously (Jas 5:14–16). Having said this, we must also understand that God is sovereign and all-wise. There are times when He chooses not to heal. One good example would be Paul (2 Cor 12:5–10). He prayed three times for his "thorn in the flesh"—a physical affliction—to be removed, but the Lord said No. Paul said the Lord allowed him to suffer this sickness in order to keep him humble and useful. The Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Paul learned to accept God's will and good purpose. He said, "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, . . . for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." Christians today need to learn from Paul this important lesson of submitting to God's will.

Isn't it God's will for His people to be healthy and wealthy?

The "health and wealth gospel" is popularly taught by the charismatics. They say, "Believe in Christ and you will be rich;" "Believe in Christ and you will be well." No more poverty, no more sickness! If it is truly God's will for all Christians to be wealthy, then Peter and John certainly missed out on God's will. Peter said, "Silver and gold have I none" (Acts 3:6). Jesus Himself was poor: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt 8:20). God definitely did not promise that we will be millionaires when we become Christians. Not every Christian will be wealthy.

Wasn't James referring to "faith healing" when he said "the prayer of faith shall save the sick" (Jas 5:15)?

Faith healing, as practised by so-called faith healers, is not done by means of prayer, but by *commanding* a disease to leave. Oftentimes, we find the faith healer saying words like, "Cancer, be gone!" This is not "the prayer of faith." This is presumption.

What was James trying to teach here? James here answers several important questions. (1) When we are sick, to whom should we go? Please note that James did not say, "Go to the faith healer." He told the sick to "call for the elders of the church" (Jas 5:14). The elders (literally, "presbyters") are the spiritual leaders of the church comprising the teaching elder (ie, the pastor), and the ruling elders (ie, the lay overseers who assist the pastor). (2) Should the elders command the sickness to depart? No, they are simply to "pray" over the sick. In verse 15, it is called a "prayer of faith." It is the prayer that fully trusts in God to do that which is in accordance to His will as revealed in His Word. This will bring about healing and forgiveness. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (v16). (3) Is medicine disallowed in our ministry to the sick? Of course not. Here, we find the elders rubbing the sick person with oil (v14). The oil used is olive oil which is known to be therapeutic (cf, Luke 10:34). The elders are not only to pray for the sick, but also to render medical help. My teacher—Dr Homer Kent—says, "God does answer prayer, and He does restore sick people—sometimes by prayer alone, sometimes after their being anointed with oil, sometimes through medicine or surgery, and sometimes by a combination of several or all of these means. Our praying 'in faith' must accept all that He has revealed and trust His sovereign will for the rest" (Homer A Kent Jr, *Faith That Works*, 191).

If the spiritual gift of healing has been withdrawn by God after the apostolic age, how is it that Dr John Sung was able to heal miraculously during his ministry?

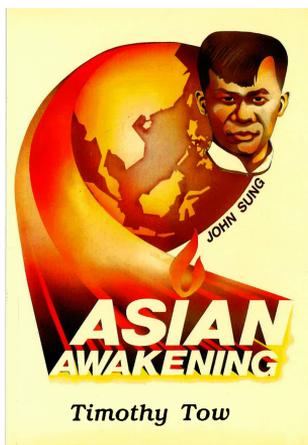
It is said that Dr John Sung practised faith healing in his ministry. The Rev Dr Timothy Tow in his book—*John Sung My Teacher*—recounted this incident, "Dr Sung had prayed for the sick and spiritually affected since that first request made by a Baptist missionary in Shantung. It was in Kowloon, the mainland side of Hong Kong, that he held a

healing session at the request of a number of converts. Precipitated again by that universal need of a mankind fallen into sin and resultant sickness, the Band felt led to administer it. Fifty sick people were directed to a special meeting at which they were thoroughly purged by a full confession of their sins under the Blood of Christ. When this was done Dr Sung and Rev Gih laid hands on them, one by one. Whether olive oil was applied or not it was not stated. Among the sick who came for the healing were several western missionaries. ‘Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him’ (James 5:14,15). At testimony hour the same evening, which was the end of campaign, many who were sick, including missionaries, praised the Lord for being made whole. Hallelujah!” (147–8).

It must be said that the healing ministry of Dr John Sung was not of the apostolic type. John Sung did not have, nor did he claim to have, the sign-gift of healing which was given only to the Apostles for the purpose of authentication. The healing ministry of John Sung was clearly a prayer ministry as taught in James 5:14–16. If John Sung had the gift of healing, all who came to him, without exception, would have been healed. But this was not the case. According to eye-witnesses, not all who came for healing were healed. Miraculous healing today comes directly from God in answer to prayer in accordance to His will.

Furthermore, healing was never prominent in John Sung’s ministry. John Sung himself was reluctant to pray for people’s healing. He said, “I know that God would heal them in answer to my prayers, but then it would attract many for healing, rather than for the Gospel” (William Schubert, *I Remember John Sung*, in Timothy Tow, *The Asian Awakening*, 140). Surely, the “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jas 5:16). But like Jesus, John Sung did not focus on healing but on preaching. In Galilee, Jesus, when He saw all men coming to Him for healing, said to His disciples, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth” (Mark 1:38). Similarly, in a two-week campaign, John Sung would have 40 sessions of preaching, but only one session for healing, the 41st and final afternoon slot. Such a prayer session for healing was necessary in those days because medical

facilities in China were sorely lacking. And the Lord was pleased to graciously heal many who were sick during this time in answer to prayer.



Asian Awakening by Timothy Tow. Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 1988. 196pp. ISBN 981-05-3257-1.

“Dr. Timothy Tow is the senior Pastor of Life Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore, and Principal of the Far Eastern Bible College. Over the last 35 years Dr. Tow has been greatly used of God in the planting of an entire constituency of thriving churches and mission stations in Singapore, Malaysia and elsewhere in the Far East. His own very large church holds services every week in the Mandarin, Tamil, Indonesian and Korean languages, besides the principal English services. Dr. Tow continues to engage in missionary itineraries throughout the Far East wherever evangelistic groups can be planted and supported.

“Dr. Tow came to the Lord in 1935 during an awakening which moved through South China and other Far Eastern lands principally through the extraordinary ministry of the Chinese preacher John Sung—born Sung Chu Un. (Wang Ming Dao, who preached John Sung’s funeral sermon in 1944, described John Sung as the Lord’s Jeremiah to Asia. It is thought that several hundred thousand lives may have been savingly blessed through his tireless travels, preparing a great Chinese “remnant” for the coming years of repression and darkness.)

“As a teenager Dr. Tow sat under John Sung’s preaching for months, and has written a biography of the evangelist. Few pastors in the West are able to draw on personal experience in describing true revival. Dr. Tow will show how lessons learned in the fires of revival have brought blessing and health to the churches called to proclaim the Gospel during a different ‘season’ of grace. Dr. Tow’s Subjects:

“Four lectures covering the following themes: The Asian Awakening, its character and conversions. Lessons learned in revival which have secured the doctrinal purity and health of churches subsequently. The attitude and methods of John Sung contrasted with those of present-day evangelists. How liberalising and charismatic influences were rebuked. Doctrinal development since the revival. Adapting to a different ‘economy’ of grace. Maintaining standards of conduct, doctrine and effort in the churches.”

— from *Sword and Trowel*, 1986, No. 1.

Chapter 7

Questions about Prophecy, Visions, and Dreams

Who were the prophets?

The word “prophet” literally means “a foreteller.” In 1 Samuel 9:9 he is also called a “seer.” A prophet is thus someone who is able to predict or tell beforehand what will happen in the future. Prophets are men specially appointed by God with a message for the people. They are God’s mouthpieces or spokesmen. God will put His words into their mouths; and they shall speak to the people all that the Lord has commanded them to speak (Deut 18:18b).

We find many prophets in the Old Testament. There are basically two types: (1) Oral Prophets (those who spoke but did not write God’s Word) like Elijah and Elisha; and (2) Writing Prophets (those who not only spoke but also wrote God’s Word) like Moses, Isaiah and the rest of the Major Prophets—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

Not everybody can be a prophet. It is not an office that one can independently choose to take. It is an appointment. God must choose a person to be His prophet before he can assume that office. There were three groups of people that were specially ordained or anointed by God in the Old Testament; they were the prophets, the priests, and the kings. The prophets were known as God’s “anointed” (Ps 105:15). God called them “My servants” (Jer 7:25). A special calling from God was needed to enter into this special ministry. Jeremiah for example was set apart and ordained by God to be a prophet even before he was conceived in his mother’s womb (Jer 1:5).

