



TONGUES AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Introduction

In my book “*A Fresh Look at Pentecost in Light of Present-Day Confusion*” I relate my personal journey in seeking the “power of Pentecost.” As a new believer I wrestled much with the desire to be all I could be in and for Christ. I was exposed, and somewhat confused by the varied denominational teachings regarding the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In my early ministry, I had not yet been exposed to folks who wave handkerchiefs, shout and run the aisle. Providentially, however, it was my lot to minister extensively among some fine people in the Wesleyan Methodist Holiness Church. They believed in the “Baptism of the Holy Ghost” subsequent to salvation, resulting in the eradication or removal of the old sin nature. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called this teaching “Christian perfection” or “entire sanctification.” Thus the term Holiness was a definite experience making one “sinless.” As I understand it, the saint who blatantly sinned after that baptism would “lose” his salvation. That’s a serious dilemma! I observed first hand that such teaching caused folks to redefine *sin* as “mistakes, faults, and infirmities, etc.” These sincere people are laboring under legal bondage resulting from an erroneous understanding of the finished cross-work of Christ.

Sanctification and the Cross

“Calvary covers it all” says the hymn. At conversion, the sinner is declared righteous or justified by faith; i.e. the very righteousness of Christ is placed on the believer’s account by God! (cf. Rom.5:1) In other words, when God looks on a true believer, He sees only the righteousness of His Son! We have a right standing before God; the penalty of sin has been forever paid in full!

The effects of our sin nature, however, still reside in our flesh or self-life. Would it not follow that the cross also provides deliverance from the power of sin? If so, does this require a “second baptism” or is the cross-work sufficient? Thankfully, that power over sin was also made available as a result of Calvary.

In justification, God *imputes* His righteousness to the believer; and in sanctification, He *imparts* His righteousness; i.e. the ability and freedom to “do right.” These two “acts” happen simultaneously in salvation resulting from the cross and the Holy Spirit. (cf. 1Cor.1:30; 6:11; Rom. 6:3, 4); while beginning at the same time as justification, sanctification is an ongoing process to empower and conform us to Christ’s image.

Thus I am *being saved* in the present by Christ’s death, resurrection, and the power of Pentecost. I am no longer under the law (Mosaic) but neither am I *lawless*; rather I’m under a “new law.” Rom. 8:2 says, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

Notice the doubled barreled victory in this text; i.e. Christ's *life over death*, and the *Spirit over sin!* The latter reality is a result of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to indwell and fill (up) believers. PTL!

“One Baptism”

Thus the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a subsequent act or “second blessing” after salvation. According to Eph. 4:5, there is only “one baptism” of the Spirit, described in 1 Cor. 12:13,

“For by one Spirit are we *all baptized* [placed] into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

Without this baptism there's no salvation or regeneration at all! As previously mentioned, God's justifying and sanctifying grace *begin at the same time.*

While all Pentecostals hold to a subsequent spiritual baptism after initial salvation, the results or evidence may differ. Unlike the Holiness teaching of resultant perfection or sinlessness, main-line Pentecostals/Charismatics have a different take. While not denying holiness, they rightly reject the possibility of attaining “sinless perfection” this side of Heaven. They do, however, insist on a “second” Spirit baptism for “power for service.” They hold that this must be evidenced by *speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives them utterance.*

No one seems to define the “other tongues.” This teaching is taken from Acts 2:4ff where the “tongues” (*glossalals*) mentioned were known languages (not gibberish, etc.). Only

Jews, *no* gentiles, were gathered from foreign countries to attend the Jewish “Feast of Weeks” (Pentecost).

Jewish believers, including the disciples, now received the “promised” indwelling Holy Ghost. (cf. Lk. 24:49; Jno.14:17) They proceeded to miraculously communicate Christ’s Gospel in the languages of those who gathered there. Three thousand were saved, and returned home to proclaim the Gospel with a new life and “anointed” tongue.

The Spirit’s “Overflow” to Gentiles

It should be noted here that after the Spirit’s initial out-pouring in Jerusalem, there were 3 other “mini-Pentecosts” recorded. In Acts 8, the Samaritans “received the Holy Ghost;” Samaria was the center of Palestine, but Pharisees refused to enter this “cursed” city of “half-Jews.” It was there, however, that Jesus met the woman at Jacob’s well, assuring her of the coming Spirit.

Acts 10 records the conversion of Cornelius the Roman centurion. Providentially, this God-fearing gentile was stationed in Caesarea, a thriving seaport and the Roman military headquarters in Israel. Miraculously Peter is led to Cornelius’ household; and during his message the Holy Spirit “falls,” saving Cornelius and friends! They speak in languages, authenticating in Peter’s mind the validity of their conversion. This language gift also served to reach an international audience spread across the Roman Empire. Is it possible that some of

Cornelius' "converts" guarded Paul while imprisoned in Rome?
What a thought!

