

Grace Church
Roanoke, Virginia

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Lesson #5

ACTS
The Explanation Of The Pentecostal Phenomena
Acts 2:14-21

“Have you been baptized by the Spirit? Have you received the second blessing? Have you been filled with the Spirit so as to speak in tongues? Have you had the charismatic experience of glossalalia?” These are very popular questions today in certain Christian circles and they are going to become more popular in the future. When these questions are given to uninformed or misinformed Christians, they are often confused and get swept away into radical groups who stress the so-called supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, referring mainly to tongues and healing.

What was the Pentecostal experience? How was it manifested? Can the Pentecostal experience be repeated today? These are questions we shall try to answer in today's sermon. Our only criterion for judging any doctrine or experience is the Word of God. “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (light)” (Isa.8:20). We are specifically told in scripture to “test the spirits to see whether they are of God“. “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (I Jn. 4:1).

PRACTICAL EXPLANATION Acts 2:14, 15

Not Drunk with Wine. (2:14, 15):

“But Peter taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: ‘Men of Judea, and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day.’”

On the Day of Pentecost, God sent a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the one hundred twenty disciples and they, being filled with the Holy Spirit, were speaking in tongues; that is, they were speaking in foreign languages which could be reduced to writing and which were spoken somewhere on the earth. This supernatural phenomena stunned, amazed and perplexed the multiple thousands of Jews and Jewish proselytes who were in Jerusalem and around the Temple site for the Feast of Pentecost. Some of these Jews had an open mind and were interested in learning more. However, many said that the disciples were drunk, for they had been hitting the sweet wine. “And they continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others were mocking and saying, ‘They are full of sweet wine’” (Acts 2: 12, 13).

Noticeably Filled with the Spirit (2:4):

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”

These disciples were not drunk but their actions indicated to those looking on that they may have been saturated with alcohol. They were drunk but their actions were due to the intoxication of the Holy Spirit. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and were speaking in tongues. The result of having been filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was that the one hundred twenty spoke in tongues (foreign languages). The filling of the Spirit enabled these unlearned, uncouth Galileans to speak in a foreign tongue “the mighty deeds of God“. When this crowd of unbelieving Jews looked at these men and women, they noted that they were excited, voluble, speaking freely and easily, and acting rather strangely.

The filling of the Spirit deals with one's experience and helps the Christian speak boldly for God, and in Acts 2 they

were speaking in a foreign language. Christians are commanded to be filled with the Spirit.

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ (Eph. 5:18-21).

Notice in Ephesians 5:18 the filling is compared with drunkenness. When a person is drunk, alcohol controls his walk, his talk and his actions. So too when one is truly filled with the Spirit, there will be a supernatural control of one's walk, talk and actions for Christ, and there will also be a boldness to speak out for Christ to others.

The filling of the Spirit as it relates to tongues is mentioned only once in the Book of Acts. The filling is mentioned many other times when tongues is not mentioned. “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31). (Acts 4:8; 6:3; 7:55; 9:17; 13:9; 11:24; 13:52). Tongues is not a necessary evidence of the filling of the Spirit.

A Spirit-filled Christian is a Christian yielded to the Holy Spirit, being in submission to the Lord Jesus, having a desire to do the will of the Father. A person is baptized by the Holy Spirit only once at the moment of conversion but a person may be filled with the Spirit many times. The filling is repeated; the baptism of the Spirit is never repeated.

BIBLICAL EXPLANATION Acts 2:16-21

Prophetic Fulfillment (2:16):

“But this is what (this is that) was spoken of through the prophet Joel.”

Peter turned these Jews to their own scriptures and told them that Joel predicted this would happen. Therefore this supernatural phenomena was not unexpected or unexplained. Peter quotes from Joel 2:28-32.

“And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind (flesh); and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth; blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls,”

Peter said that Joel 2:28-32 was the exact fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost - “this is that (what).” Some feel Peter quoted Joel 2 in a very general way to show the coming of the Spirit was predicted in the Old Testament, and they take the words of Acts 2:20 about the “sun turned to darkness” and “moon to blood” as figurative language and say this was somehow fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. However, it seems better to take a more literal meaning of the quote. Acts 2 is a real fulfillment of Joel 2. It is a partial fulfillment but a real fulfillment. Acts 2:20 will be finally fulfilled at the second advent of Christ when Israel accepts the Messiah. At that time the sun will be darkened and the moon turned to blood in fulfillment of prophecy. Acts 2 is the beginning of the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32 but not a total fulfillment.

Present Fulfillment (2: 17 ,18)

“And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth My Spirit upon all mankind (flesh); . . .”

Peter took the liberty, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to change the words “after this” of Joel 2 to “in the last days”, referring to the fact that the Holy Spirit was poured out in the last days. The Jews did not think of “the last days” as the end of the world, but were looking for the glorious rule of their Messiah on this earth in His glorious

kingdom. The “last days” actually began when Christ came to this earth as the God-Man and Israeli’s Messiah.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb. 1:1, 2).