The prophets spoke under divine inspiration. God revealed His will and word to His prophets either audibly, or through visions and dreams (Num 12:6–8). The prophets spoke the very words of God. We read in the

Old Testament how “the word of the Lord came unto the prophet” (2 Sam 24:11 cf, Exod 4:15–16, 7:2). The words spoken by the prophets, since they come from God, were infallible and inerrant. The prophets made no mistakes when they spoke under divine inspiration. Such prophets who spoke God’s Word were also found in the New Testament. John the baptiser who was Jesus’ herald was one such prophet (Matt 17:11–13, Luke 7:28).

After Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave the gift of prophecy to certain Christians. The Lord gave to the church some prophets to assist the Apostles in building up the church at a time when the Bible was still incomplete (1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11–12). Some of the people identified as prophets in the early church were Agabus (Acts 11:28, 21:10–11), and Philip’s four virgin daughters (Acts 21:8–9).

Are there prophets today?

If by prophets, we mean those of the Old Testament and New Testament type who spoke inerrantly the Word of God, then the answer would be No. The spiritual gift of prophecy is no longer given to Christians. The gift was withdrawn when the New Testament was completed (1 Cor 13:10). So technically we do not have prophets who reveal to us the Will and Word of God under divine inspiration today. What we do have today are those who preach the Will and Word of God from the Holy Scriptures. In a sense they may be loosely called “prophets” since they also do the work of (1) “foretelling” when they talk about the end-times and the return of Christ as found in the Scriptures, and (2) “forthtelling” when they preach, teach, and apply the Scriptures to the Christian life. More accurately, those who do this work of “foretelling” and “forthtelling” today are the pastors and teachers who base their ministry of the Word upon the teachings of the Apostles and Prophets (Eph 2:20 cf, 4:11).

Now, there are those who appoint themselves prophets. Be careful, these are the false prophets. God knew that false prophets would arise. Satan would plant his imposters to confuse God’s people. So in Deuteronomy 13 and 18, the Lord warned the Israelites to watch out for these false prophets: “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not

hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him” (Deut 13:1–4). “But the prophet which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, . . . When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him” (Deut 18:20,22). How do you spot a false prophet? Watch out for these 2 things: When a so-called minister (1) tells you that Jesus Christ is not the only way to heaven (ie, to “go after other gods”), and (2) teaches something that is contrary to the Holy Scriptures (ie, “presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak”), he is a false pastor or preacher. Jesus has already warned the Church against false prophets and teachers who will arise in the last days: “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. . . . And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many. . . . For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt 24:4–5,11,24).

How do we know for sure that the Bible is complete, and that God no longer reveals Himself through dreams and visions today?

We know for sure that special divine revelation is no longer progressing because God has revealed all that He wants to reveal in His Living Word (ie, Jesus Christ), and in His Written Word (ie, the Holy Scriptures). The Bible is thus complete.

God has revealed Himself fully and clearly in His Son—our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is taught in Hebrews 1:1–3, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” In

the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to His people in many parts and in many ways through His prophets. Revelation was progressive and piecemeal. God revealed Himself bit by bit. For example, right after the Fall, God promised a Redeemer from the seed of a woman (Gen 3:15). Later, He revealed that this Redeemer would come from the lineage of David (2 Sam 7:12–14), that He would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14), and that He would die for the sins of His people (Isa 53). The Old Testament promised a Saviour, and the New Testament records its fulfilment in Christ. It is in the incarnation of Christ that we see a full-orbed picture of God’s unfolding drama of redemption.

God spoke to His people in times past in spectacular ways. In those days, God spoke to His people through dreams and visions, and direct communication (Num 12:4–7). But today, He speaks to us through a Person—His Son Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews would have us know that the revelation of Christ surpasses all other forms of revelation in terms of its fullness and clarity (Heb 1:4–5, 3:5–6). Moses was perhaps the greatest prophet in the Old Testament with whom God spoke “mouth to mouth” (Num 12:7). But in comparison to Christ, Moses is but a shadow. Moses’ face reflected the light of God when He came down from the holy mountain, but Christ is Himself the Light. Jesus is “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:9,14). Did not Jesus also say, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father . . . the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:9–10)? Jesus is the “express image” of God. He is the exact representation of who and what God is. God no longer needs to send snapshots of Himself to His people; He has already made a live appearance in Christ His Son.

God also made it a point to inscripturate His Word for a permanent testimony to His people. He not only gave us the Living Word, He also gave us the Written Word. The inscripturated Word is the infallible testimony of the incarnate Word. The inscripturated Word is complete. It comprises just 66 books—39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament, no more no less. We are sure that God is no longer adding to this number because He had put a full-stop to His revelation after the last biblical book was written. God’s warning in Revelation 22:18–19 proves that His revelation has ceased, and His Word is complete: “For I testify

unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Since that time no Prophet or Apostle arose. No one spoke as they did: “Thus saith the Lord.” This happened once before during the 400 silent years of the inter-testamental period when there was no prophet and no prophecy. It is no surprise then that the Old Testament canon concluded with Malachi—the last prophet of the Old Testament period (cf, Luke 24:44). The new period of revelation began only when John the baptiser came into the scene to announce the coming of the Messiah. God began to reveal Himself through supernatural means again. The Apostles were raised to pen the Scriptures (Eph 2:20, 2 Pet 1:21). This period ended when the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation. Since then divine revelation has ceased for good. None is to add to or subtract from God’s Word which is now complete. The Apostle Jude says that this body of truth as contained in the Scriptures is “once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). We should not be seeking for further revelation. The Apostle Paul tells us that the canonical Scriptures we have today is sufficient for making us perfect in Christ (2 Tim 3:17). There is nothing more. God speaks to us today through His Word, and not through visions and dreams.

If God no longer speaks to His people through visions, dreams, and voices, then how do you explain the revelatory experiences of Dr John Sung?

It is recorded in a number of biographies of John Sung that God spoke to him in a special way. The first experience happened when he was a student at Union Theological Seminary—a hotbed of modernistic teaching. At Union, his faith was gradually whittled away by the antibiblical doctrines of his unregenerate professors. He had no assurance of salvation. He was plagued by sin and guilt. “In the seclusion of Room 415 Sung was locked in a prolonged spiritual battle. His continued absence from the lecture theatre was noticed. In ‘My Testimony’ which was published in 1933, he vividly remembered, ‘The heavy burden of my soul became heavier day by day until on February 10th I got to the point where I no longer had any desire to live.’ His heart became the battleground

between Satan and the Holy Spirit in a life-and-death struggle to the end. ‘That night,’ recalled Sung, ‘I prayed. I prayed earnestly, intensely, in tears of penitence, asking the Lord to cleanse me by His precious Blood. I would live not for self anymore, nor for the glitters of this world, nor for my empty dreams. I bared open my heart asking the Lord to deliver me from the ravages of Satan on my body, soul and spirit.’

“It was about 10 pm that night of February 10th, 1927. As he prayed he saw all the sins he had committed, not the four Chinese vices of womanising, gambling, drinking and smoking but of pride, hypocrisy, doubt and unbelief spread before his eyes one by one. He felt miserably condemned to Hell. In this predicament he searched for his long neglected, much read and underlined Bible. He found it in his trunk, and as he turned, it fell on Luke 23, the story of Jesus’ Trial and Crucifixion. As he read and wept for the misery of his sins on bended knees, he realised it was midnight as the clock struck twelve.

“Suddenly the Lord with pierced hands and wearing a crown appeared to him in a vision, standing before him and speaking in a compassionate voice, ‘My son, your sins are forgiven! Your name is now changed to John.’ John, no more the old noble haughty Shang Chieh, said, ‘Lord Jesus, please don’t leave me!’ As the vision receded John felt a wonderful relief in the sudden rolling away of his sin-burden. . . .

