

BIBLE DOCTRINES

A Pentecostal Perspective

*William W. Menzies
and
Stanley M. Horton*

Stanley M. Horton, Th.D.

General Editor


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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Initial Physical Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost

An important question is how one may know when one has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. To be sure, there should be many evidences along the roadway of life to indicate a life empowered by the Holy Spirit. However, the real question is not the long-range result of the baptism in the Spirit, but the immediate indication that one may point to as witness of the experience itself. Has God provided such an indicator? If one concludes that the Book of Acts is not only a descriptive history, but also has a theological purpose, and that the experience of the Apostolic Church, which it records, is indeed normative¹ for the Church of all ages, then one can answer the question with a resounding yes.

SIGNS OF THE OUTPOURING

On the Day of Pentecost two signs preceded the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They heard "a sound like the blowing of a violent wind" and they "saw what seemed to

¹For a good discussion of this, see Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984).

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be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (Acts 2:2–3). These particular signs were not repeated on later occasions when people were baptized in the Spirit. One sign, however, was actually a part of the Pentecostal baptism. All who were filled with the Holy Spirit "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). These "tongues" were languages they had never learned, given apart from the individual's understanding. Some present who understood the languages recognized that they were "declaring the wonders [the mighty, magnificent sublime deeds] of God" (Acts 2:11). This remarkable sign was the most spectacular phenomenon evident on the Day of Pentecost. But it was repeated again at various times, two of which are recorded in the Book of Acts (10:46; 19:6).

Special interest attaches to the episode at the house of a Roman centurion, Cornelius. There, because of the ingrained prejudice of the Jews against the Gentiles, a convincing evidence was needed. Only one evidence was given to show that these Gentiles had received "the gift of the Holy Spirit." The astonished Jewish believers "heard them speaking in tongues and praising God" (Acts 10:46), exactly as the 120 had done on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4,11). Later when Peter was criticized for going to the house of a Gentile and eating with them, having table fellowship, Peter explained that "the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning [that is, as on the Day of Pentecost]. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with [in] water, but you will be baptized with [in] the Holy Spirit.' So if God gave them the same gift [Gk. *tên isēn dorean*, meaning "the identical gift"] as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:15–17). The next verse shows that apostles and the other Jewish believers accepted the sign of speaking in tongues as the convincing evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'" Surely in a day when many think, hope, believe, and then wonder whether

they have the baptism in the Spirit, a convincing evidence is still needed.

Some years later, at Ephesus, the Gentiles there likewise received the Pentecostal experience and "they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (Acts 19:6). This again shows they had received the full experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Greek normally implies also that they continued to speak in tongues and prophesy. "Speaking in tongues . . . continues to bring enrichment to the individual believer in personal devotions, and to the congregation when accompanied by the interpretation of tongues."²

With the death of Stephen, persecution began, scattering the believers (except the apostles) and spreading the flame of the gospel in many directions (Acts 8:1). Representative of the gospel's advance is Philip's preaching at Samaria to people who had been under the influence of Simon the sorcerer. They believed and were baptized in water, but the Holy Spirit did not come upon any of them. Perhaps because they now realized they had been wrong about Simon the sorcerer, as well as about many of their Samaritan doctrines, they found it hard to take the next step of faith and receive the baptism in the Spirit.³ But when Peter and John came, prayed for them, and placed their hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17). At that point Simon the sorcerer fell back into his old ways and offered money for the authority to place his hands on people so that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Obviously, there was something supernaturally evident in the receiving of the Spirit. Simon had already seen Philip's miracles. Prophecy would have been in their own language and not obviously supernatural. Speaking in tongues must have been the evidence that Simon recognized. Luke, however, at this point focuses attention on Simon's wrong attitude and thus does not mention the tongues.

There is one other episode in the Book of Acts which has at least the implication of tongues. When Paul was

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²*Where We Stand* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1990), 147.

³Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 154.