“For He (Christ) was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you” (I Pet. 1:20).

The time from the first advent of Christ to the second advent and the kingdom following may be referred to as the Messianic Age. Messiah came in Jesus Christ and would have set up His kingdom if Israel would have believed, but they rejected Messiah and His kingdom. However, Christ is still the Messiah and He reigns spiritually today at the right hand of the Father. All those who trust Christ are followers of the King. Today followers of the King, Christ Jesus the Lord, experience the power and blessings of the kingdom even though the King is absent. Christians enjoy the spiritual blessings of the kingdom now as they walk by faith in the King.

At Pentecost, God poured out His Spirit upon “all flesh” which is a spiritual blessing. The ultimate fulfillment will be when Israel turns to Christ and accepts Him as King. The Messiah has died; the Spirit has been sent and the earthly kingdom will be a reality when Israel repents and turns to Christ. But in the meantime, the Holy Spirit is being poured out on “all flesh“. This does not mean upon all men in general but upon all who receive Christ, both Jews and Gentiles. The Holy Spirit is poured out upon all kinds of people, young and old, rich and poor, male and female, educated and uneducated. All who trust in Christ receive the Holy Spirit who gives them the spiritual blessings of the kingdom while they are waiting for the earthly kingdom to be established.

“And your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men will dream dreams“.

In the new age of the Spirit, there would be prophesying and visions. In the first century church, some Christians did have visions and prophecy because there was no completed canon of scripture. With a completed Bible, there was no longer any need for visions and prophecy. Notice the emphasis on youth. God is saying that in this age of the Spirit, leadership, effectiveness and power will not be limited just to the older folks but also young men and women shall speak and lead and prophesy.

“Even upon My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy.”

Even slaves, obscure people, insignificant people will experience the Spirit and will prophesy. It is important to note that in the quotation from Joel 2, there is no mention of tongues. The gift that is primarily mentioned is the gift of prophecy. Prophecy in the New Testament was the receiving of special revelation from God and giving it forth in the common language of the people. This gift was needed when there was no complete canon of scripture. Today we might say that prophecy is the ability to declare the Lord in power. Young and old, servants and royalty, and obscure people shall be equipped by the Holy Spirit to speak forth the Word of God.

Future Fulfillment (2:19, 20)

“And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.”

Not all the events recorded in Acts 2 occurred on the Day of Pentecost, for at Pentecost there was no “blood, fire and vapor of smoke.” The sun did not turn to darkness and the moon did not turn to blood, but these things will occur literally in the future, “in the last days.” This part of the prophetic quotation of Joel 2 is still future and will occur at the second advent of Jesus Christ to this earth (Matt. 24:29-31; Rev. 6:12).

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will

appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Matt. 24:29-31).

In the quote from Joel 2, Peter gives the beginning and the ending of this present age of the Spirit. It began at Pentecost and will end after the great tribulation.

“And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Obviously the ultimate reason Peter picked this quote in Joel 2 was to stress to the unsaved Jews that the gospel of Christ and the coming of the Spirit was for Gentiles as well as Jews. All who call on Christ, whosoever will, shall be saved. To call upon Christ is to acknowledge one's total inability to save himself and to callout to Christ for salvation; that is, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We dare not limit the “everyone who calls“, for the offer of salvation is open to all those who believe in Christ and call upon Him to save them.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (Jn. 5:24).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

When men and women believe what God has said about Jesus Christ and call upon the name of the Lord, asking Jesus to be Lord of the life, then they receive the Spirit of God with all of its fullness. There need be no manifestations, not outward signs. Notice carefully this does not say when a person calls on Christ he “may be saved” or “might be saved” or “hopefully he will be saved,” it says “he shall be saved.” It is impossible to get a much more positive statement than “everyone who calls shall be saved.”

PRESENT DAY EXPLANATION OF TONGUES

It is obvious on the Day of Pentecost and in First Corinthians that Christians spoke in the supernatural gift of tongues. Is it possible for Christians to experience a second Pentecost today? Is there a gift of tongues today? What about our charismatic brethren who are claiming to speak in heavenly, unknown languages, consisting of strange words and syllables, uttering what sounds like gibberish that no man can understand? How do we know who is right? We can only judge the modern day tongues movement (charismatic movement) by the Word of God.

The final question which must be asked is: “Is the modern phenomenon of tongues the same gift as recorded in the Bible?” There seems to be very few people who honestly ask this question. Most simply assume that the modern manifestation must be the same. All we can do is “test the spirits” and see if the modern day tongues movement is Biblical.

