

# SPEAKING IN TONGUES AT SPIRIT BAPTISM



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## INTRODUCTION

Socrates once remarked that it is madness to speak definitely on matters of opinion. He was right. Therefore, I want to avoid sounding overly confident in this little pamphlet. Over the years, the Lord Jesus has revealed truths to me concerning his New Testament, but this is not one of them. The best that I can say is something like Paul said to the Corinthian saints when he gave his judgment concerning a marital issue: on this matter, “I think I have the Spirit.”

Reason is not revelation, but it is a tool by which we can determine what is true if our reasoning is led by the holy Spirit. With humble confidence that the Lord will so lead us now, let us reason together about the issue of speaking in tongues at Spirit baptism. And with mercy from God, this reasoning together will lead us to the harmony that Jesus earnestly prayed his followers would enjoy.

### “INITIAL EVIDENCE”

There are many services which may be rendered to the household of faith by the phenomenon of the Spirit of God speaking through man. Praying in the Spirit (Rom. 8:23-27; 1Cor. 14:13-15; Jude 20) and the gift of diverse tongues (1Cor. 12:10) are examples of such services, but our focus will be the experience of speaking in tongues as it relates to Spirit baptism.

Until recently, Pentecostal denominations unshakably held that speaking in tongues is the “initial evidence” of receiving the baptism of the holy Ghost. Historically, that doctrinal position is what has set Pentecostals apart from other Christian sects, but there seems to be some movement now away from that position by some of the Pentecostal faith. Many who are called “Charismatics” (the more modern version of Pentecostals), disagree with the old-time Pentecostal position, saying that while speaking in tongues may occur when one is baptized, it need not occur in every case in order for the baptism to be genuine.

### Using the Book of Acts

Pentecostals often fail in their attempt to persuade others of their point of view concerning speaking in tongues at Spirit baptism because they rely too heavily on the baptismal experiences recorded in the book of Acts. Actually, using personal experiences from the book of Acts alone, it is impossible to determine whether every person baptized with the holy Ghost speaks in tongues or not. It just doesn't say. In some accounts (Acts 2, 10, 19) speaking in tongues is mentioned, while in others (Acts 8, 9, 16) it is not. Pointing to these dissimilar accounts, opponents of the traditional Pentecostal doctrine had justifiable criticism of it.

Of course, the book of Acts contains material relevant to this issue, but we must go beyond the limited descriptions of personal experiences found in the book of Acts to mine the gold from its pages. This is a doctrinal issue as fundamentally important to the faith as can be, especially if Pentecostals are right. We must approach the matter from a teaching perspective, drawing from the Master's words and the teachings of the apostles and prophets.

I am persuaded by convincing evidence from these holy men of God that the traditional Pentecostal stance is the true one. I do not think that the Pentecostals' position on this subject lays out a path that God must follow. Rather, I think it recognizes the path that God laid out and which we must follow.

## THE STATE OF MAN

There are basic truths concerning mankind that must be realized in order for us to see the wisdom of God in ordaining speaking in tongues to be the “initial evidence” of Spirit baptism. An important biblical fact concerning the human condition is that all of mankind is, by nature, estranged from the Creator and lives in spiritual “darkness”. The ancient prophet Jeremiah described the condition of the human heart this way:

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* (Jer. 17:9)

We all are, or were before Jesus rescued us, a part of this world. There is not a single person excluded from this observation made by the apostle John:

*“The whole world lies in wickedness.”* (1Jn. 5:19b)

Most people do not know that this is true. They do not understand that their lives *need* changing, that there is a holy life for them to live that is different from, and contrary to, the way they are living. This is difficult for man to believe because he can so easily deceive himself. Being in the darkness of ignorance and pride, he can convince himself that he is right – and then refuse to look at any contradictory evidence. When a man does not know that his own heart is “deceitful” and “desperately wicked,” he has the tendency to trust himself.

