

Tongue Tied, Part 2

Scripture: Acts 2:6; Acts 2:11

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The following is an excerpt from the preface of the Chinese edition of Charismatic Chaos. It explains the origins and early history of the charismatic movement. With the Strange Fire conference rapidly approaching, we believe it is appropriate to share this material with you. This is the second of two excerpts; part one is available [here](#). —GTU Staff

From the day he announced to the world that Agnes Ozman had written in Chinese until the end of his life, Charles Parham tirelessly sought to perpetuate the mythology he had invented. Despite an abundance of evidence to the contrary and without a shred of evidence to support his claims, he remained insistent that the gift of tongues would revolutionize Christian work overseas and accelerate the church's efforts to fulfill Christ's Great Commission. Several years after those original Pentecostal missionary teams had come home under clouds of failure and disillusionment, Parham was still painting a shining picture of success:

We have several missionaries in the field who have the gift of tongues, who not only speak the language and understand the natives, but can use the language intelligently; it has become a gift to them. . . . It is a known fact that scores of infidels have been converted through hearing people speak distinctly in other languages. [1][Charles F. Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel* (Baxter Springs, KS: Apostolic Faith Bible College, 1911), 68]

None of that was true, of course.

The movement Charles Parham helped start has grown to massive proportions today. Multiple millions claim to be able to speak in tongues. But charismatics and Pentecostals still cannot communicate with people from different language groups (or even with one another) unless they have *learned* whatever language they wish to use. More than a century after Parham claimed his students were speaking Chinese, *not one documentable case of the Pentecostal gift of tongues has ever occurred*. Charismatic tongues have been repeatedly recorded and analyzed by linguists, and they have none of the characteristics of language. Modern Charismatic tongues are indiscriminate syllables and sounds spoken or sung in rapid succession, conveying no discernable meaning at all.

That is not the biblical gift of tongues. At Pentecost, people heard the apostolic gathering speak in recognizable languages (Acts 2:6, 11). The tongues described in the New Testament were *always* capable of translation (Acts 10:46; 19:6). Indeed, the meaning of any message delivered in tongues was a vital aspect of the gift itself. No one was even supposed to speak in tongues without an interpreter (1 Corinthians 14:27).

With all the controversy surrounding Charles Parham, in the wake of so much scandal and so many unfulfilled promises, especially once the total failure of his missionary strategy was evident, it may seem amazing that the Pentecostal movement managed to stay alive at all, much less gain the kind of following we see today. But by the time Parham had been arrested on sodomy charges in Texas,

his teachings were spreading like leaven.

One of Parham's early disciples was William J. Seymour, an African-American holiness preacher who had sat under Parham's instruction in Houston, Texas. In 1906, Seymour was invited to lead a series of meetings in California, and while preaching in a ramshackle building in Azusa Street on the edge of downtown Los Angeles, he began to teach some of the distinctive doctrines he had heard from Parham. He taught, for example, that the only biblical evidence of Spirit baptism is the gift of speaking in tongues. Within weeks, dozens of people at Azusa Street were manifesting *glossolalia*, and the fame of the Pentecostal movement spread from there. Pentecostalism had at last gained a significant foothold, and from Azusa Street it ultimately expanded across America.

Going back to the apostolic era, the church has of course *always* been troubled by false teachers claiming supernatural gifts who are driven by ungodly passions—"people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain" (1 Timothy 6:5 ESV). (That is a picture-perfect description of people who have sold out to the Word-Faith heresy.)

But at its heart, the charismatic movement is uniquely American in character. It had its genesis in the American heartland, and from its very inception it was the fruit of a unique style of religious fanaticism that thrived on the American frontier. With an abundance of untrained, unaccountable, and often self-appointed prophets and itinerant preachers roaming freely, superstitions and aberrant doctrines spread virtually unchecked.

The charismatic movement was exported from America to the rest of the world by an aggressive public-relations campaign, employing several media networks that are devoted mainly to raising money. Large amounts of whatever funds are raised are spent to enable lavish lifestyles for charismatic televangelists. The culture of charismatic religion seems to breed rank charlatans who deliberately flaunt immoderate lifestyles and expensive appetites in order to entice people with the false promise that if they will donate more money than they can afford, God will be obliged to make them rich, too.

The prosperity of the charismatic televangelist fraternity is illusory. So are the miracles they pretend to perform and whatever degree of holiness they want their viewers to think they have attained. Indeed, superficiality and phoniness have been the besetting sins of the Pentecostal and charismatic movement since its inception.

Why is that? Well, as we have noted already, it is a simple matter of fact that modern charismatic tongues are nothing like the Pentecostal gift of tongues described in Acts 2. Charismatic doctrine therefore requires its followers to suspend biblical discernment and embrace a variety of "spiritual gifts" that have no basis in biblical teaching. That makes the movement a perfect hunting ground for frauds, false teachers, and charlatans. Indeed, Pentecostal-charismatic history is littered with an extraordinarily high percentage of leaders and celebrities who have shown themselves to be doctrinally corrupt and morally decadent.

In short, charismatic teaching fosters willful gullibility while subtly but systematically undermining the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. That is a recipe for spiritual and doctrinal disaster as I've documented in the chapters that follow.

The first edition of this book was a relatively thin volume titled *The Charismatics*, published in 1978. A decade or so later, the so-called “Third Wave” was making headlines. Charismatics and evangelicals alike were intrigued with signs and wonders, extrabiblical prophecies, and strange manifestations such as “holy laughter.” At that time I wrote several additional chapters, more than doubling the size of the book. The expanded work was retitled *Charismatic Chaos* and released in 1992. It has now been more than twenty years since that second edition was published. The book has never gone out of print and remains in great demand, even though some of the trends it deals with were much more popular in the early 1990s than they are today.

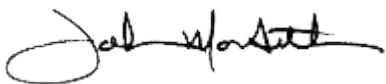
People sometimes ask whether I have changed my stance since then. The answer—emphatically—is *no*. Scripture, of course, hasn’t changed, and my understanding of what the Bible teaches on the charismatic issue hasn’t changed materially, either. My commitment to the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word hasn’t changed. If anything, my convictions are clearer and more settled than when I first began addressing this issue in the 1970s.

I’m also frequently asked whether I think the charismatic movement has changed for the better as more people in the evangelical mainstream have either embraced charismatic doctrines or made an uneasy truce with our charismatic friends. Few leading evangelicals today seem to have the will or the interest to wade into controversy over the charismatic question these days.

I’m convinced that is a serious mistake, and the drift toward acceptance of charismatic beliefs and practices is a sign of decline and a harbinger of apostasy in the evangelical movement.

Some of the people critiqued in this book (including John Wimber, Kenneth Hagin, and Oral Roberts) are no longer living. But the movements and the doctrines they taught are alive and well and still causing chaos. The leaven of their influence is still spreading. Christians confronted with their teachings are easily confused by them, and those seeking a critical and biblical analysis of popular charismatic claims will find that such resources are scarce.

So I’m very grateful that this new edition of *Charismatic Chaos* is being published in Chinese. My prayer is that it will provoke discussion, encourage discernment, and equip more believers worldwide to resist the tsunami of fraud and confusion that seems to follow the charismatic movement wherever its tentacles have reached.



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