I am one who cannot dogmatically say that tongues was a temporary gift which passed out of existence after the first or second century since there was then a completed canon of scripture and there was no need for sign gifts or special revelation. A good case can be made from church history where there has been very little evidence for the tongues movement until 1850 and I Corinthians 13:8 which says, “If there are tongues, they shall cease” to prove that tongues was a temporary gift and passed out of existence. While I do believe that there are temporary gifts (such as the gift of apostle) which passed out of existence, I cannot dogmatically say, based on my own understanding of the Bible, that the gift of tongues is no longer in existence.

Scriptural Criteria. The Bible, in my opinion, is quite clear on the use of tongues and we must judge the tongues experience according to the Bible and not our own feelings or experiences. There are at least ten marks of the Biblical gift of tongues:

(1) Foreign Language. The gift of tongues is always a known language, spoken somewhere on the earth, which can be reduced to writing. These tongues (languages) may not be known to the people hearing them, as in I Corinthians 14,

but they are foreign languages. There is no such thing as an “unknown tongue” in all the Bible. The word “unknown” occurs in the K.J.V. but it is not in the better Greek manuscripts and it is in italics in the K.J.V. “For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God . . .” (I Cor. 14:2). The tongues of Acts 2 and I Corinthians 14 are the same and there is no Biblical reason to take them as different.

(2) Lower Spiritual Gift Sovereignly Given. Tongues is a spiritual gift, “And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues” (I Cor. 12:28) and God gives spiritual gifts sovereignly to whom He pleases (But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11). While the ability to speak in tongues is a very spectacular gift, it seems to be the least of all the gifts, for they are ranked and tongues is purposely put at the bottom of the list (I Cor. 12:28). If tongues is not the least of all gifts, it is certainly a lower gift from other spiritual gifts.

When was the last time you heard of an all night prayer meeting to get the gift of helps or faith or administration? Yet, those gifts rank higher than the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues is greatly abused today and too much emphasis is placed on the so-called tongues experience.

Tongues is only mentioned three times in the Book of Acts (Acts 2, 10, 19) and only mentioned in one of the Epistles and that is First Corinthians. The context is not about the use of tongues in I Corinthians but the abuse of tongues, not how to exercise tongues but how to restrict them, and not to encourage the gift but to discourage the overuse of it.

(3) Not the Result of the Baptism of the Spirit. Tongues is not in any way the direct result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit occurs at conversion to Christ at which time a believer is put into spiritual union with Christ being made part of the body of Christ, the church. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13).

(4) Propagation of the Gospel. Tongues are related to making known “the mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:11). This would include the propagation of the gospel coupled with an attitude of praise and worship. Tongues in most cases in the New Testament are related to the propagating of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

(5) Not for All Christians. Tongues is not a spiritual gift that all believers can get and this is clearly taught in the Bible.

“All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor. 12:29-31).

Christians are to seek the better gifts and not the lesser gifts. Since tongues is a spiritual gift and only a few may have this gift, then tongues has nothing to do with a sign of salvation, spirituality or that one is filled with the Spirit.

(6) Not for Private Worship. The gift of tongues is intended to be manifested publicly and not privately. In Acts and First Corinthians, the gift of tongues was used in public worship and not in private worship. Tongues, as is every spiritual gift, are to be used for “the common good” of the body of Christ. “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (I Cor. 12:7). It is difficult to see how a private use of tongues builds up the whole body of Christ. I have a few charismatic friends who believe they have the gift of tongues (I question if they are Biblical tongues) and they claim the verses in I Corinthians 14 for a private use of tongues only.

“For one who speaks in tongues does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries” (1 Cor. 14:2).

“But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God” (I Cor. 14:28).

While I feel strongly that the context of I Corinthians 14 deals with public worship, if my charismatic friends use their

so-called gift of tongues in private worship, I will honor that conviction.

(7) Sign to Jews. The gift of tongues, at least in the Book of Acts, and probably in First Corinthians was a sign to unbelieving Jews that God was with the new movement of Christianity.

(8) Sign to Unbelievers. Tongues are always a sign to unbelievers and not believers. It is amazing how many of our charismatic brethren deal with First Corinthians and ignore 14:22: "So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers." So many times I will hear charismatics say, "God gave me a sign by giving me the gift of tongues." This is not Biblical.

(9) Regulated. Tongues speaking in the New Testament was to be done in an orderly fashion. Only three at any meeting were to speak. "If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret" (I Cor. 14:27), everything was to be in order, "But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner" (I Cor. 14:40) and there were to be interpreters for those who did not understand the foreign language (I Cor. 14:27).

(10) No Women Are to Speak. Tongues in First Corinthians was limited only to men in public worship.

"For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let the woman keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let then ask their own husbands at home, for it is improper for a woman to speak in church" (I Cor. 14:33-35).

If a woman speaks with tongues at any public meeting of the church, it is contrary to the Word of God. Someone has said, "Take the women out of the tongues movement and it will die."