The scriptures are replete with examples of persons who were convinced they were holy, when they were evil. Jesus rebuked certain ministers of his time with these words: *“Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts”* (Lk. 16:15a). And he warned his followers of a time coming when *“they will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he is doing God service”* (Jn. 16:2).

This, then, is the state of man. He does not know truth, does not understand eternal life, cannot discern between good and evil nor appreciate the doctrines and deeds of the Spirit. And, most significantly, he does not know that he does not know! He is bound by his own darkened intellect, self-esteem, lust, and a wily, perverse heart. His spirit is restless, his work is temporal, his institutions vain, and his desires animalistic.

*“Truly, every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. Surely every man walks in a vain show.”* (Ps. 39:5b-6a)

## Confession of Faith

If man, by nature, is in this tragic state, then how can his “confession of faith” ever be trusted? There are certainly a multitude of deluded souls who consider themselves to be servants of God, yet are not (e.g. 2Cor. 11:13-15; 2Pet. 2; 1Jn. 2:18-19; 4:1-5; Rev. 2:9; 3:9). Paul wrote of men who considered themselves to be something in the kingdom of God that they were not (pastor, prophet, or whatever), and described them as spreading such deception to others (2Tim. 3:13). Whenever men, therefore, make confessions of faith, it basically means nothing, or nothing more than that they are making that claim. Nothing man says makes anything true, whether they are speaking about themselves or God. Whether faith actually abides within a heart is not proved by what any man says. Whatever anyone declares about himself, others, or God, is

only as dependable as his own spiritual condition. And man's natural spiritual condition is depraved. "*In me,*" wrote Paul, "*that is, in my flesh dwells no good thing,*" but it was not only himself who was in this condition. Paul said that the spirit in man is so darkened that holy things seem foolish to him:

*"A worldly man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is unable to comprehend them because they are spiritually discerned."* (1Cor. 2:14)

Jesus understood man's deplorable natural state as no one else did. When the multitudes saw the miracles he performed at Jerusalem, they enthusiastically declared that they believed in him. But Jesus refused to acknowledge their confession of faith because "*he knew what was in man*" (Jn. 2:25). Before their conversion, Jesus' own disciples heard him belittle even their confessions of faith (Jn. 6:68-70; 16:29-32). On one occasion, the Lord bluntly stated to his listeners, "*I accept no human testimony*" (Jn. 5:34), and there is no scriptural indication that Jesus' attitude toward man's testimony has ever changed.

Scriptures such as these reveal the utter worthlessness of man's estimation of his own standing with God. As such, it is obvious that man needs concrete, trustworthy evidence directly from God that will let him know that his confession of sin and repentance have been accepted and that he is forgiven. This would be a chief reason for God choosing tongues (or "stammering lips") as the sign of Spirit baptism. Speaking in tongues at Spirit baptism is the voice of God, not man, declaring a person to be God's child. It is the Spirit's testimony, not merely a human one.

Jesus suggested that the witness of the Spirit should always precede one's personal confession (Jn. 15:26-27):

*"When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which comes from the Father, he will testify of me, and you also will bear witness because you've been with me from the beginning."*

Because man, on his own, cannot be trusted to know the truth about himself or God, we must conclude that until God's Spirit declares one to be born of God, there simply is no sound scriptural ground for him to consider himself to be a member of God's family. "*The Spirit is the witness*", wrote John, "*because the Spirit is truth.*" "*The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit*", Paul taught, "*that we are the children of God*" (Rom. 8:16). This, then, is what speaking in tongues at Spirit baptism appears first of all to be, based on all the scriptural evidence: God's personal witness that He has justified and cleansed the person through whom the Spirit is speaking.

Were it man's place to declare that he has received the Spirit (as many are taught), we would be in a position (as most of us are) of not knowing who to believe and so, not knowing who is a brother and who is not. But if, in every case, "*the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God,*" and if the Spirit itself testifies of the entrance of Christ into one's fleshly temple, then we may begin to discern with certainty who is born again and who is not – without making any judgment about anyone on our own!

