

ACTS
Saved, but Lacking
Acts 19:1-7

Every Christian has, or will, come into contact with so-called charismatic Christians who teach that it is possible to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation at one point of one's Christian experience and then, at a later point in one's Christian experience, it is possible to receive the Holy Spirit for sanctification. The people who hold this kind of theology are called Pentecostals, Holiness or Charismatics. They claim that sometime after initial salvation one must have an experience with the Holy Spirit to have power to live the Christian life. This experience after conversion is sometimes referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the second blessing or the second work of grace, and for most, this experience is accompanied by the manifestation of the charismatic gifts with special emphasis upon the speaking in tongues, which for them are unknown, heavenly languages of praise to God. They believe that this second experience with the Holy Spirit comes when one is fully surrendered and totally yielded to God.

It is grossly unfair on my part to try to classify charismatics, for they range all the way from snake handlers to the most dignified and cultured Christians. Among charismatics themselves, there is a wide difference of opinion as to what the Bible teaches on this encounter with the Holy Spirit and the speaking in tongues. Some think that one must speak in tongues to evidence salvation, for it is tongues that proves one has the Holy Spirit. Still others would not go so far but they would say that speaking in tongues is necessary to evidence one is truly Spirit-filled. Still others, who are more biblical, see tongues as just one of the spiritual gifts in the church and some have the gift of tongues and some do not. Charismatics, as a whole, are very difficult to talk to once they have had the so-called tongues experience, for once one has experienced something subjectively, it is difficult to be objective. What we must do with our charismatic brethren is to bring their experience of tongues and their theology surrounding this experience to the touchstone of Scripture. Charismatics, for the most parts are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Our task is not to berate, mock or shun them but to love them and help to examine the Scriptures on tongues so as to get biblical perspective on this subject. Once a charismatic sees what the Bible teaches, then his fanaticism over tongues will leave (even though he may not give up the use of the gift as he understands it) and he will become balanced, more biblical, and more loving and understanding towards the rest of the body of Christ who have not experienced what he thinks is the biblical gift of tongues.

It is impossible for me in this one message to deal with the whole, complex subject of speaking in tongues, but I do hope to put the subject into a biblical perspective. Some may not be happy with my explanations but what I say shall accurately reflect my own thinking on this matter. I am not closed-minded on tongues and will talk to anyone who wants to open the Bible and try to discuss the issue on biblical grounds. My prayer is that God will use this message to unite the body of Christ and not rip it apart.

THE DISCIPLES IDENTIFIED - Acts 19:1

“And it came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, . . .” -- Starting out on his third missionary journey, Paul went through the areas of Phrygia and Galatia and came to Ephesus in Asia Minor. Paul had told the Ephesian Jews that he would return if the Lord willed it and He did will it (Acts 18:19, 20). Whatever God wills comes to pass, for all of life is under the providence of a sovereign God.

“. . . and found some disciples, . . .” -- When Paul came into the Jewish community in Ephesus, he found some disciples there. This context tells us that they were disciples of John the Baptist. They probably had been taught by Apollos before he accepted the Messiah who had come. Before Apollos came into a full understanding of Christ, His life, death and resurrection, he preached only the message of John the Baptist, which was a message of expectancy. These disciples of John the Baptist through Apollos were still looking for the

Messiah to come when He had already come twenty years before. They were, therefore, Old Testament believers who had come under the teaching of John the Baptist. If they died, they would have gone to heaven. John called men to repentance to wait for Messiah, but these disciples had not understood that Christ had come, died for sinners, was resurrected from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father and sent back the Holy Spirit to permanently dwell in the hearts of true believers in the new age of the church. These disciples were in the transition period between Old Testament and New Testament saints, the congregation of Israel and the church of Jesus Christ. What happened to these disciples cannot happen to us today simply because we are not in that transition between Old Testament and New Testament dispensations.

In the Old Testament, believers knew much about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit saved men, filled men and indwelt men.

“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow;” (I Peter 1:10, 11).

We may debate whether the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was permanent or temporary but the Holy Spirit did indwell men. Jesus Christ taught the Holy Spirit was with His people before the Day of Pentecost.

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you” (John 14: 16, 17).