(11) Summary. It is my opinion that God, being sovereign, could give the gift of tongues today to a Christian. These tongues, however, would have to meet the Biblical criteria. I personally have never seen anyone with the gift of New Testament tongues in the twentieth century. However, I have heard of recorded cases where missionaries were overcome by the Spirit and began to speak in the language of the people they were trying to reach. If this happened, I would say this was tongues.

If some Sunday morning we had a family visit Grace Church who did not speak much English - let's say a family from Japan. If someone in our congregation got up and began to speak in Japanese and the family recognized their language as their own, I would ask if there was an interpreter in our congregation. The interpreter would tell the whole congregation what the speaker in tongues (Japanese language) was saying to the Japanese family. This in my opinion would be New Testament tongues.

Satisfying Explanation.

(1) How do we square the modern day manifestation of so-called heavenly tongues with the Bible? In my opinion it is not the same thing as Biblical tongues. The present day manifestation does not meet the Biblical standard at all. There are occasional attempts to square modern tongues with the Biblical picture but these are always twisted and strained attempts to make the Bible fit the modern charismatic movement. How then can we explain the modern day tongues movement? We must say that charismatics are experiencing something, but it may not be Biblical tongues at all.

(2) Modern Tongues May Be Emotionalism. A person may work himself into such an emotional state that he may place himself in a mystical trance. There are very few experiences a person cannot have if he seeks them long enough.

(3) Modern Tongues May Be Fraud. There are people who have been told that tongues are a mark of spirituality or even salvation, and, because they want to be saved or spiritual and not ostracized from a particular group, they "fake tongues."

I have a friend, who is not a charismatic, but he can put himself in the state of mind where he can sound just like a charismatic speaking in a heavenly language. This gift certainly can be mimicked.

(4) Modern Tongues May Be Self-Hypnosis. A person could put himself in a hypnotic state so as to free his tongue from the mind. It should be noted that people in other religions can speak in babbling tongues. Tongues were spoken by the mystery cults of the Graeco-Roman era. Even Plato claimed to speak in tongues. Hindus and Mohammedans and African cults are claiming the gift of tongues. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-day Adventists claim this manifestation. These false religions and cults are not Christian, so apparently it is some psychological experience Christian men and non-Christian men can get if they desire it bad enough.

Carroll Stegall, Jr. in his pamphlet on "The Modern Tongues and Healing Movement" says,

Instead, the seeking worshipper is noisily coached by a team of specialists who gather around him, or in the majority of cases, around her, stamping their feet, dancing, clapping their hands, chanting, shouting advice in their ears and giving them a treatment any psychologist would recognize as designed to lead the victim into releasing cerebral control of his body to the autonomic nervous system. This is a form of self-hypnosis.

(5) Modern Tongues May Be Satanic Deception. Satan can also produce tongues in a person. He will do anything to get people away from the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus. This does not mean that everyone in the charismatic movement is controlled by Satan. However, it is possible to get off on any tangent in Christianity so as to further the cause of Satan rather than Christ.

(6) Summary. My own educated guess is that most of the tongues movement is a psychological response to a great need in a dry Christian's soul for spiritual reality and there is a need for signs because there is little Biblical reality.

Ray Stedman in his message on Acts 2:5-21 says about tongues,

Well then what is it (tongues)? At best it is a psychological response to a strong desire to have something that will give some sense of spiritual or exceptional superiority in some remarkable way. It is a trick that the mind plays upon us to fulfill an overpowering desire to have something that will mark us as unusually favored in God's sight. That is almost always the explanation behind the hunger of those who seek this gift. It is, however, true that the false gift often appears in connection with a genuine moving of the Holy Spirit, and sometimes is hard to separate the true from the false. Oftentimes this false gift is a seed planted by the enemy in the midst of a genuine moving of the Spirit. Much blessing that comes from the genuine awakening is unthinkingly attributed to tongues, to the manifestation of this so-called gift of tongues.

But again, after the observation of many years, it is clear to me that the results of yielding to this false gift of tongues is frequently spiritual derailment. Many who have begun well, who have begun to walk in the Spirit and to seek after the Lord and grow, are derailed, shunted into a dead-end street which never goes anywhere. It ultimately results in divisiveness, in separation of Christian from Christian, as well as prolonged barrenness in the spiritual life. That is why there is need for warning against this false manifestation that is so abroad today.

CONCLUSION

What is the message of this section of scripture in Acts? The Holy Spirit is available to everyone who calls upon Christ. Whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. "Whosoever" - "Everyone" means anyone who desires to come to Christ may come.

Do you have a desire to be saved? Believe in Christ and call upon Him to save you. Then you will receive the Holy Spirit and He will begin to make Christ real to you, teach you spiritual truth and give you the power to live the Christian life. What is the message? "Everyone who calls upon the Lord shall be saved!"