If we wait for the Spirit to bear its audible witness that others have been born into the kingdom of God before we judge them, then we will be able to tell, without partiality, who has received the Spirit and who has not. It seems obvious that waiting for the Lord to declare a man born again is our only means of escape from the confusion, judgmental attitudes, and uncertainty

that results from having to rely on a mortal man's testimony concerning his standing with God.

## Two Witnesses

Two witnesses have always been required in order to establish the most important matters among the saints in God's kingdom (e. g. Deut. 17:6). And surely, knowing who is a member of the body of Christ and who is not is one of life's most important issues. Jesus even said of himself, "*In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true. I am one who bears witness of myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness of me.*" And later, "*If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another who bears witness of me, and I know that the witness that He bears of me is true*" (Jn. 5:31-32).

If Jesus insisted that even his testimony was worthless if it was the only one he had, then surely we should humble ourselves to say the same about ours. What anyone on earth claims about his standing with God counts for nothing in heaven, though worldly men often honor highly each other's professions of faith. God requires a second voice, the testimony of the Spirit. And when the Spirit comes in and moves a person to begin to speak in tongues, that utterance is the other, required testimony, the witness of the Spirit. That precious testimony, purchased for us by the blood of Christ, added with the testimony of the person through whom the Spirit is speaking, make up the two witnesses required by God for anything to be established in His kingdom.

## THE SPIRIT'S VOICE

When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, the power of Jesus' comment about the absolute necessity of being "born again" shook him. And as the elderly master of the Law sank in heavy contemplation, Jesus described the new birth experience in these precious, mysterious words:

*"The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it's coming from or where it's going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."*  
(Jn. 3:8)

Because the Greek word for "wind" is also the word for "spirit", a simple translation, without any manipulation whatsoever of the Greek words in this verse, could be

*"The Spirit breathes where it will, and you hear its voice, but you cannot tell where it is coming from or where it is going. So is every one who is born of the Spirit."*  
(Jn. 3:8)

This is critical information concerning who is really a child of God and who is not. We know that we can trust what Jesus said on this and every other subject, and the revelation he gave to Nicodemus here is vital; it is exactly the kind of information that can bring us to a knowledge of the truth.

There are three fundamental truths concerning genuine conversion, or being "born again", that are revealed in this one sentence from Jesus. Let us carefully consider them.

First, at the end of that verse, notice that Jesus said that his description of the new birth applies to *every* person born of the Spirit. In other words, **Jesus has said something about being born again that is real and present every time someone is born again.** There are *no*

*exceptions* at any time, with any one. Jesus said so. This is precious information from the Savior. The Son of God has told us how to recognize the new birth *every time it happens*.

Second, from the middle of the verse, we learn that the Spirit moves independent of men's minds. **Men do not know where the Spirit will go next or where it has been.** This reinforces our earlier discussion of man's ignorance of divine life. Man cannot know who around the globe is being convicted of sin and is repenting; therefore, he cannot know where, or into whose heart, the Spirit will next breathe life (cp. Isa. 55:8-9).

Third, and most important, Jesus described in the opening phrase of John 3:8 **the one characteristic of being born of the Spirit that is present in every case, without exception:**

*"The Spirit breathes where it will, and you hear its voice."*

Now, it is not as important to know that *a* voice is heard that when a person is born again as it is to know that *the Spirit's voice* is heard. It is not the individual who is being converted, nor the individual's pastor, nor even the Bible, that is ordained to speak and to declare that one is now born again; Jesus said that it is the Spirit that declares it. In every case, said the master, *"you hear its voice."* A good question for all of us to ask ourselves is, "Who told me that I was born again?" Jesus said that the Spirit's voice is heard whenever anyone is truly born again. Remember these words:

***"so is EVERY ONE who is born of the Spirit."***

#### THE CRY OF BIRTH

Paul's references to the "crying out" of God's Spirit when it enters into a heart are reminiscent of the birth-cry of a newborn baby. Paul's comment to the Galatians stands out:

*"And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."* (Gal. 4:6)

And to the assembly of saints at Rome, Paul also wrote:

*"For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."* (Rom. 8:15-16)

The Greek verb *kratzo* is translated "cry out" in these verses, and it signifies a fervent verbal expression. *Kratzo* is used approximately sixty times in the New Testament books, and in every case it is used to denote an actual vocalization, usually the result of a circumstance overwhelming the speaker's being.