Likewise, the gentiles in Ephesus also experienced the Pentecostal "infilling" in Acts 19. They only knew of John's baptism, and now were baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ. The spoken languages again would testify that pagan gentiles could also experience the saving work of Pentecost. This event certainly helped to establish Paul's ministry in that great city.

Fallacy of the "Second Baptism"

Since Pentecost must follow Christ's finished cross-work, the Holy Spirit's baptism must make a "full" gospel accessible; i.e. a complete salvation, equipping the believer for godliness, service, and victory over sin. (cf. John 7:38, 39; Acts 1:8) To insist that a genuine Christian "seek" another Spirit baptism is erroneous, redundant and confusing.

Thankfully, there has been a significant movement among some Pentecostals to question the Holiness position of a "second" baptism for sanctification. These critics rather focus on "Christ and Him crucified;" i.e. as previously discussed, both justification and sanctification begin *at the cross*. No "second blessing" needed!

A Challenging Contradiction

If the Holiness folks are wrong about the second baptism, then mainline Pentecostals also have a problem. If the believer receives all of the Holy Spirit at conversion, what more does he need? Why another baptism?

Significantly, I have heard Pentecostal leaders admit that the “baptism with tongues” does not produce power over sin. They talk about “Spirit-filled, tongues speaking” men who are yet living defeated, powerless lives. What a contradiction! Those who “walk in the Spirit” are not dominated by sin. (cf. Rom. 6:14; Gal. 5:16) By their admission, this so-called “baptism” is short-lived; for there is no “one-time” act of the Spirit that insures unlimited fullness or power. That’s a hard pill to swallow, seeing that historically the “tongues baptism” has been promoted by some as the utopia of Christian experience.

Exploring the “Tongues Distinctive”

Since all we need for “life and godliness” is found at the Cross, the baptism with tongues would be superfluous; but it’s “draw” has much to do with experiencing an “emotional high.” I’ve found out that most folks would rather *feel* good than *be* good! “Speaking in tongues” has been a Pentecostal “trade mark” or pet doctrine for many decades. Sadly it has been used by the enemy to divide believers into two categories; the “haves” and the “have nots;” i.e. those who really have Holy Ghost power and those who don’t.

More recently I have been encouraged by some sincere Pentecostal brethren who have acknowledged and confessed their “elitist, self-righteous” attitude regarding this issue. They’ve come to realize they have erred in thinking that experiencing the second baptism experience places them in an exclusive spiritual class. Interestingly, these same folks have called for Holiness leaders to repent of their false teaching regarding the “second blessing;” but would not repentance also apply to those holding an unbiblical “tongues baptism”?

Scriptural Remedy

It’s clear that every believer should be Spirit-filled (Eph. 5:18). The issue is how does it happen and what is the evidence. I believe that every genuine, born-again, child of God is filled (up) with the Spirit at conversion; that’s why there’s usually an obvious exuberance in a new believer. In time, however, that joy, etc. is challenged by trials and temptations. The need for a fresh appropriation or filling of the Spirit becomes evident. Through the Spirit’s indwelling the believer has full provision for “life and godliness;” yes, including power for service.

To relegate the Spirit’s power to one “second” baptism experience is ludicrous. The Spirit’s fullness is not a one-time, feel-good experience; but an ongoing flow emanating from Christ’s cross-work and His resurrection. Remember, we don’t need to be seeking victory in Christ; for that victory was *fully* accomplished at Calvary; therefore, we are positioned on the right side of the Cross, moving *from* the victory already won!

“Be filled with the Spirit” in Eph. 5:18 literally reads “be being full [filled up] with the Spirit.” The emphasis here is on our internal, ongoing condition or walk in God’s fullness; however, we experience sinful “leaks” at times and thus need another “fill up.” Particularly when ministering the Word, etc. there’s a definite need to pray for a fresh touch or filling of the Holy Spirit. But to put one’s “faith” and dependence in a past, “once for all” second baptism is not only erroneous, but futile.

When proclaiming the Word, etc. I make use of the following prayer; “I take the promised Holy Ghost; the blessed Power of Pentecost to fill me to the uttermost; I take; thank God, He undertakes!” Amen!

True Evidence

Unfortunately too few Christians are filled with the Spirit. Most are ill taught and ignorant of the indwelling Holy Spirit and His provision. Others, I believe, have been “turned off” or intimidated by the excesses found too often in “charismania.” For whatever reason the Spirit’s ministry has been neglected and/or ignored, resulting in spiritual deadness. Indeed, we are candidates for true Biblical reformation and revival!