“Recalling Feb 10th, 1927 he said in an interview, ‘That night of nights, Feb 10th, 1927, was the birth of new life in me after forty days of wilderness struggle. I shall never forget” (Timothy Tow, *John Sung My Teacher*, 72–3).

A few days after this tremendous experience, he had another encounter with the Lord, this time through a dream. In this dream, he saw himself lying in a coffin dressed in his academic regalia and holding his diploma. Then he heard a voice say, “John Sung is dead—dead to the world!” At this point, he saw his corpse coming back to life. When this happened the angels in heaven started to weep, until he called out, “Don’t weep, angels! I will remain dead to the world and to self!” (Leslie Lyall, *John Sung*, 34). It was perhaps at this time that the Lord revealed to him that his ministry would only last for 15 years. In 1931, he told his friend—William Schubert—that the 15 years consist of five periods of three years each. These periods were Water (1927–30), Door (1930–3), Dove (1933–6), Blood (1936–9), and Tomb (1939–42) (see William E

Schubert, *I Remember John Sung*, in *The Asian Awakening* by Timothy Tow, 144–82). John Sung, true to his word, remained dead to the world and self till the very end. He was called home on August 18, 1944.

His third experience occurred when he was in a mental hospital. He was put there by his seminary professors who thought he had gone mad when he kept talking about Christ and His cleansing blood, and when he called their highly regarded colleague—Dr Fosdick—a devil. The mental asylum was truly a madhouse. John Sung could find no peace of mind in the midst of incessant din and antics from the inmates. He testified, “I was bombarded by a tirade of jangling sounds—from self-scoldings to strident singing, from jumping to clapping, from striking to cursing. Unless you were there you could never comprehend what I am trying to tell you. My mind could hardly snatch a moment of peace under these circumstances—what a mental torture! As I look back, I can truly praise the Lord that He took me through this bitterest phase of my journey. To go through that situation was taxing one to the extreme of extremes.

“One night Satan tried to ensnare me. . . . As my thoughts wandered from home back to self, to my past, present and the future, I saw my past all gone in smoke. There was no need to look back. But when I considered the present and projected it into the future, I suddenly thought a bad thought—to take my own life. As the idea began to take hold of me in the stillness of the moonlit night, as tears welled up at the thought of home again, I wanted to take the plunge.

“In this moment of despair there suddenly came a voice from above telling me of the Grace of God. . . . I heard the Lord’s still small voice: ‘My child, you have been bought by my precious blood. How can you take your life so lightly?’ I said, ‘Lord, I’m a worm. I’m born into a sunless world. Since I can’t return to you my filial piety, to live is worse than death. So I thought of taking my life.’ The Lord’s voice continued, ‘All things work together for good to them that love God. If you can endure a little more, for 193 days of sorrow you must go through, you will have learnt the lesson of carrying my Cross and walk the road of obedience after Me to Golgotha.’ Suddenly that thick darkness that had surrounded me gave way to God’s glory shining over me.

“On the 30th day of August my bosom friend (Dr Rollin Walker) an American missionary had returned from Europe. Immediately upon his arrival he heard I was confined to a lunatic asylum. He came in haste to

New York State to see me. I wept bitterly when he visited me. I told him all my troubles. He comforted me. He went to see the Superintendent of the Hospital and got me signed out at once. Simultaneously the Superintendent had received an inquiry from the Government. This matter had put him in a quandary. Thus with a guarantor on hand what better solution could there be? What better opportunity to return a favour, to do a good turn to someone? I was now a free man!

“Looking back on this episode of my life I consider it rather a drama of paradoxes. From the day of my admission to the Hospital to the evening of my discharge, according to God’s timetable, there was a total of 193 days” (Timothy Tow, *John Sung My Teacher*, 79–80).

God visited John Sung in a special way on three separate occasions. God spoke to him in a vision, a dream, and lastly by a voice. What are we to make of all this? Firstly, we want to ask the question: Were these experiences of God speaking to John Sung genuine? How can we know for sure the truth of the matter? On what criterion do we base our judgement? We need to go to God’s Word. God’s instruction in Deuteronomy 13:1–3 applies, “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams.” Jesus Himself taught His disciples to discern truth from error by applying this test: “For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. . . . Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Luke 6:43–44, Matt 7:20). What fruits did John Sung produce? Were they good or corrupt? We judge a minister by his message and his conduct. Did John Sung preach another gospel? Did he live a godly Christian life? On both counts, John Sung passed the test with flying colours. No one can deny that John Sung was truly and remarkably used by God to convert thousands of souls; many of whom are still living today, and fervently serving the Lord. The following testimony is typical of John Sung’s revival meetings: “entire congregations fell on their knees, wept in repentance, confessed their sins, and asked for forgiveness. Quarrels and debts were settled. Backsliders righted their lives. Christians were quickened with renewed spiritual interest in prayer, Bible study and witness. Decisions for Christ, especially among nominal believers, were

crystallised. Many came forward to accept the Lord. Most of this effect fell on those who were already Christian in name” (Timothy Tow, *John Sung My Teacher*, 218).

Having tasted the poison of the modernistic teachings, John Sung spared no effort to repudiate them in his preaching and teaching. The Rev Dr Timothy Tow relates one such incident in Shantung where John Sung met some missionaries who did not believe in an inerrant Bible, and who spurned the blood of Christ. These missionaries not knowing Dr Sung’s background asked him to comment on science and religion to which he replied, “Science is good up to a point. One thing it cannot do is to deliver a sinner from his sins! When it was suggested to him that Dr Fosdick and Mahatma Gandhi were fine types of Christianity, Dr Sung replied, ‘Confucius’s teaching is far greater than theirs, yet what China needs is Jesus and His Cross. People quote Fosdick but what do they know of him? I have studied under him in New York City, but I totally repudiate his teaching and philosophy” (Timothy Tow, *John Sung My Teacher*, 123). John Sung was a fundamentalist. He was not only a Bible-believer, but also a Bible-defender.

In terms of his conduct, John Sung had a very sensitive conscience. He was very conscious of sin, and made every effort to live a sanctified life. He walked his talk. John Sung consistently preached against sin, particularly the four proverbial Chinese sins of womanising, gambling, drinking, and smoking. In preaching against such sins, he made sure he himself was kept from all of them. The Rev Frank Lin who co-laboured with John Sung for a season testified, “I have never forgotten that when he and I were in Hunan during the last period of his work in Bethel Evangelistic Band, he said to me, ‘Frank, we are both Fukienese, why don’t we band together to go on with our work?’ God did not allow me to make this decision because I knew *I was not as strong in spirit, in self-denial, in sacrifice, purity, and in faithfulness as God’s servant, Dr. John Sung*” (Timothy Tow, *The Asian Awakening*, 135). How many of these modern charismatic revivalists, so called, measure up to John Sung in terms of self-denial, sacrifice, purity and faithfulness? We are sad to note that the big boys of the charismatic movement like Bakker and Swaggart have fallen into sexual sins.

Now, let us deal with the issue of visions and dreams. We have established from the Scriptures that God no longer communicates His Word through supernatural and spectacular means (visions, dreams,

voices, angelic messengers etc). In other words, the Holy Bible is complete, and the Canon is closed; God is no longer adding to His Word. However, by virtue of his Bible-centred and Spirit-anointed ministry, we are sure that the visions and dreams John Sung had were genuine. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? Visions and dreams have ceased, and yet God spoke to one of his servants today in such ways. There is really no theological problem. The dreams and visions received by the Prophets and Apostles of old must not be confused with the dreams and visions experienced by select servants of God today. The former falls under the category of divine revelation which is authoritative to all and becomes Scripture while the latter comes under divine providence which is authoritative only to the recipient for guidance. God does not normally communicate through dreams and visions today, but when He does, they are not to be taken as Scripture; they do not fall under the category of “Thus saith the Lord.” We do believe that in *very exceptional* cases, God providentially intervenes in a miraculous fashion in order to redirect our course in life especially in times of great crisis. John Sung experienced such supernatural divine interventions in a most critical period of his life. Such special acts of providence are rare. They are not normative experiences for the Christian.