For example, demons "cry out" when face to face with Jesus' powerful presence (e.g. Mt. 8:29; Mk. 3:11; Lk. 4:41). Jesus' own death scream is called a "crying out" (Mt. 27:50). And desperate individuals, such as Bartimaeus and the Syro-Phoenician woman, "cried out" for deliverance when Jesus passed by.

The readers of Paul's message to the Romans and Galatians would never have understood his reference to the Spirit's "crying out" to be a secret, internal, spiritual event. The word never meant that. They would have understood perfectly that Paul was referring to the same spiritual experience that Jesus described to Nicodemus when he said,

*“The wind blows where it will . . . and you hear its voice. So is every one who is born of the Spirit.”*

### “CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD”

It is true that the scriptures say that *“whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Joel 2:32; Rom. 10:13). But what does the Bible mean by the phrase, “calling on the name of the Lord”?

In many places where that phrase is used, it is connected with the worship of God by His people, an example being Psalm 116:17: *“I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call on the name of the LORD.”* This act of communicating with God during worship is not an act that sinners can perform. Sinners are they who do not call on the Lord’s name: *“Pour out your wrath on the heathen that have not known thee, and on the kingdoms that have not called upon your name”* (Ps. 79:6).

Paul asked this rhetorical question: *“How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?”* (Rom. 10:14). The obvious answer is, they cannot. One must be a believer in order to call on God’s name. They are *“the workers of iniquity”*, wrote David, who *“call not upon the LORD”* (Ps. 14:4); *“but as for me,”* he said later, *“I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me”* (Ps. 55:16).

Calling on the name of the Lord is an experience shared only by those who know the Lord and whose prayers are anointed by Him to *“enter into that within the veil.”* Speaking of the future New Testament time, the ancient prophet Zephaniah stated plainly that harmony among God’s children, as well as the ability to call on the name of the Lord would be made possible only when God restored to the people *“a pure language”* (3:9). This seems to be a clear reference to the divinely inspired utterance we know as speaking in tongues. This is what the Lord said through Zephaniah (3:9):

*“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent.”*

When David was moved by the Spirit to pray, *“Give us life, and we will call upon your name”* (Ps. 80:18), he was confessing that without life from God, he could not call on His name. David was moved by the Spirit of God to pray that prayer, just as he was moved by the Spirit on many other occasions (2Sam. 23:1-2). And, being moved by the Spirit, he did not have to understand that what he was really praying for was that God would pour out His Spirit on men. *“The Spirit is life”*, wrote Paul (Rom. 8:10); therefore, when David prayed for life, he was praying for the Spirit, whether he knew it or not.

When Christ came, he told his disciples that the Spirit is what makes men truly alive (Jn. 6:63), and he exhorted those who wanted eternal life to come to him for it (Jn. 7:37-39).

### “EVERY SPIRIT THAT CONFESSES”

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God,*

*because many false prophets have gone out into the world. You know the Spirit of God by this: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ when he has come into flesh is of God, and every spirit that doesn't confess Jesus Christ when he has come into flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming, and now, already, it is in the world."*

(1Jn. 4:1-3)

It is fundamental to the understanding of this passage of scripture to note that John is speaking of the confession (or absence thereof) of *spirits* rather than of the confessions of humans. It is obvious that John knew better than to think that any *person* who says that Christ Jesus lived in the flesh has the Spirit of God within them. Considering Jesus' refusal to trust the testimony of men (even that of his own disciples) and his warnings to John not to be fooled by what men said or appeared to be (e.g. Mt. 7:15; Lk. 21-8), it is inconceivable that John would later teach that whoever says that Jesus lived on earth in the flesh is born of God.