Believers in the Old Testament knew much about the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but the one ministry which they knew nothing about was the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit which occurred for the first time on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Christ promised the Spirit would baptize believers, “. . . for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5), and it happened in Acts 2. “And when the day of Pentecost had come. . . And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance” (Acts 2:1, 4). We know that the baptism of the Holy Spirit came to form the church, the body of Christ. “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” (I Cor. 12:13). At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came in a unique way not known before in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit was poured out in the church and in each Christian just as it was predicted in the Old Testament and by Christ. In the New Testament, we have the fullness of the Spirit for the church. The fullness of the Holy Spirit has brought more light than the Old Testament saint had, which includes more understanding of the Old Testament, a grasp of the first advent, a full-orbed understanding of the person and work of Christ and many other things. The fullness of the Holy Spirit also brought more power--power to live a fruitful and abundant life, power to witness for the Lord, power to make an impact on the world. The Spirit came in His fullness at the Day of Pentecost when every true believer in Christ was identified with and placed in union with Jesus Christ through the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit, forming the universal church, the body of Christ.

THE DIRECT QUESTION OF PAUL - Acts 19:2a

“. . . and he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’” Paul probably observed these disciples closely. Perhaps he heard them talking about the Messiah in a personal way but sensed something was lacking in their lives. He knew immediately something was missing. We are not told what prompted Paul to ask this question. It may have been that he saw no joy in their lives, no power, no peace, or he may have sensed there was no great love for the Word or a desire to reach the lost. He may have recognized no real manifestation of the spiritual gifts among them. We do not know what Paul noticed specifically but the power of the Holy Spirit, New Testament style, was noticeably lacking in their lives. Then Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” This question indicates that the normal New Testament pattern is that the Holy Spirit is given immediately upon belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and Christ Himself taught this.

“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.”’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39).

Those who believe that there is a second experience of receiving the Holy Spirit after one is saved go to this verse to make their point. They say these disciples who were true believers received the Holy Spirit New Testament style after they were saved. This is true but this situation was an extraordinary case, an exceptional situation, a unique circumstance due to the transition between the Old Testament and New Testament economies. They were true Old Testament believers in Messiah who had never even heard of the Holy Spirit in New Testament terms. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and fell on the 120 gathered in a room in Jerusalem, were the 120 the only true believers in the world? No. If a true Old Testament believer resided in Ephesus or somewhere other than Jerusalem, would that person automatically receive the baptism and fullness of the Spirit? No. In fact, he wouldn't have known anything about Messiah who had come and sent the Holy Spirit as another Comforter. This was all part of the transition from the Old Testament age to the New Testament age.

It is a very shaky thing to build a whole theology of separating justification and sanctification, as most charismatics do, on such a questionable passage as Acts 19:2.

THE DEJECTED ANSWER OF THE DISCIPLES - Acts 19:2b

“And they said to him, ‘No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit’” -- These disciples of John the Baptist admitted they knew very little of the Holy Spirit. We must not interpret this to mean they did not know anything of the Holy Spirit for, as Old Testament believers, they would have acknowledged the Holy Spirit, and even John the Baptist predicted the coming of the Holy Spirit in baptism through the ministry of Christ. “As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance; but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11). These disciples knew of the Holy Spirit, but they did not know that the Holy Spirit had come in His baptizing and fullness of power on the Day of Pentecost. They knew nothing of the New Testament work of the Holy Spirit.

Again, it should be pointed out that these disciples of John the Baptist are not models for today. There is only one generation of which the Holy Spirit was received after conversion and that was the first century when there were Old Testament believers who needed to be put into the body of Christ by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. They were saved but lacking the fullness of the Holy Spirit which comes when one is baptized by the Holy Spirit. This baptism today occurs at the moment of salvation for all Christians, placing them into the body of Christ, the church.

THE DECLARATION OF WATER BAPTISM - Acts 19:3

“And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ And they said, ‘Into John's baptism.’” -- Paul perceived they were Old Testament believers and asked them what they were water baptized into; that is, what creedal system or doctrine they were identified with through baptism. They answered, “Into John's baptism.” Then it became perfectly clear to Paul where they were spiritually. They were Old Testament believers waiting for the first coming of Christ when He had already come, and they had not received the Holy Spirit New Testament style.

THE DEFINITION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST'S BAPTISM - Acts 19:4

“And Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’” -- John the Baptist called people to repentance and identified them with the coming Messiah. John called men to acknowledge their sins, confess their sins, turn from their sins and surrender their wills to the coming Messiah. John water baptized the elect remnant in Israel who were expecting the arrival of Messiah.