The charismatics often talk a lot about their “dreams” and “visions.” Many boast of having received a special word from God. But those who have truly received a dream or vision from the Lord are extremely reluctant to share it with others. The Apostle Paul, for example, said that only a fool would boast about his dreams and visions (2 Cor 12:6,11). Dr John Sung too, “Though he had visions and dreams during the days of spiritual conflict, he rarely referred to them in his sermons, except his conversion experience” (Timothy Tow, *The Asian Awakening*, 38).

Does not Acts 2:17 say that in the last days God’s people “shall prophesy, . . . see visions, and . . . dream dreams?” Isn’t the charismatic movement fulfilling this prophecy (ie, Joel 2:28–32) today?

The charismatics claim that they are recipients of the “latter rain” spoken of in Joel 2:23; the “former rain” being the one at Pentecost in Acts 2. Can this be? Joel 2:23 says, “Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former

rain, and the latter rain in the first month.” Does the “former rain” mean “First Century Pentecost,” and the “latter rain,” “Twentieth Century Pentecost?” To say so would make Joel say what he did not say. This is another case of twisting a text out of its context. Let us study the context of Joel 2:23. Israel has sinned against God. God punished the people by devastating their land. A plague of locusts has spoiled the crops (1:4), and the fields have become unproductive (1:10). The people are called to fast and pray (1:13–14). If no repentance is forthcoming, “the day of the LORD”—a day of judgement—will come (2:1). The Lord is going to send a more terrible plague of locusts to invade the land (2:2–11). God calls Israel to repent sincerely (2:12). God “is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness” (2:13). He is ever ready and ever willing to forgive His people and restore them to Himself. The priests are called to lead the people in repentance (2:17). When the people humble themselves before the Lord, He will “be jealous for his land, and pity his people” (2:18). Joel 2:19–27 tells us how God is going to bless His people physically when they turn back to Him. The “former rain” and the “latter rain” of verse 23 must therefore be read in context of such physical blessings the Lord is promising Israel if she repents of her sins. The former and latter rains refer to Israel’s climate. Israel’s rainy season falls between the months of October and April. Within these months there are two periods: the former rain (Oct–Nov), and the latter rain (Mar–Apr). These rains are necessary for a full harvest. This verse has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit.

It is only in Joel 2:28–32 that we read of the Holy Spirit. God promised that in a future time, He will pour out His Spirit in a special way. When did it happen? The Apostle Peter said it happened at Pentecost: “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:16–18). Peter, in refuting certain ones who concluded that those who spoke in tongues must be drunk, quoted Joel 2:28–32 to prove that the spectacular phenomenon they had just witnessed was not the work of alcohol, but of God. The Spirit of God descended on the people in a most wonderful way at Pentecost.

Why was this event wonderful? It was wonderful because Israel never experienced such an outpouring of the Spirit in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, only specially appointed servants of God were filled with the Holy Spirit. These men were the prophets (Ps 105:15, 1 Kgs 19:16), priests (Exod 40:13, Lev 4:3,5,16; 6:22; Zech 4:14), and kings (1 Sam 10:1, 15:1, 16:13). But there will come a time when God will reveal Himself no longer through the prophets, priests and kings, but through ordinary folk—sons and daughters, young men and old. These will dream dreams and see visions. This happened at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). On very ordinary Jews like Peter, James and John—unlearned fishermen—were the special revelatory gifts bestowed so that they might proclaim the gospel of Christ. This is a special act of God. The whole event is only significant to the Jew. Joel’s prophecy was applicable only to the Jewish context. It was not meant for the Gentiles, and certainly not meant for the church today. Charismatics who cite Acts 2:16–18 as a proof-text in support of their prophecies, dreams and visions have really taken the text out of its biblical-historical context. A prophecy can have only one fulfilment. According to Peter, Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled in AD 30 at Pentecost. It is not fulfilled again today in the charismatic movement.

Are there two kinds of prophecies in Scripture, one that is totally infallible and applicable to all, and another that is fallible and applicable only to some?

The charismatics say that there are two types of prophecies, one infallible, the other fallible. It is also advocated that the prophecies God gives today belong not to the first but second type (ie, fallible prophecies). Is this correct? Let it be known that it is very wrong to say that prophecies from God can contain errors. All God-given prophecies by virtue of their origin must be infallible. God does not make mistakes!

The prophecy of Agabus in Acts 21:10–11 has been cited as an example of a fallible prophecy. In this account, we find the prophet Agabus telling Paul that he would soon be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem and be handed over to the Romans. Did this happen? It happened exactly as Agabus had said (vv27–36). There was no error whatsoever in the prophecy. Then why do certain charismatics say that the prophecy was fallible. They come to this conclusion because Paul chose to “disobey” the prophecy (vv13–14). Did Paul really disobey the

word from God through Agabus? Definitely not. In the first place there was nothing for Paul to disobey. Agabus merely predicted what would happen. The prophecy did not include a command from God telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. It was not the Lord who forbade Paul from going to Jerusalem, but his friends (v12). This was only natural since they were concerned for Paul's safety. When Paul insisted on going to Jerusalem testifying that he was ready to die there, they realised it must be God's will, and said, "The will of the Lord be done" (v14). Indeed it was God's will for Paul to go through this trial in Jerusalem.

Therefore, there is no such thing as a fallible prophecy. God makes no mistakes. The only fallible prophecies are those that come from false prophets. Many so-called prophecies today are proven to be erroneous because they come from none other than false prophets. Beware!

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(Beulah House, 2nd Storey)
Tel/Fax: (65) 6254 9188
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Chapter 8

Questions about Satan, Demons, and Spiritual Warfare

Who is Satan, and what are demons?

Satan (Hebrew: “accuser”) was originally called Lucifer (Latin: “light-bearer”) (Isa 14:12). He was created by God, and was beautiful and morally perfect in the beginning (Ezek 12:13). God made him a high ranking angel with other angels under his charge (Ezek 28:12–14). But he became proud and rebelled against God (Isa 14:13–14, Ezek 28:15–16, 1 Tim 3:6). In his rebellion, a third of the angels followed him (Rev 12:4). God cast all of them out of heaven (Isa 14:15, Rev 12:7). Satan is also called the devil (Rev 12:9), and the angels that fell with him are called demons (Matt 25:41, Eph 6:12). There is one devil but many demons.

Satan is a murderer and a deceiver (John 8:44, 1 Pet 5:8, Rev 12:9). His goal is to oppose God and His people, and to destroy as many human lives as possible by blinding them to the gospel (Rev 12:1–10, 1 Pet 5:8, John 8:44, 2 Cor 4:4). Satan and his cohorts will be defeated by Christ and His saints, and will finally be cast into the Lake of fire to be tormented forever and ever (Rev 16:13–14, 19:11–21, 20:10).

What is demon possession?

Demon possession as the term implies refers to a person whose body has been invaded and inhabited by a demon. Such a person is commonly described in the Bible as one who is “demonised” (*daimonizomai*). In the KJV, the Greek *daimonizomai* is mostly translated “possessed with a devil” (Matt 4:24, 8:16,28,33, 9:32, 12:12, 15:22; Mark 1:32; Luke 8:36; John 10:21). The one who is demonised is also described as “having” or “possessing” a demon or an unclean spirit (Mark 5:15, 7:25, 9:17; Luke 4:33, 8:27; Acts 8:7, 16:16, 19:13). When a person is demonised, he is under the full control of the evil spirit that has inhabited him. He is not

able to resist doing the will of the evil spirit. The demon can speak through him (Matt 8:29,31; Mark 5:7–10), cause him to be blind, deaf or dumb (Matt 12:22), empower him with superhuman strength (Mark 5:3–4), cause him to go about naked (Mark 5:15), cause him to hurt himself physically (Mark 5:5), or make him insane (Luke 8:35). The demonised man is totally at the mercy of the evil spirit.

What is demon-casting?

Demon-casting is the act of expelling an evil spirit from a person in the name of Christ. In the Bible, we find both Jesus and His Apostles casting demons out of people (Matt 4:24, 8:16, Mark 1:32–34, Luke 4:41, Acts 8:6–7, 16:16–18). When Jesus commanded the demons to leave the person, they did so immediately. The Apostles had the power to cast out demons too, but they had to do so in the name of Jesus. Jesus said, “In my name shall they cast out devils” (Mark 16:17).