On the other hand, if John is saying that every time the real Spirit of God enters the fleshly temple of repentant men, it "confesses" that Jesus Christ has come, then his teaching bears heavy resemblance to that of his Master: "*But when the Comforter is come . . . he will testify of me*" (Jn. 15:26), and "*so is every one who is born of the Spirit*" (Jn. 3:8).

Later in this chapter, when John states, "*Whoever will confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God*" (1Jn. 4:15), John's readers knew that John was speaking of a confession which is possible only when a person is moved by the Spirit to make it. In John's own words, "*It is the Spirit that bears witness (confesses, or testifies) because the Spirit is truth*" (1Jn. 5:6c). "Confession," as used here by John, is not an act that is possible for man without God's help. To do what John was talking about, confession must be inspired by the power of God. Paul said it this way:

*"Wherefore, I give you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit is saying, 'Jesus be cursed!' And no one is able to say, 'Lord Jesus', but by the holy Spirit."*  
(1Cor. 12:3)

The apostles were certainly wise enough to know that the spirits of greed (1Pet. 5:2; 2Pet. 2:3; Jude 11-19) or pride (3Jn. 9) or deceit (2Cor. 11:13-15) or even the spirits of envy and strife (Phip. 1:15-16) could prompt a man to proclaim the message that Jesus is Lord. When Paul wrote that only by the power of the Spirit could one confess "Jesus is Lord," he was teaching precisely what Jesus and John taught; namely, that the Spirit of God is the only true confessor of Christ, and that men may participate in that confession only as they participate in the life of the Spirit.

## “JUDGE NOT”

The making of *any* spiritual judgment apart from the Spirit of truth is dangerous. If the Spirit was sent to guide us into *all* truth (Jn. 16:13), then what truth may be obtained without the Spirit? Utter dependence upon the Spirit of God cannot be too much to expect when it was given to us for that very reason. The standard that Jesus set and that the apostles followed was to humbly rely on the Spirit of God as our guide in all things, especially in making judgments.

Considering Jesus’ refusal to make any judgment based on man’s testimony or man’s action (cp. Isa. 11:2-4), it is simply unthinkable that his apostles would have felt differently. The reliance upon the Spirit of truth to distinguish those who truly believe, rather than judging people’s hearts for ourselves, is a pillar of the faith as taught and demonstrated by Jesus and his earliest followers.

The scope of Jesus’ words, “*Judge not*” (Mt. 7:1) includes a prohibition against judging people *to be either right or wrong*. Currently, there are probably many more people being judged and declared by ministers to be right with God (even though the Spirit has not given its witness!) as there are people being judged to be sinners. Yet, it is just as wrong to judge someone to be justified with God as it is to condemn someone! Judging is judging. Let us learn, for everyone’s sake, to wait for God’s Spirit to declare a man to be forgiven, by speaking through him. Only the Spirit knows the heart.



## WHO NEEDS IT?

If speaking in tongues is the evidence that a person has received the Spirit of God, then who needs that to happen, besides the one who receives it? God certainly needs no evidence; He knows all things. Who then needs to have proof that the Spirit has been received? Who needs to know which persons have God's Spirit and which do not? Obviously, unbelievers have that need. In Paul's words:

*"Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."* (1Cor. 14:22a)

But if tongues are God's sign for unbelievers, we should then ask, "A sign of what?" Isaiah prophesied that speaking in tongues would be God Himself speaking through the believer, *to the disobedient*, showing them where they can find rest from sin (28:11).

Believers in Christ Jesus declare openly the holiness, purity, and power of God. But then, so do Muslims, Jews, and others in various religions around the world. The attributing of glory to God does not (for the sinner seeking the truth) distinguish the true faith from false religions, for they all, in some way, do the same. The God-given mark of the one true way to eternal life is the holy Ghost baptism, with the Spirit's "sign for unbelievers": speaking in tongues. **This spiritual baptism comes only in the name of Jesus, and every religion without it is false.**

As long as there is hope for unbelievers, there will be a need for speaking in tongues at Spirit baptism. It is only when *"that which is perfect is come,"* and the Final Judgment on mankind has been made, that tongues will cease (cp. 1Cor. 13:8-10). No one will at that time need a witness from God to let him know who is a believer, for believers will be the only ones left standing. But as yet, there remains a need for God to help the thirsty to find the waters of life.

