

"LET THE HOLY SPIRIT DO THE TALKING"

(Acts 2:1-13)

(Chuck Swindoll)

A lot of churches place a great burden on their members to repeat the experience of Pentecost, at least in part. According to some leaders in certain circles, the ability to speak in tongues is a necessary indication that a person is a genuine follower of Christ. Many correctly understand that the Holy Spirit immediately takes up residence in a believer at the very moment of salvation, but they think it happens only on a temporary basis. Taking Acts 2 as their example, they conclude that speaking in tongues is a necessary outward sign of the Holy Spirit's presence. Therefore, no speaking in tongues means no Holy Spirit within, and no Holy Spirit within means no salvation.

Others call the Holy Spirit a "second blessing," noting that Acts reports at least one case in which people received salvation and then received the Holy Spirit sometime later (8:14-17). They conclude that the Holy Spirit and His attendant gifts are an additional blessing for which one must pray earnestly. According to this view, speaking in tongues doesn't indicate salvation as much as measure piety. Consequently, genuine believers who do not speak in tongues are considered underdeveloped or incomplete as Christians.

Both views have significant biblical and theological flaws.

The fact is, we are *never* commanded to experience Pentecost or even to seek it. *We can't!* That's like telling someone to experience the parting of the Red Sea or the feeding of the five thousand. Those were unique works of God, done by Him through His own initiative at a specific point in history to teach unbelieving bystanders something about Himself. He used believers as instruments to accomplish a specific purpose; therefore, to expect a person to repeat the experience of Pentecost would be like asking a screwdriver to be picked up by its owner.

In addition, these miraculous events brought glory to God alone. The giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was a onetime event, marking the beginning of a brand-new era. It didn't bring glory to the people; the coming of the Holy Spirit and their subsequent speaking in other languages put the Lord at center stage. Their speaking in tongues didn't prove their incredible piety as Christians, because none of them were very mature Christians at all!

Finally, we must remember, the "speaking in tongues" described in Acts 2 produced a number of human languages that could be understood by people from other nations; it was an effective evangelistic tool, not some kind of heavenly language unintelligible on earth. Therefore, if we want to use speaking in tongues as an



indicator of salvation or a measure of godliness, no one today passes the test!

Never are we commanded to be *baptized* in the Spirit or to produce supernatural evidence of the Spirit. God gives His Spirit immediately, fully, and permanently to believers when we receive His gift of salvation. And anything He does—miraculous or otherwise—is His prerogative, subject to His sovereign authority, irrespective of what anyone else does, desires, or expects. W.E. Vine writes,

There is no evidence of the continuance of this gift after apostolic times nor indeed in the later times of the apostles themselves; this provides confirmation of the fulfillment in this way of 1 Cor. 13:8, that this gift would cease in the churches, just as would “prophecies” and “knowledge” in the sense of knowledge received by immediate supernatural power (cf. 1 Cor. 14:6). The completion of the Holy Scriptures has provided the churches with all that is necessary for individual and collective guidance, instruction, and edification.

As I consider the issue of speaking in tongues while reflecting on this passage in Acts 2, two truths emerge that help guide me through these troubled waters.

First, *when God does a work, no one can duplicate it or ignore it.* When God does something miraculous, it’s obviously of God, and no doubt remains. People might reject it—think of the scoffers who accused the believers of drunkenness—but they cannot deny the unmistakable hand of God. “Supernatural,” by definition, refers to something God alone can do. When people try, the response is doubt, skepticism, questioning. People analyze it like a magician’s illusion. But when God does something truly miraculous, no one can duplicate it or ignore it.

Second, *when the Spirit gives power, God receives the credit, not people.* When a surgeon performs a lifesaving procedure in the operating room, no one later praises the scalpel. It didn’t do anything on its own. Similarly, we are incapable of supernatural activity—on our own. Furthermore, the surgeon didn’t choose that particular scalpel because it has made itself useful for the job; it was made by someone, sharpened by someone, sterilized by someone, and then finally put to use by someone. We are no different. People cannot make themselves either capable or worthy of supernatural power.

When God works supernaturally, any thought of human recognition is absurd, especially to the people involved.

The next time you see something that claims to be the supernatural work of God, ask yourself two questions, in this order:

If this is genuine, for whom do I feel admiration right now? (If it’s anyone but God, beware.)

Is it possible to duplicate this feat or accomplish the appearance of it through human means? (If so, beware.)