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arrested by Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was blinded by the glory, led into Damascus to the house of Judas on Straight Street, and given a vision that a man named Ananias would come and place his hands on him to restore his sight. That good disciple then came and told Paul that the Lord had sent him so Paul might see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). Tongues is not mentioned specifically on that occasion, but later Paul testified: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (1 Cor. 14:18). From what happened on the other occasions where people were baptized in the Spirit, we can infer that Paul's initial experience of speaking in tongues was on that occasion when Ananias came to him, as mentioned in the Book of Acts.

If all the references to Pentecostal enduement in the Book of Acts are put together, the overwhelming evidence is that tongues was the initial, physical sign or evidence of receiving the experience. Since we do acknowledge the historical description in Acts as having a *theological purpose*⁴ and holding a pattern for the Church today, there is strong ground for our conviction that those who would be filled with the Spirit should expect to have the witness of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit enables them.⁵

FUNCTIONS OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES

It may be asked if speaking in tongues is only for the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The answer is

⁴Some writers claim that doctrine must be based on declarative statements in the Epistles, not on the history in the Book of Acts. However, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching [doctrine, KJV]" (2 Tim. 3:16). Furthermore, "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us" (Rom. 15:4). When the Bible wants to develop the doctrine of justification by faith in Romans 4, it goes back to a historical passage in Genesis and talks about Abraham. When it wants to show how grace comes in, it goes back to a historical passage and talks about David.

⁵"The word translated 'tongues' in Acts is the same word used in 1 Cor. and refers to actual languages of men or angels (1 Cor. 13:1). There is no justification for interpreting the word as strange or ecstatic sounds. In New Testament times, as in our own, there were people who heard and understood the speaking with tongues" (*Where We Stand*, 147).

no, the phenomenon of tongues has at least two other important functions.⁶ Personal tongues, that is, the gift of utterance in unknown languages in private devotions, has the very worthwhile value of edifying the one engaged in prayer. To pray in an unknown tongue is to engage in a lofty form of worship (1 Cor. 14:4). Praying in tongues is a useful practice; it should be cultivated in the believer's daily life, for by it one is built up in faith and in spiritual life. Paul seems to take for granted in his epistles that believers normally went on to the baptism in the Holy Spirit and that tongues was a common part of their daily experience. He himself spoke in tongues more than the Corinthian believers, but in private (1 Cor. 14:18-19).

There is another use for tongues. Although the same in essence, the gift of tongues employed in public services is for a distinctly different purpose. The tongues mentioned in Acts are evidential and private, the tongues mentioned in the Epistles are public and intended for general edification. Private tongues need not be interpreted since the individual is edified even if his understanding is not fruitful. However, the disciplines regarding the employment of tongues in public gatherings emphasize the need for interpretation of the tongues so that the whole gathering may be blessed (1 Cor. 14:2-20).

QUESTIONS ON SPEAKING IN TONGUES

There are a number of questions that have arisen concerning speaking in tongues. Some of them are worth considering here:⁷

1. Can doctrine be based on less than declarative statements?

⁶A person may receive tongues as the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and only later receive the gift of tongues which may be manifested in personal devotions or in public services. See Smith Wigglesworth, *Ever Increasing Faith*, rev. ed. (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 114; Frank M. Boyd, *The Spirit Works Today* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1970), 83-86.

⁷The following material is adapted from *Where We Stand*, 150-154.

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Although doctrine should not be based on isolated fragments of Scripture, it can be based on substantial, implied truth. The doctrine of the Trinity is based not on a declarative statement, but on a comparison of Scripture passages relating to the Godhead. Like the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of tongues as evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is based on substantial portions of Scripture relating to this subject.