In this, the mysterious love of God is revealed, that in a world filled with voices of men declaring to have found the way of life, God Himself would condescend to speak through true and humble believers, declaring to every confused and hungry soul, *"This is the way; come walk in it."* It is the purest love and wisdom of God that He should begin each believer's spiritual life with a divinely inspired testimony for the sake of those looking for the truth. Oh, that we all would always follow such a heavenly example, from the moment of conversion to the moment of death!

Knowing the confusion and darkness of men's minds, God has not left man on his own to determine which way is right. In His unfathomable wisdom, God calls from heart to heart, not with reasons but with compassion. And when the presence of His Spirit fills a believer to overflowing, and "its voice is heard," the sinner is called upon for a decision. It is a decision of the heart, not the head.

## REST FOR THE WEARY

Early in his ministry, my father had a dream in which he was burying the Lord after his crucifixion. Just as he was about to lower him into the grave, Jesus opened both his hands and said to my father, "Here, this cannot be buried with me."

My father then saw in one hand twenty-eight dollars and eleven cents and in the other,

eleven dollars and twenty-eight cents. He reached and took the money, as Jesus had instructed him, and as he looked at the money, it changed into two books of the Bible. The twenty-eight dollars and eleven cents became Isaiah, and the eleven dollars and twenty eight cents became Matthew. Here is the verse from Matthew:

*“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*  
(Mt. 11:28)

And from Isaiah:

*“For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to his people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith you may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing; yet, they would not hear.”*

(Isa. 28:11-12)



In the holy Spirit, Jesus offers us rest from sin and shame. But Isaiah’s ancient question can still be asked: *“Who has believed our report?”* For God has chosen *“the foolishness of preaching”*, and *“the base things of earth, and things that are despised”* (such as speaking in tongues), so that He might *“confound the wise [of this world], and “confound the things which are mighty”*. He has purposely designed this New Covenant so that only the truly humble will enter into the holy rest that Jesus purchased with his sacrificial death.

*“The foolishness of God is wiser than men”*, wrote Paul. God’s wisdom in speaking in tongues at Spirit baptism is revealed, at least in part, by the fact that proud people are ashamed to be seen speaking in tongues, and stubborn people refuse to yield control of their hearts, and tongues, to God. Liars hate the Spirit of truth, and immoral people avoid His “clean Spirit”.

It is a matter of the heart. *“Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks”*, said Jesus. And I am persuaded that when the holy Spirit of God fills the heart, the mouth, indeed, does speak.

In Psalm 51, the Spirit of God moved David to cry out for the cleansing power of the New Testament. The Old Testament under which David lived did not provide for the inner, spiritual cleansing for which David felt such a deep need. As part of his earnest plea to God, the “sweet psalmist of Israel” prayed, *“O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise”* (Ps. 51:15). I understand this to be a cry for God to open our mouths and help us render praise to Him, and I believe that the answer to David’s prayer is the baptism of the Spirit that was first poured out on Pentecost morning:

*“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE.”*

How David would have loved to be there, to have God to wash away his sins and open his lips, so that David might praise God in the “new and living way” of this new covenant!

## CONVERSATIONS

With their traditional doctrine that insists that one is born again before receiving the baptism of the Spirit, Pentecostals have not followed a logical path. To defend the doctrine that one must be born again before receiving the holy Ghost baptism is a scriptural impossibility. The baptism of the Spirit is unquestionably how one becomes a member of the body of Christ (Rom. 6:3; 1Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27); that is, the baptism of the Spirit is itself the experience of being born again. That being so, it is illogical and unscriptural to teach that one must be born again (that is, become a member of the body of Christ) before receiving Spirit baptism.