Exorcism is one of the main features of the charismatic movement. The charismatics call it a deliverance ministry or spiritual warfare. This is usually done through the laying on of hands and by invoking the name of Christ. Church members, family and friends are often enlisted to help cast out the demons. They would be told to read the Scriptures aloud, pray in tongues, or sing hymns and choruses. As a young Christian who did not know better, I was involved in a few of these sessions. As I observed the proceedings, several questions were raised in my mind: Why did not the demons leave immediately when they were commanded to do so? Why were these demon-casting sessions long drawn affairs? Why were the demons able to resist being expelled even though the name of Christ was used? Was the name of Christ not powerful enough?

In the Scriptures, when Jesus or His Apostles cast out a demon, it leaves immediately. Even in cases where there were more than one, they all came out in a single moment; they did not come out one by one, nor take turns to leave. The demons were not able to resist but had to obey when they were commanded to leave the person they had possessed. Jesus and the Apostles did not engage in long-drawn-out battles with demons, unlike the charismatics.

Why is charismatic exorcism so different from that found in the Scriptures? The answer lies in Mark 16:17 where demon-casting is called a sign-gift. The sign-gifts of the Spirit were meant to authenticate God’s special messengers, in this case, the Apostles (Mark 16:17 cf, v20). The

Lord endorsed the ministry of the Apostles “with signs following.” And one of these signs was the sign of casting out demons. The same word “signs” (*semeia*) in Mark 16:17 is also used in Acts 5:12 to refer to the gift of casting out demons (v16), among other spectacular gifts (vv14–15). In Acts 19:11–12, healings and demon-castings performed by Paul in Ephesus were known as “special miracles” (*dunameis*). Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:12 called these wonderful works “mighty deeds” (*dunamesin*), and “signs of an apostle.” Clearly, the gift of casting out demons was a sign-gift bestowed upon the Apostles to authenticate their ministry. So when the Apostles passed away, the gift went with them. God no longer empowers His people with the gift of demon-casting. That is why charismatics who perform exorcisms today are not only ineffective, but are also using the name of Christ in vain (cf, Exod 20:7).

If the gift of demon-casting was given only to the Twelve (ie, Apostles) for authentication, then how about “the seventy” who also had the ability to cast out demons?

In Luke 9:1–6, we read of Jesus sending out the Twelve to preach the gospel and heal the sick. Later, He sent out the Seventy as recorded in Luke 10:1–20. Jesus sent out both groups to declare the message of His kingdom (v9 cf, 9:6). In order to authenticate their message, the Lord empowered both groups with the ability to heal and to cast out demons. We know that the Twelve were personally chosen by the Lord for a special purpose. They were later appointed Apostles. The Twelve were recommissioned by the Lord in Mark 16:15–18. The Seventy, on the other hand, received no such mandate. We have to conclude that the Twelve had a permanent ministry the Seventy did not enjoy. After the Seventy accomplished their mission in Luke 10, they were not heard of again. We have to conclude that Jesus appointed them only for a short season because of the urgent need at that time: “The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few” (Luke 10:2). They were just “*acting* apostles.”

It is dangerous for anyone to attempt to cast out demons today if God had indeed withdrawn this supernatural gift. Acts 19:13–16 tells us of Sceva and his seven sons who were exorcists. What happened to them when they attempted to cast out demons in the name of Jesus? Luke tells us, “And the evil spirit . . . said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that

house naked and wounded.” Casting out demons today is dangerous business. Stay clear!

If the supernatural gift of casting out demons is no longer given, how then can Christians help those who are demon possessed?

We help those who are under the bondage and control of demons in the same way we help those who are under the bondage and control of sin and unbelief: Preach the gospel, and pray for them. Only the gospel of Christ can break Satan’s fetters. Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is *the power of God unto salvation* to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). The gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation,” and this salvation includes deliverance from demonic possession and control. The gospel is most powerful to deliver a person not only from sin, but also from Satan. When a person confesses his sins and trusts in Christ as his Lord and Saviour, his sins are cleansed by the blood of Christ, and he is made a child of God. Once the Holy Spirit indwells a person, the demons will have to depart. Darkness cannot fight Light. “Greater is he (ie, the Holy Spirit) that is in you, than he (ie, Satan) that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Can a Christian be demon possessed?

Christians cannot be possessed by demons. By “Christian” we mean someone who has truly believed in Christ, is born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5–8,16). Satan cannot dwell together with Christ. Light dispels darkness (2 Cor 6:14–16, 1 John 4:4). Christ has already crushed Satan (Gen 3:15, Luke 10:18–19, 1 John 3:8). In Christ we are completely delivered from the power of darkness (Col 1:13, Heb 2:14– 15). When Christ enters, Satan exits.

However, there are those who claim to be Christians but in actual fact are not. There are those who are Christians only in name. They may profess Christ, but were never possessed by Him. These are vulnerable to demonic possession, like unbelievers. A biblical example of such a person is Judas Iscariot. He appeared to be a disciple of Christ, but in actual fact was never truly saved. Judas was indeed possessed by Satan. The Apostle John tells us what happened to Judas that night, “[Jesus] was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. . . . He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have

dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop *Satan entered into him*. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest do quickly” (John 13:21,26,27). We can certainly conclude that so-called “Christians” who are demon possessed are still unregenerate. They need to receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour if they are to be delivered from this bondage.

Can Christians be influenced by Satan?

Yes, Christians can be influenced by Satan and his demons to do their bidding, and to sin against God. That is why Paul exhorted every Christian: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” Peter likewise warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Peter must be speaking from experience. He must have recalled how he fell into Satan’s trap when he dissuaded the Lord from going to the cross. Jesus had to rebuke Peter, “Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men” (Mark 8:33). Satan did not possess Peter for sure, else the Lord would have cast the devil out of Peter. But Peter was certainly influenced by Satan to hinder God’s plan of salvation. Jesus looking at Peter rebuked Satan because He knew that Satan was behind it all. Satan can tempt us to sin when we let our guard down. We need to be ever alert, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor 2:11). “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas 4:7).

Can physical illnesses be due to demonic possession or oppression?

The charismatics teach that most physical illnesses are due to demon possession. For healing to take place, the demon must be cast out. Is this true?

It is not true to say that “most” or even “many” illnesses are due to demonic spirits. Most physical ailments are a result of natural causes. For

such ailments, we go to the medical doctor for treatment. However we do find in Scripture people whose illnesses are due to demonic possession (see Matt 4:24, 8:16–17, 9:32–33, 12:22, 15:21–28, 17:14–18; Mark 1:32–34, 9:25, Luke 8:2, 13:10–17). In such cases, medical doctors offer no help; only Jesus—the Spiritual Doctor—can help.

In the passages mentioned above, we note that those demonically afflicted with physical illness were unbelievers. The physical illnesses from which a Christian may suffer cannot be due to demon possession because a Christian cannot be demon possessed. There is no case in Scripture of a believer being healed by exorcism.

We do however find believers being afflicted with physical illnesses that are attributed to Satan and his demons. These illnesses are due not to demonic possession but to demonic oppression. The believers are not internally but externally afflicted. Job is an example. God gave Satan permission to test Job's faith (Job 1:12). Satan would not have been able to touch Job, if God had not given the go ahead. This shows that Satan has no control over us unless God allows it. Satan cannot afflict us at will, and he certainly cannot possess us.

Does the Bible give Christians the right to verbally abuse Satan?

Charismatics are fond of scolding and rebuking Satan. This is dangerous. Jude in verse 8 speaks against those who “despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities” (ie, Satan and his demons, cf, Eph 6:12). “Yet Michael the archangel when contending with the devil . . . durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee” (Jude 9). Jesus Himself warned against exulting over Satan and his demons: “rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Those who arrogantly curse the devil “speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves” (Jude 10). Peter likewise describes these people as being “presumptuous” and “selfwilled.” “Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption” (2 Pet 2:10–12). God did not give

Christians licence to verbally abuse the devil. We defeat Satan not by hurling invectives at him, but by keeping ourselves holy, and by faithfully preaching His Word. Dr John Whitcomb rightly said, “the New Testament epistles say *nothing* about attacking Satan’s empire of darkness or identifying, confronting or casting out demons. But they have much to say about our eternal *position* in Christ through faith and our moment-by-moment *privilege* of putting on the whole armor of God and standing in His strength and authority in the evil day (Eph. 6:13; cf. Rom. 13:12, 14; 1 Pet. 5:8; James 4:7).”