2. Is speaking in tongues a phenomenon that belonged only to the apostolic period?

There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that speaking with tongues would be in effect only during the apostolic period or until the New Testament canon had been completed. When Paul made the statement that tongues would cease (1 Cor. 13:8), he also indicated when this would happen: He wrote, "When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears" (1 Cor. 13:10).⁸ He also indicated that at the time tongues shall cease, knowledge will pass away and prophecies will cease (1 Cor. 13:8). The context of Paul's statement makes it clear that the time when tongues shall cease is future, and other things such as knowledge and prophecy will change in significance at the same time. Until that time the words of Jesus apply, "These signs will accompany those who believe: . . . they will speak in new tongues" (Mark 16:17).⁹

3. When Paul wrote, "Do all speak in tongues?" (1 Cor. 12:30), was it not a rhetorical question which required a negative response?

To understand Paul's question it is necessary to recognize the various functions of speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues serves as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 10:46; 11:15). Speaking or praying in tongues in private is for personal edification (1 Cor. 14:2,4). And speaking in tongues in the congregation—accompanied by

⁸"Perfection" here must refer to the time of the return of Christ. Compare 1 John 3:2.

⁹See Donald F. Stamps, ed., *Full Life Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1990), 106, 232.

interpretation of tongues—is for the edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:5).

There is no contradiction between Paul's desire that all speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5) and the rhetorical question asking whether all speak in tongues. All believers at the time of their baptism in the Spirit begin speaking in tongues and may continue on in personal prayer for personal edification. All, however, are not the agents through which the Holy Spirit manifests himself through tongues and interpretation in the congregation. In the congregation the Holy Spirit distributes the manifestations as He determines (1 Cor. 12:11). Rather than contradiction in these two statements of Paul, there is complementary truth.

4. Why were there periods in church history when the phenomenon seemed to be absent?

The possibility exists that any biblical doctrine can suffer from neglect. In fact, great spiritual renewals have often been the revival of doctrine. For example, the doctrine of justification by faith was almost completely lost until the time of the Reformation, when Martin Luther and others reemphasized the biblical truth. The doctrine of sanctification had suffered neglect until the time of the Wesleyan revival, when it was again brought to the attention of the Church. Although the truth of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues appeared in a number of revivals throughout church history, it did not have the emphasis it has received in the present revival.¹⁰

5. Is there a danger that people will seek for tongues rather than the actual baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Unfortunately this is a possibility, but the abuse of a doctrine does not invalidate the doctrine. Abuse and counterfeits, rather than disproving a doctrine, help to establish the genuine.¹¹

¹⁰R. P. Spittler, "Glossalalia," in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Regency Reference Library, S. M. Burgess and G. B. McGee eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 339–340.

¹¹See *Full Life Study Bible*, 232, 254. This is a good discussion dealing with false speaking in tongues and testing for genuine baptism in the Spirit.

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6. If people speak in tongues, will there not be temptation to spiritual pride?

When people truly understand the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it will result in humility instead of pride. Believers are baptized in the Spirit not because of personal worthiness, but to empower them for humble service and a more meaningful life.

7. What about truly born-again people who have accomplished great things for the Lord but do not speak in tongues?

There can be no question that dedicated believers who do not speak in tongues are indwelt by the Spirit and have accomplished great things for God. In considering the question, however, every student of God's Word must determine whether he will base doctrine on God's Word or on experiences of even the most devout believers. Because the Bible indicates that all may speak in tongues in personal devotions if not in the congregation, every believer must determine whether to accept or reject this provision of God's grace. Scripture makes it clear that believers must recognize their personal accountability to God and not evaluate Christian experience on the basis of human comparison. Paul wrote: "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12).

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. One Bible version refers to tongues as "strange sounds." Why is that translation inadequate?

2. What is the evidence that speaking in other tongues is the initial physical, or outward, evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

3. Why is it probable that those who were baptized in the Holy Spirit at Samaria spoke in other tongues?

4. Why can we infer that the apostle Paul spoke in other tongues when He was baptized in the Holy Spirit?

5. What is the value of continuing to speak in tongues as the Spirit enables us?

6. What are some of the reasons we should expect the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues to be the normal experience of believers today?

7. What information did you find helpful in the section "Questions on Speaking in Tongues"?

8. What other questions about the evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit have you heard? How would you answer them?

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