Some years ago, a Church of God minister, a friend of mine named Lee, explained to me his church’s position on this, that one must believe and “get saved” before being baptized with the Spirit. I replied, “But Lee, that’s the opposite of what Jesus taught. Jesus said, ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved’, not ‘He who believes and gets saved shall be baptized.’ Somebody has it backwards.” Brother Lee promised he would get back with me after he reviewed the Church of God Minute Book, but unfortunately, he moved out of town and passed away before we had that discussion.

In 1979, in a letter sent to me from a prince in the kingdom of God, Oral Roberts (to whom I owe my life for healing my dying father before I was born), put forth the same position as did my friend Lee. Rather than summarize his remarks, I will write them out in full:

Dear John:

I appreciate you writing me back and sharing some of the thoughts you have concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I can tell you are struggling with this. And while I don’t have time enough to answer each of the points you shared, I do feel impressed to share a thought with you that may help you.

John, your main concern seems to be that a person's conversion doesn't really take place until the moment they are baptized with the Holy Spirit. Now, I firmly believe that the Holy Spirit is in you when you first come to the Lord. Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit Who draws you to God. But the scripture indicates there is a deeper dimension of the Holy Spirit that is available to those who believe on Jesus. And that is the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Focus your attention now on John 3:16. It says that God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son so that whosoever believed on Him would have everlasting life. Now, who did God love? He loved the world – the world and everyone in it, everyone from that generation to this and everyone yet to be born until the Second Coming of Christ. Also, the promise of everlasting life (the promise of salvation) is given to whosoever believes on Jesus. TO WHOSOEVER. There is no special qualification given here. Salvation is promised to anyone in the world who believes on Jesus.

Now look at I Corinthians 2:11-16. Read it carefully, paying attention to these words -- “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God . . . but the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him . . .” You see, there is a separation point concerning the baptism with the Holy Spirit. While salvation is freely given to the world, this baptism is reserved for those who have chosen to join the body of Christ. It can come to them at any time after they have believed on Jesus, but at no time before.

I hope this helps clarify what I teach about the Holy Spirit. Feel free to write me at any time. Now, God bless you in every way.

(Signed) Oral Roberts.

I read this letter over and over, and yet I could not understand it. Finally, I took it to my elderly father, an old-time holiness preacher, and asked him to explain it to me. He read it in silence, and then summed it up succinctly. He said, “He's saying that salvation is for sinners and the baptism is for saints.” Then I understood what Brother Roberts' was teaching in his letter. He was saying that “salvation” is “conversion”, which is itself a mistake, and that conversion must be experienced before one can receive the holy Spirit baptism.

That doctrine, which is typical of Pentecostals everywhere, is biblically indefensible. The apostles and the Lord Jesus most often referred to salvation as the future hope of the saints, the reward that Jesus will give to faithful saints when he returns. In other words, *salvation* is most often used as another name for *glorification*, an event that happens after death. Salvation is not a synonym for conversion. It is something Jesus will give to faithful saints at the end, not to sinners today. On the other hand, the baptism of the Spirit, from the first day it was poured out, was proclaimed to be for sinners, not saints, who would repent and believe the gospel (Acts 2:38). The baptism of the holy Ghost is the very thing that washes away the sinner's sins (1Pet. 3:21; Tit. 3:5).

How could such a great man of God as Oral Roberts not see that? This was a deeply disturbing mystery that I cannot yet fathom. It has vexed my spirit many times over the years as I pondered over how such anointed and righteous men as he could teach that the baptism of the holy Ghost is an experience to be received only after conversion takes place, when the biblical evidence shows that the baptism of the holy Spirit *is* conversion. This question troubled my spirit so badly, not because I thought I was closer to God than they, but because I *knew* that they were closer to God than I was. It was because I honored them so very highly that my heart was

grieved that we did not see alike on this important issue.

More than a few times, I concluded that I must be wrong and they, right. But then, when I tried to read the Bible as they read it concerning the baptism of the Spirit, it was impossible for me to make them right. It was almost maddening. I *wanted* to be wrong; I ached inside to be wrong; I tried to make the Bible say what they said so that I could agree with their doctrine, but it just would not.