What are territorial spirits? Do Christians need to bind them in order to gain ground for God’s kingdom?

“Territorial spirits,” according to charismatic teaching, are highranking demons which have been appointed by Satan to control the different nations of the world and their respective provinces, districts, cities, and villages. The main job of these demons is to prevent God from being glorified in their respective territories. It is believed that these territorial spirits will always get the upper-hand over against the work of God and His Church. So, these demons need to be bound for God’s Church to grow (cf, Matt 12:29).

It is true that Satan as the “prince of this world” (John 16:11, Eph 2:2) has the power to influence and move the nations. He is the mastermind behind the coming new world order under his lackey—the Antichrist (Rev 13:1–18). God has allowed Satan and his demons to organise all wicked nations of the world for a final showdown with Christ and His saints at the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16–19).

Does the Bible teach us to bind Satan or his demons? We often hear charismatic preachers say: “Satan, you foul spirit, I bind and cast you out of here in Jesus’ name.” It is said that Jesus taught His disciples to bind and cast out Satan in Matthew 12:29: “how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man (ie, Satan)?” It must be stated that Jesus was not teaching Christians to bind Satan here. He was simply proving how illogical the Pharisees were in accusing Him of casting out Satan by the power of Satan. Satan does not fight against himself. If Satan is cast out, it can only mean someone stronger has come into the scene. Satan is therefore cast out because Jesus is stronger than him. Satan may be strong, but Jesus is much stronger.

Only Christ has the power and authority to bind Satan. This He will do when He returns (cf, Rev 20:2). It is not God's will to bind Satan at this time. Those who pray for Satan to be bound at this time are thus praying against God's will.

How about the “binding” spoken of in Matthew 16:19, and 18:18? Do not these verses teach that Christians have the authority to bind evil spirits?

Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 do speak about “binding.” But do these texts teach the binding of evil spirits? Jesus told Peter in Matthew 16:19, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” The binding here has to do with the *keys of the kingdom* the Lord has entrusted to Peter. Keys are meant to open doors. The keys of the kingdom are gospel keys. Christ is going to build His Church (v18), and He will use Peter to open the gospel door not only in Jerusalem and Judea, but also in Samaria, and then to the uttermost part of the world (Acts 1:8 cf, 2:14–40, 8:14–17, 10:1–48). Peter was at the scene each time the gospel broke new ground as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. The “binding” in Matthew 16:18 has nothing to do with binding evil spirits.

In Matthew 18:18, Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Matthew 18:18 like Matthew 16:18 has nothing to do with the binding of evil spirits. The context clearly tells us that it has to do with church discipline (vv15–17). The “binding” speaks of the church's duty to *prohibit* any violation of God's Word; the “loosing” refers to the church's duty to *promote* the keeping of God's Word. The ecclesial duties of excommunication and readmission are also in view here (cf, 1 Cor 5:1–5, 2 Cor 2:5–10). The “binding” thus has to do with human beings, and not spirit beings.

Chapter 9

Questions about Charismatic Worship

Is charismatic worship biblical?

Christian worship is the biblical act of glorifying God in our words and in our deeds. True worship must be geared primarily towards the glorification of God (1 Cor 10:31). Since God is a Spirit, “they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). In other words, God does not desire any kind of religious worship, but worship from people who are indwelt by His Spirit, and who are obedient to His truth. If any of these two requirements are missing, the worship would be false or misdirected.

Is charismatic worship biblical? In order to answer this question, let us first ask: Do charismatics worship in spirit? Since God is Spirit, He requires those who worship Him to have His Spirit. He only wants true worshippers who are born again, and spiritually alive (John 3:3–8). Are charismatic churches largely congregated by true believers? We cannot be very sure. What is the gospel? Do they know? Do their tongues, prophecies, and demon-casting make them true believers and hence true worshippers? Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:21–23 are very telling, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” In light of this divine caveat, every charismatic needs to examine whether he is truly in the faith.

Without doubt there are charismatics who are truly saved. Nevertheless, that does not necessarily make their worship acceptable before God. This brings us to our second question: Do charismatics worship in truth? In order to worship in truth, we need to worship in

accordance to God's rules as laid down in His Word. The Westminster Confession of Faith, for instance, states, "the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture" (XXI.1). God requires us to worship Him in His way, not in our ways. Any worship not instituted by God becomes false worship and will not be accepted. For example, in Genesis 4:3–7, we find God accepting Abel's offering but not Cain's because the latter failed to approach God in the way He had prescribed (see Heb 11:4). Nadab and Abihu were punished by God because they "offered strange fire . . . which he commanded them not" (Lev 10:1). God does not allow us to worship Him according to our whim and fancy. He requires us to worship Him according to the principles of worship He has set forth in the Scriptures.

Charismatic worship is quite different from the solemn and dignified traditional service. It is characterised by the use of contemporary music and modern musical instruments (eg, drums, electric guitars, synthesizers). It is also common to find charismatics swaying their bodies, and dancing; raising, waving or clapping their hands during worship. The worship is often interspersed by the din of tongues. Screams and shouts are not uncommon. Charismatic worship services appear no different from the regular pop or rock concerts of the world. Is *worldly* worship acceptable to God? The Apostle Paul tells us not to be conformed to the world in our worship of God (Rom 12:1–2).

Does not Psalm 150 tell us to worship God with all kinds of musical instruments?

Psalm 150 calls on the Israelites to praise God with all kinds of musical instruments. So why can't we do the same in our worship? There is a need to understand and apply Psalm 150 correctly. It is important not to ignore the cultural context in our attempts to understand Scripture. Psalm 150 does not teach us—the church—to worship God with all kinds of instruments. The psalm is descriptive of Jewish and not ecclesiastical worship.

The psalmist is not teaching the church to use all kinds of musical instruments in her worship. Neither is the psalmist telling the Jews to use all these instruments in their Temple. Not all the instruments were

employed in the Jewish Temple where formal worship of Jehovah was conducted. The worship in the Temple was stringently regulated. In regard to musical instruments, only a few types could be used, and even then, they were not used all the time. The only instruments approved for Temple worship were the harp, the psaltery, the cymbals and the trumpet (1 Chron 16:4–6, 25:1). They were used only on certain specified occasions, and no other instruments were allowed (see also 2 Chron 29, Ezra 3:10, and Neh 12:27,36).

The other instruments that were disallowed in the Temple were used for worship outside the Temple. For example, in family worship, or in the synagogues, the string instruments were used (cf, Pss 92 and 144). The tambourines were used especially in the fields during festive occasions (Ps 81:2–3), or during the victory celebrations of Jewish troops returning from battle (Exod 15:20, Judg 11:34, 1 Sam 18:6, 2 Sam 6:5, Ps 68:25).

From the above, we see that the use of musical instruments in the nation of Israel was highly regulated. Not all instruments were allowed in the Temple. Many of the instruments were used in the open during national festivities. The psalmist was primarily speaking to his own people—the Jews. So, Psalm 150 is not teaching the church to employ all kinds of musical instruments in her worship services. It is not telling Christians that the more instruments they have in their worship service, the better their worship will be. How then is Psalm 150 applicable to us? It is applicable in that it seeks to teach us something about the spirit or attitude of worship. It teaches us to worship God with our whole being—our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Should dancing be allowed in a worship service?

Psalm 149:3 is used by the charismatics as a proof-text for dancing in church. The psalm reads, “Let them praise his name in the dance.” This verse must be understood in the light of its cultural context. Dancing was part and parcel of Jewish life. They dance in thanksgiving to God for a good harvest, and for victory in war. The church is not a nation. It does not have seasonal agricultural festivals. It does not go out to war. These Jewish activities and their attendant celebrations thus do not apply to the church. For instance, verse 6 says, “Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand.” Do we then worship in church with a parang or a machine gun in our hand?