Dr. Luke obviously is only giving a summary of what Paul taught these twelve disciples of John. Paul gave them the whole gospel, speaking of Christ's life, miracles, death for sinners, resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven and then told them about how He sent the Holy Spirit to live in every true Christian.

THE DECISION FOR CHRISTIAN BAPTISM - Acts 19:5

“And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” -- These twelve disciples of John, when they heard the truth about Christ, wanted to be rebaptized in the name of Christ. Apparently, Paul thought their baptism from John was invalid. Perhaps all converts of John were rebaptized into Christ although we have no record of this. It could be that these disciples were baptized into John's baptism after the Day of Pentecost and it was considered a defective water baptism. Most likely Paul felt their water baptism into John's ministry was invalid because it was based on insufficient information about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Whatever, they were rebaptized.

This is the only case of rebaptism in the New Testament. This may, however, give us a biblical basis to rebaptize people who were baptized as infants or as mere professing Christians without any reality of Christ. My personal conviction is that all persons should be rebaptized who did not have a living, vital, saving faith the first time they were baptized. Baptism is for those who know the risen Lord who sent the Holy Spirit to give them power to live the Christian life.

THE DISPENSING OF CHARISMATIC GIFTS - Acts 19:6, 7

“And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, . . .” -- It seems to me that when the Holy Spirit came upon these disciples, it was not the baptism of the Spirit, nor the indwelling, nor the fullness of the Spirit since these things must have happened when they believed on Messiah who had come and were water baptized. This must refer to the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the charismatic gifts. The evidence that the Holy Spirit had come was the exercise of spiritual gifts.

The laying on of hands did not impart the Holy Spirit but it signified identification. Paul was identifying these twelve disciples, who had been Old Testament believers but came to believe in Christ who came, with the body of Christ. He was identifying them with the new body formed by the Holy Spirit.

“And they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. And there were in all about twelve disciples.” -- The two charismatic gifts mentioned here are prophesying and tongues. There are other charismatic gifts mentioned in the Bible--faith, administration, giving, helps, wisdom, knowledge and many others. The two manifestations here in Acts 19:6 are for a definite purpose. The gift of tongues was given to witness to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, and the gift of prophecy was to believers. The gift of prophecy was either receiving special revelation from God and sharing this revelation in the common language of the people or it refers to one who illuminates people's lives with the power and truth of Scripture.

It cannot be denied that these twelve disciples, when they came into a full understanding of the person and work of Christ, received the Holy Spirit and His presence was manifested in this particular case by the speaking in tongues. This raises the question, “Is the spiritual gift of tongues for today?” Some Christians have dogmatically said that tongues have passed out of existence today, basing their thinking on the theological argument that there was no need for tongues (foreign languages) after the first century propagate the gospel since the New Testament canon was completed, and also First Corinthians 13:8 says, “If there are tongues, they shall cease.” Other Christians feel tongues is for today and they point to Acts 2, 10, 19 and First Corinthians 12-14 to show the Bible teaches tongues. They also point to people today who are claiming to speak in tongues. My own position is that I do not see enough biblical evidence to prove that God has done away with tongues forever although there is much historical evidence to show that from the second century to the nineteenth century there was hardly any speaking in tongues. On the other hand, if the biblical gift of tongues is in existence today, it must conform to the New Testament pattern. What then are the New Testament criteria or rules for speaking in tongues?

Tongues Are Foreign Languages. The gift of tongues is always a known language, spoken somewhere on the earth, which can be reduced to writing.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. . . And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?” (Acts 2:4, 8).

These tongues (languages) may not be known to the people hearing them, as in First 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 King James Version but it is not in the better Greek manuscripts and it is in italics in the King James Version - “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 First Corinthians 14 are the same and there is no Biblical reason to take them as different.

Tongues Are Lower Spiritual Gifts Sovereignly Given. Tongues are a spiritual gift, “And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, 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” (I 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 are purposely put at the bottom of the list (I Cor. 12:28). If tongues are not the least of all gifts, it is certainly a lower gift from other spiritual gifts.

Tongues Are Not the Result of the Baptism of the Spirit. Tongues are not in any way the direct result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit occurs at the 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” (I Cor. 12:13). Tongues in Acts 2 were the result of the filling of the Spirit. “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues . . .” (Acts 2:4).

Tongues Are related to the 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.