Jesus said that a “good tree” is known by its “fruit;” He goes on to say, “by their fruits ye shall know them.” The genuine evidence of being Spirit filled is not tongues or gifts, etc. but rather the fruit of the Spirit.(Gal. 5:22, 23) This may explain why Paul “sandwiched” the “love” (fruit) chapter (1 Cor. 13) between the “gifts” chapters 12 and 14. I conclude that the

“gifts” come out of the “fruit,” not the other way around; without the fruit the gifts are ineffective at best.

In fact, the Spirit’s fruit, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance [self-control]” (Gal. 5:22, 23), depicts the virtues of our Savior Himself. These character traits are now manifested in and through the believer’s daily walk. In other words, the Spirit’s work is ultimately to make us like Jesus! To be Christ-like is far more important than just being a “good” church member!

Closing Thoughts

I trust that my position on “tongues” is not construed as a denial of the Holy Spirit’s gifts. Pentecost was a unique event, supernaturally communicating the Gospel of the kingdom to the Jewish world; however, that in no way diminishes or limits the Spirit’s operation today; for He is God!

I know of a Spirit-filled missionary who went to Brazil, and within one month was preaching fluently in Portuguese! The Spirit of God enabled him to speak in their native language. I’ve wondered for years that if “tongues” is valid for today, why would Pentecostal missionaries need to attend language school? – Just asking.

Another missionary friend in Congo years ago heard an African pastor preach in a foreign dialect. He told me that although he had never heard that language, he was able to clearly understand the message! Now that’s miraculous! Let’s not limit the Spirit’s

work; likewise, let us never misinterpret the Word of God to satisfy our fleshly pride or defend a false denominational bias.

We sing, “O, for a thousand tongues to sing, our Great Redeemer’s praise;” and then fail to use the one tongue we have! Ecstatic expressions of godly praise may be appropriate in one’s prayer closet; but in public we need an “anointed,” intelligible tongue, under the Spirit’s control. We must always make the message plain!

Need for Balance

One final observation is the lack of balance in our churches. Consider the beautiful and awesome balance of the Trinity. Jesus came to glorify the Father, while the Holy Spirit came to glorify Jesus, the Son. (Jno. 16:14) To focus solely on the Father or the Spirit is off-balanced and leads to heresy. Thus a Spirit-filled believer will not focus on the Spirit but will always seek to magnify the Lord Jesus Christ! This means we can talk about Jesus all day long and only be drawn closer to God. PTL!

Jesus taught the woman at the well a vital lesson about the balance of worship. He said, “God is a Spirit and they that worship him must *worship him in spirit and in truth.*” (Jno.4:24, italics mine) This balance of “spirit and truth” is difficult to find these days. We see those who have much truth, but little spirit; then others seem to have much spirit, but little truth. It takes two wings to fly, even in our spiritual life. If a saint has truth without spirit, he’ll *dry up*. If he has spirit without truth, he’ll *blow up*. But if he has truth and spirit, he will *grow up*!

Scripture definitely connects the “one baptism” to the “one body.” (Eph. 4:5,6) In that light, Jesus prayed, “...Holy Father, *keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*” (John 17:11, italics mine)

While the Anti-Christ, ecumenical church emerges, the church of the Living God needs a heavenly “invasion” of Spiritual understanding, power, and unity! Hear David’s heart in Psalm 133;

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity...*for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*” Maranatha!

About the Author

Pastor, teacher, author, mentor, and presently a Bible instructor at the Rescue Mission of Mahoning Valley in Youngstown, Ohio. Bill Finnigan has been engaged in active ministry for almost sixty years.

A native of Newark, New Jersey, Bill received a call to ministry while in college. The ensuing years were spent in intensive study to learn and sharpen ministry skills. Attending several universities, he holds a number of degrees, including the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry. For over twenty seven years, Bill has held pulpits in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, reaching people with God's life-changing Word.

His outreach has also included radio, prison, and Bible conference ministries. He has served as a college professor, and director of a Biblical counseling center. He has authored other publications, including his latest book, *A Fresh Look at Pentecost in Light of Present Day Confusion*. This book serves to help the church better understand what really happened on the Day of Pentecost, and how the Church began in an applicable way that will clear up the confusion that is so pervasive in the church today.

Other publications include: *Healing for the Mind*, which offers comfort and remedy for mental turmoil; *Forgiven to Forgive*, which serves as an antidote to resentment and bitterness; *Living Skillfully*, a commentary on the book of Proverbs; and *Facing Depression*, examining its cause and cure.

More recently, Bill's time has been devoted to writing, preaching, and the on-going Biblical instruction at the rescue mission in Youngstown, OH. As the Lord provides opportunities, he continues to be busily engaged in the Lord's Vineyard, considering himself "refired," rather than retired.

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