Moreover, the Israelites do not dance in their Temple. They dance outdoors. To say that Psalm 149:3 teaches us to dance in the church sanctuary is to misunderstand and misapply the text altogether.

Should we sing contemporary Christian choruses in a worship service?

Many of the charismatic choruses are not only doctrinally shallow, but also unsound. Love is a popular theme in charismatic choruses. Yet the love is more like that of Hollywood than of Holy Writ. The pop, rock, and jazz tunes arouse not reverent, filial emotions, but worldly, sensual ones. Choruses in and of themselves are not wrong. But for choruses to be acceptable, they need to be (1) sound in doctrine, and (2) reverent in tune. More on Contemporary Christian Music can be found in the internet: Go to the music section of (1) wayofflife.org, and (2) av1611.org.

Should we clap, wave, and lift up our hands in worship?

Psalm 47:1 exhorts God's people to clap their hands. Under what circumstances do the Israelites clap their hands? The second part of the verse says, "shout unto God with the voice of triumph." The Israelites clap their hands to signal the victory God has given them over their enemies. The verses that follow describe God as "terrible" (or "fear producing"), "a great King over all the earth." As such, no one can defeat Him for He "shall subdue the people under us, and the nations under our feet" (v3). Psalm 47 is thus a war psalm. It is sung as the nation of Israel marches to or returns from war. It is not a temple psalm but a battle psalm. Does the church go out to war? Is the church armed with machine guns and grenades? Inasmuch as the church does not literally go out to war, the call to clap our hands here need not be applied literally by the church.

Leviticus 7:30 is one of the texts cited in support for the waving of hands in church worship. Charismatics regard their waving of hands to God as a "wave offering." The problem with this charismatic practice is that it is totally foreign to the Old Testament concept of a wave offering. Let us read in context what the wave offering was all about: "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, He that offereth the sacrifice of his peace offerings unto the LORD shall bring his oblation unto the LORD of the sacrifice of his peace offerings. His own hands shall bring the offerings of the LORD

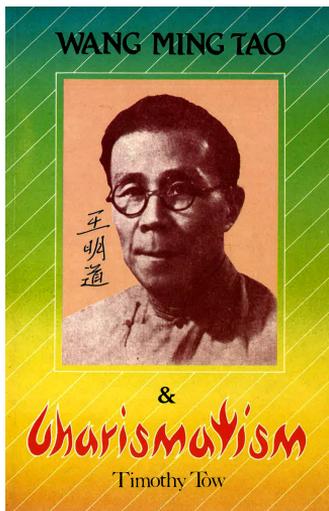
made by fire, the fat with the breast, it shall he bring, that the breast may be waved for a wave offering before the LORD. And the priest shall burn the fat upon the altar: but the breast shall be Aaron's and his sons" (Lev 7:28–31). Note that the wave offering was not done with open and empty hands. The priests held in their hands the breast of the sacrificial animal, and waved it as an offering to God. If the charismatics want to be truly biblical in their practice, they should first make sure they have breast meat in their hands before presenting to God a wave offering.

The Psalms often speak of the lifting up of hands to bless the Lord (Pss 63:4, 119:48, 134:2, 141:2). Lifting up of the hands is a common posture of prayer and praise among the Jews. I had the opportunity of seeing the Jews pray when I was in Jerusalem. They do lift up their hands in prayer, but the way they do it is quite different from that commonly seen among the charismatics. The charismatics usually lift up their hands over their heads like they are about to lift off. But the Jews lift their hands up only to the waist level with palms facing heavenwards. The open palms symbolise purity and expectancy. Psalm 24:3–5 expresses this thought well: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." Whether we lift up our hands or not is not the point. The point is the form must reflect the attitude. God accepts our worship not just because we lift up our hands. God wants us to lift up *holy* hands. For our worship of God to be acceptable, it must originate from a sincere and truthful heart (Josh 24:14).

Should we practise the holy kiss?

In 2 Corinthians 13:12, we find Paul commanding the brethren to greet one another with a holy kiss. Some charismatic churches practise the holy kiss. Should this be practised today? Culture must be taken into consideration in answering this question. There is a need to consider the cultural context of the Pauline injunction of the holy kiss. It was customary for the people to whom Paul was writing to greet one another with a kiss. This is commonly practised in Western, and Middle-Eastern countries today. In their culture, the kiss is an expression of friendship or kinship. In New Zealand, the traditional Maori greeting is nose-to-nose. Different cultures have different ways of salutation. In Chinese culture,

kissing as a greeting is not practised. It may even be frowned upon. A handshake or polite bow is the customary Chinese greeting. The principle of expressing union and fellowship as part of God's family is observed nonetheless but in various outward forms depending on the cultural situation.



Wang Ming Tao & Charismatism by Timothy Tow. Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1989. 126pp. ISBN 9971-991-20-9.

“Having been privileged to read in advance of publication Dr Timothy Tow’s translation of Wang Ming Tao’s assessment of the Charismatic Movement, I can see how very important it is that this work should have the widest possible circulation. Although this assessment was written in 1934, it struck me as remarkably modern and totally applicable to the practices that have swept through many church fellowships and house groups in our day.

“True believers, whether in or out of the Charismatic Movement, possess an inborn desire — implanted by the Spirit — to test all things by the Word of God, and so to remain under the lordship of Christ. This book will meet their need, for it examines various charismatic practices fully

and thoroughly in the light of Scripture. No reader can fail to detect that Wang Ming Tao’s supreme concern is to be right by God’s Word, and not merely to justify some tenaciously held viewpoints.

“Dreams, visions, speaking in tongues, spontaneous healings, and dancing in worship are all discussed. The method is patient, careful, and always interesting, reflecting the author’s unique charm and skill as an expounder of the Scriptures. No issue is ‘ducked’, and whether the author is speaking of David dancing before the ark, or about the source of charismatic experiences, his conclusions are crystal clear and replete with the force of Truth.

“Wang Ming Tao does not take the ‘cessationist’ position held by many of us, namely, that the revelatory and sign gifts passed away with the apostles. Nevertheless, his arguments are weighty and powerful, and all the more worthy of attention on account of his own early pentecostal beliefs.

“Dr Tow has adorned this vital book with biographical material and a valuable essay of his own which summarizes and updates the issues. For many years now, he has laboured tirelessly to win and care for souls in Singapore, Malaysia and elsewhere in Asia. He is ‘father’ of a thriving group of spiritually-alive churches, and this book is so obviously the product of pastoral concern for the well-being of God’s people in these confused and perilous times. May God grant that it will be read and deeply considered by many.”

Foreword by Dr Peter Masters of Metropolitan Tabernacle (Spurgeon’s), London.

Chapter 10

Questions about Judging the Charismatics

The Bible says, “Judge not.” Are we therefore wrong to judge the charismatics?

Jesus in Matthew 7:1 did issue a command against judging others: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” However, did Jesus mean that Christians should not judge at all no matter what? If so, then the Lord Himself would have violated His own injunction, for in verse 5 He judged someone and called him a “hypocrite.” It is clear from the context that Jesus was not against judging per se. What He was truly against was a judging that was hypocritical—a judging that did not first begin with self (vv3–5). This type of self-righteous judging is unrighteous, and hence forbidden.

The Bible does teach about judging righteously. Jesus commanded in John 7:24, “Judge righteous judgment.” He did just that in Matthew 7:15 where He told His disciples, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Paul commanded, “brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom 16:17). John wrote, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Now how are we supposed to do all this if we are not at all to judge? It is thus not wrong to judge the doctrines and practices of the charismatics. We judge righteous judgement when we judge according to the Scriptures. It is certainly a sin if we as Christians exercise no judgement or discernment whatsoever. “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8).

Is it true that the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is committed by anyone who speaks against the charismatic movement?