Tongues Are Not for All Christians. Tongues are not a spiritual gift that all believers can get if they exercise enough faith, 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 have nothing to do with a sign of salvation, spirituality or that one is filled with the Spirit.

Tongues Are 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 several verses in First 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 First 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.

Tongues Were a 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.

Tongues Were a Sign to Unbelievers. Tongues are always a sign to unbelievers and not to 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.

Tongues Are to be 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” (1 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).

Tongues Are Not for Women. 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 them ask their own husbands at home, for it is improper for a woman to speak in church” (1 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.”

It is my own 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.

The speaking in tongues was a sign to unbelieving Jews in Acts 19. These twelve Christians could now speak the gospel in other languages. Ephesus was a polyglot city where many languages were spoken. East and West met along that coast. These men were now able to give the good news of Christ to the entire city which was a sign to Jews that the gospel was now going out to the whole world and was no longer to be contained to Israel alone.

It should be noted that tongues are only mentioned three times in the Book of Acts and two of these deal with transition situations (Acts 10, 19). In First Corinthians 12-14, Paul wrote about tongues not to encourage their use but to curb their abuse, not to show how to use tongues but instructions about the restriction of tongues, not to encourage exercising the gift but rather discouraging the overuse of it. The Bible gives very little place to tongues as a spiritual gift and so should we. Whole denominations have come into existence because of an overemphasis on tongues. Why? Well, men today are like the Corinthians who gave the gift of tongues the prominent place because it was such a spectacular thing, but the Bible seems to indicate it is the least of all the gifts.

We should also remember that there is an imitation today of the gift of tongues, a psychological phenomenon

which has been known among men for centuries. Tongues were spoken in several of the mystery cults in the Greco-Roman era, and even Plato discussed them in some of his lectures to the Greeks at Athens four hundred years before Christ. Some Hindus, Mohammedans and Spiritualists today claim to speak in estatic languages. Some Jehovah Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists, Christian cults, speak in tongues. It was the Mormons who first spoke in tongues in America. These groups are certainly not Christian by any stretch of the imagination. Some Roman Catholics are speaking in tongues, claiming that they are giving them a greater love for Mary, a stronger veneration of the Pope and a deeper devotion to the Catholic Church. Imitation tongues, which is probably 95 percent of all so-called tongues speaking today, is a result of auto-suggestion, self-hypnosis and extreme self-induced emotionalism.

What then should be our attitude toward people who call themselves charismatics? We should love them for many are brothers and sisters in Christ, but we should also try to get them to bring their tongues experience to the touchstone of Scripture.

CONCLUSION

Saved. For us who are saved, we should remember that we received the Holy Spirit the moment we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. All true believers have been baptized by the Holy Spirit. They have been permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They have received the fullness of the Spirit. As Christians, we are never going to get any more of the Holy Spirit than we already have, but He is going to get more of us. It is possible, however, for a Christian to be saved and lacking, not lacking the indwelling of the Spirit but the power and the manifestation of the spiritual gifts which come through the filling of the Spirit. As Christians we have infinite spiritual resources abiding in us through the Holy Spirit, but we must tap these resources by exercising human responsibility constantly and progressively so as to appropriate by faith the power and blessings that are ours as we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Christians cannot lose the indwelling of the Spirit, but they can lose the filling of the Spirit, and this loss comes when the Christian sins. Christians can lose power because of rebellion and indifference to Christ.

How are Christians filled with the Spirit? First, they confess their sins. Second, they walk by faith in Christ. Just as the Christian initially believed in Christ for salvation, he is to continually believe in Jesus Christ for the filling of the Spirit and sanctification. "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. 2:6).

If we Christians are not seeing the evidences of the Spirit in our lives, what is wrong? If we lack joy, see no graces of the Spirit, experience no power, are apathetic about witnessing, what is wrong? We are not continually believing in Jesus Christ and consequently we are missing the filling of the Spirit. It is possible to be saved and lacking. A Spirit-filled Christian is a Christ-centered Christian who has a sense of expectancy, a fresh anticipation of the Spirit's sovereign moving, and an excitement about the mysterious workings of God. Christian, you 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" (Eph. 5:18).

Unsaved. If you are not a Christian, the Bible says you do not have the Holy Spirit. "But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him" (Rom. 8:9). How can you get the Holy Spirit? By trusting in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. When you trust the crucified and risen Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, by the surrendering of your will to Him, then and only then will the Holy Spirit come to you. Trust Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.