Such communications as those above, which I have had with beloved Pentecostal and Charismatic believers, small and great, indicate what the reader no doubt already knows; namely, I am in an extreme minority who believe that the baptism of the holy Ghost, with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, is the experience Jesus described to Nicodemus as being “born again”. But if we few people are right, what is there to be done? The numbers against even giving us a fair hearing are formidable. The traditions and doctrines that oppose us are set in stone, and they have been in place for centuries. As one wise, elderly preacher put it, “It’s like facing a strong hurricane, trying to blow it back where it came from.”

I am fully aware of the stunning ramifications of what I am teaching. If the traditional doctrinal position of Pentecostals is true, if every time a person is baptized with the Spirit, the Spirit’s voice is heard, then the only logical and biblically sound conclusion is that no one is born again except those who have spoken in tongues (or had Spirit-inspired “stammering lips” – Isa. 28:11-12). This is earth-shattering in its meaning; nevertheless, I believe it to be the case.

God help me. Here I stand. I cannot see it any other way, though God alone knows how sincerely I have tried.

## CONCLUSION

This booklet presents the most accurate and consistent biblical explanation I can find for speaking in tongues being the “initial evidence” of being baptized with the Spirit, as Pentecostals have traditionally taught. This doctrine, taken to its logical conclusion, alters radically the commonly accepted picture of the body of Christ. For since the baptism of the Spirit is the means of entering the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:13), we conclude that the body of Christ is composed exclusively of those who have received the baptism of the Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues “as the Spirit gives the utterance.”

Further, since it is true that “*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His*”, it is absolutely necessary for us to know who has received the real Spirit of God and who has not.. Otherwise, we are lost in a world of religious confusion as to who really is of God and who is not, and that condition exists among most of God’s children today.

Having been taught that the baptism of the Spirit is only for a few saints, Pentecostal people are tempted to think that those who are baptized with the Spirit are the spiritually elite, or at least the spiritually mature of the body of Christ. But if their own doctrine is true, if speaking in tongues is the “initial evidence” of the baptism of the Spirit, then Spirit-baptized people alone *are* the body, for the Spirit’s baptism (as we have shown) is how one becomes a member of the body. On the other hand, non-Spirit-baptized people should be cautioned that we are not to “take it by faith” that we have received the Spirit. Rather, we “*receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*”

Being baptized with the holy Ghost is not something we are to assume has happened based on a doctrine we have been taught or on a scripture that we believe; rather, it is a real experience that we receive simply because we believe the gospel and obey God. And the sign

that it has happened is always that *“you hear its voice.”*

God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering angered Cain so much that he murdered his brother rather than mend his own evil ways. Likewise, it sometimes happens that when God accepts the repentance of some and *“bears them witness, giving them the holy Ghost,”* certain people without that Blessing are troubled, or even angered because they feel left out or exposed. But God, *“who knows the heart,”* is the One who chooses who to fill and who not to fill with His Spirit.

If, as seems to be the case, speaking in tongues is God’s chosen “initial evidence” of the baptism of the Spirit, then the anger that this experience provokes among some who have not yet received it is an example of the kind of envy that motivated Cain, and it is to be avoided at all costs. The priests and elders of Israel fell victim to this evil spirit of envy when Peter described the ones whom God blesses with His Spirit. They were so angered by Peter’s innocent words that they wanted to kill both Peter and John. Nevertheless, Peter’s simple truth stands as true today as it did when he humbly spoke to the Sanhedrine in Acts 5:30-32:

*“The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree. Him God has exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things, and so is the holy Ghost, WHICH GOD HAS GIVEN TO THEM THAT OBEY HIM.”*

We all should be thankful that the Blessing of the Spirit is still available and is for everyone. Seeing others receive that Blessing should only encourage everyone without it to seek God earnestly for the precious Promise, for we know that *“God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation, he that fears Him and does righteousness is accepted with Him.”*

**Amen.**