No, the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be committed by exposing error. In the light of Scripture, it is clear that the charismatic movement is not of the Holy Spirit. All Christians have a duty to warn against false beliefs and practices. No Christian can commit the unpardonable sin of blaspheming against the Spirit. It is a sin committed by reprobates. In the Gospels, we find blasphemers of the Spirit in people like the Pharisees (Matt 12:24–32, Mark 3:22–30, Luke 12:10). How was this sin committed? This sin was committed when the Pharisees in their wickedness attributed to the devil all the wonderful works of Jesus even after it has been convincingly proven that these works were from God. It was a sin against Truth. In speaking against charismatism, we are not speaking against truth but against error. How do we know it is error? We know it from the Holy Bible which is our sole authority for faith and practice. It seems more likely for charismatics to commit this sin of blasphemy if they wilfully reject the Scriptures, and persist in their error of attributing to the Holy Spirit the “signs and wonders” that are clearly not His.

Are charismatics saved?

Only the Lord knows! Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt 7:21–23).

Is the charismatic movement of God?

The charismatic movement is *not* of God. God is not the source of anything that is false. Apart from all its unbiblical doctrines and practices, one thing that rings loud and clear that charismatism cannot be of God is its ecumenism. The charismatic movement is the catalyst in bringing about a reunion of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches. Michael Harper in his book—*Three Sisters*—describes the charismatic movement as the “bridge-builder.” There are three sisters—Roma, Evangel, and

Charisma; Roma and Evangel are at odds with each other, and Charisma is trying to patch them up. Bishop Moses Tay of the Anglican Church in Singapore in support of charismatic and ecumenism has described the role of Charisma well, “In many instances the Charismatic Movement has brought a fresh and deeper unity between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and has broken down denominational, social, cultural and other barriers” (“The Charismatic Movement: A Way or The Way of Renewal,” *The Courier* [Jan ’88]: 7). Former Roman Catholic priest—Bartholomew F Brewer—has rightly observed, “the charismatic movement is being used worldwide by the leaders of the ecumenical movement for what are questionable purposes, to say the least. The two movements have been channeled into the same furrow. Why? Because many charismatics and ecumenical leaders claim that through the Holy Spirit the differences between denominations disappear and become meaningless. The present ecumenical movement toward a super one-world church is gaining tremendous momentum from the charismatic movement. And . . . the so-called inspired teachings of the charismatics are being cited as ‘revelations from God’ to support the super one-world church” (B F Brewer and Alfred W Furrell, *Pilgrimage from Rome* [Greenville SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1982], 111). Charisma may have good intentions, but what she is doing is clearly not from the Lord and contrary to His Word. God is against the unequal yoke (2 Cor 6:14–7:1).

Let us not repeat the sin of the Israelites who, instead of worshipping the living and true God, lusted after the gods of Egypt. The sixteenth century Protestant Reformation was a work of God. Just as Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt, the Church was delivered from the darkness of Rome. A return to Egypt or to Rome is as good as telling God that He had made a mistake in saving His people. It is a very grievous sin to accuse God of making a mistake. The Israelites did just that, and they suffered a terrible judgement for it (Num 13–14). Let us take heed to this biblical warning: “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily,

while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb 3:7–4:1). Let us, therefore, steer clear of the errors of charismaticism and ecumenism.

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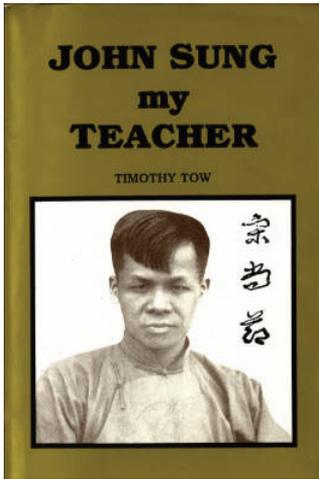
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John Sung My Teacher by Timothy Tow. Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1985. 288pp. ISBN 9971-991-13-6.

“The Lord be praised for the timely publication of this book in this Jubilee Year of Dr John Sung’s first coming to Singapore to revive the Christian Churches here and in Malaysia. To me, who personally shared all the spiritual blessings from beginning to end in all Dr John Sung’s four revival campaigns in Singapore from 1935 to 1939, this book, the manuscripts of which I finished reading with great delight and interest almost non-stop for 12 hours, has warmed up my heart and brought back the fondest of memories of those days when we sat through three long sermons a day without any sleepy nodding of the head. This reading has also led me to pray for

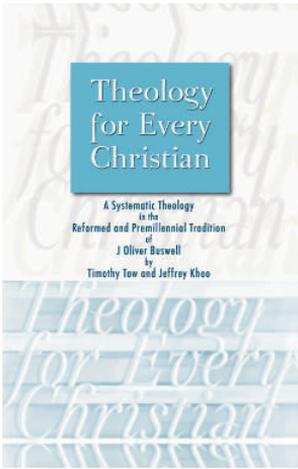
God’s continued keeping that I may remain true to the end to the whole-life consecration vow which I made at the same time as the author in September 1935.

“Now, after a lapse of 50 years, many who were set on fire for the Lord through Dr Sung’s ministry have gone Home to be with the Lord. Not a few others have by the grace of God been preserved to this day in His service, but even more have lost that revival fire or even have gone the way of Demas. The reading of this book not only will warm up the old timers like me, but should instill in the younger generations now and to come a revival zeal and fire so lacking in this age when the world is intruding more and more into the Christian Church both in doctrine and life and when hearts generally are growing colder and colder.

“The author, Rev Dr Timothy Tow who already has had eight books to his credit, has gathered and edited by translation, reproduction and original writing, such historic facts and valuable material as to make this new volume far excel other publications written before on Dr John Sung.

“Besides, the author’s personal experience of the rich spiritual blessings from the ministry in Singapore and Malaysia of Dr Sung, his very descriptive accounts, in beautiful English, of past events, his translation, at times humorous, of Chinese names and idiomatic expressions, and above all his very appropriate quotations from the Holy Scriptures to evaluate different situations in the life and ministry of Dr Sung make the reading and study of this book a most delightful, profitable and inspiring one. So much so, the reader once he or she begins will most probably, like me, be anxious to finish reading it. To every English-speaking Christian who wishes to know why there was such a great spiritual revival half a century ago in the Church of Jesus Christ in China and Southeast Asia, and wherein lie the secrets of Dr Sung’s mighty ministry, I heartily recommend this book for reading.”

Preface by Rev Quek Kiok Chiang, Moderator, Bible-Presbyterian Church of Singapore and Malaysia.



Theology for Every Christian Theology in the Reformed and Premillennial Tradition of J Oliver Buswell by Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo. Singapore: Far Eastern Bible College Press, 2007. 716pp. ISBN 978-981-05-9034-5.

There are many textbooks on Christian theology but J Oliver Buswell's *Systematic Theology* published in 1962 by Zondervan is, as far as we know, the only one that expresses a Reformed and yet Pro-Israel Premillennial system of theology.

The Bible Presbyterian Church as founded by Carl McIntire in 1937 is the ecclesiastical representative of the Reformed and Pro-Israel Premillennial system of theology. Timothy Tow, the father of the Bible-Presbyterian Church and movement in

Singapore and Southeast Asia, studied Buswell's *Theology* under Buswell himself at Faith Theological Seminary (1948–50), and Jeffrey Khoo in turn learned it from Tow at the Far Eastern Bible College (1985–9).

Besides Calvin and his *Institutes*, Buswell—our teacher and grand-teacher—has been our guide in the Reformed tradition, and we hereby acknowledge his contribution herein. But let it be known that the Holy Scriptures are the rock foundation of our studies, and the sole and supreme authority of our faith and practice.

Satan hates God's Word, and from the beginning has tried to undermine it. This he did by demoralising our first parents, "Yea, hath God said?," and they succumbed. The theologians before us have done well in declaring the Bible to be verbally and plenary inspired, infallible and inerrant. This has confirmed our faith in the Scriptures. But in order to spoil us again, Satan tries to erode the foundation of our faith by subtle new tactics. This he does by questioning the verbal and plenary preservation of the Holy Scriptures, casting doubt on the text of Holy Scripture through Westcott and Hort. He cunningly contrives rules for interpreting, yea, rather misinterpreting, Scripture which he hides under a big word "hermeneutics," and "historical criticism," and "textual criticism." Last but not least, he twists the meaning of Scripture, right and left, by a new method of translation called "dynamic equivalence." In order to unmask Satan's masquerading, this book is not only didactic but also polemic, in obedience to the apostolic injunction, "that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

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