GLOSSOLALIA
(SPEAKING IN TONGUES)

Is it the evidence or an evidence of the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit?

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Thousands today are speaking with tongues when baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit, just as on the day of Pentecost, and this is only one more sign of the imminent return of our Lord. The Apostle Peter assured us that Pentecost was only a sample of what Joel predicted would happen in the last days. He stated in Acts 2:16-18:

"In the last days, God says, **I will pour out my Spirit on all people.**
Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions,
Your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
**I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.**"

Today so many are "speaking with other tongues" when baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit, that hundreds of sincere and earnest saints are teaching that all truly baptized persons must speak in tongues, as *glossolalia* is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The historic Pentecostal position states that baptism of the Holy Spirit is a critical event (experience) subsequent to and/or distinct from conversion, granting the believer the benefits of a permanent, personal and full indwelling of the Holy Spirit, thus providing power for Christian service, particularly evangelistic service, with the equipment of spiritual gifts.

This distinctive doctrine of the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Movement is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, what is the most distinctive about this doctrine is the strong belief that the initial evidence or one of the evidences of this baptism was and is speaking in tongues.

It is the purpose of this paper to examine the biblical evidence to determine whether *glossolalia* is the initial evidence or one of the evidences of the baptism or filling of the Holy Spirit.

While it is admitted that Holy Scripture nowhere explicitly or theologically teaches that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, people of the Pentecostal or Neo-Pentecostal persuasion believe that the weight of the passages in the book of Acts must compel this doctrine implicitly and historically.

What is the biblical teaching on this matter?

**Pentecost (Ac 2:1-4)**

The most celebrated effusion of the Holy Spirit with the manifestation of tongues occurred on the day of Pentecost. It is argued that if speaking in tongues were God's way of evidencing the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Church's **first** experience, why, should it not be so for her **continuing** experience?
The Pentecost occasion was accompanied by unique and unrepeatable phenomena, such as the sound of the wind (Ac 2:2) and the vision of tongues as fire (Ac 2:3) and the fact that here only, as far as we can tell, are the tongues understood by the hearers (Ac 2:11). It is held that these unique and unrepeatable phenomena separate from the repeatable and pattern-making phenomena (*glossolalia*). The argument is that while wind, fire and remarkable manifestations had occurred as signs under the old covenant, tongues never had, and therefore it is concluded that tongues speaking is meant to be the sign of the Spirit’s presence under the new covenant. Thus it is vigorously insisted that this unique Pentecostal event is in its evidential character the pattern for every subsequent baptism of the Holy Spirit.

A careful study of the words used in this Pentecostal promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is essential for a proper interpretation of its significance. First of all, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is called not the opportunity or responsibility of the believer, but "the promise of the Father." Thus the baptism of the Holy Spirit comes in the name of a *promise*, not a command; as a gift, not as a challenge. The exclusive source, therefore, of the baptism of the Spirit is the Father and His grace and not men and their conditions.

In Acts 1:5 and in Luke 24:49 the verbs are used in the passive voice which means that the baptism is not to be the result of the activity of the apostles, but of the Giver. The subject of the spiritual baptism is not the recipient and his activity but the Promiser and His will.

Another feature of the baptism in Acts is that it is given to *every* believer without exception or qualification, from the 120 at Pentecost to the 12 at Ephesus (Ac 19:1-7). There is not record in Acts of any Christian failing to receive the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost is ushered in not with a spiritual or psychological explanation but with a historical one: "When the day of Pentecost had come" (=was fulfilled). Instead of pointing to fulfillment of conditions by the disciples, Luke points to God's timing in history.

In verse 2 Luke points out the condition of the waiters: "where they were sitting" (v. 2); he did not say "where they were kneeling, praying or seeking." The Holy Spirit was a gift given according to God's sovereign will.

"And [they] began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (2:4). There is no record that the disciples at Pentecost were seeking this particular experience. Rather it seems that it was God's will for the world mission of the Church to proclaim the great deeds of God in the languages of the world of that time. And the Holy Spirit moves men to praise "the mighty works of God" (2:11).

But what was the evidence that they were baptized on this historic day? Jesus, questioned about His promise that they should be baptized with the Holy Spirit soon replied:
"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Ac 1:8).

The power was itself the evidence.

There was a sound of a great, rushing mighty wind. But that is not what they had been told to expect. There were the cloven tongues like as of fire that rested on the disciples, a wonderful miracle and beautifully symbolic. But that is not what they had been told to expect. They talked in many languages so that everyone there could understand the gospel, and this was a wonderful and useful miracle. But it was not what they had been told to expect; it was not the evidence.

But when three thousand people turned to God that day under the mighty power of the preaching and testimony of these same Spirit-filled disciples . . . that was the evidence! "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you," Jesus said. They received the power, so they knew that the Holy Spirit had come upon them.

Jesus had said, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about" (Ac 1:46). When the mighty power of God to convict and save sinners was hundred and twenty who had waited for this very same power could doubt the evidence before them.

Converts in Samaria (Ac 8:4-24)

This is a very difficult passage to interpret. Some believe that these Samaritans were not really saved until Peter and John laid their hands upon them as they "received the Holy Spirit" (8:15). Others believe that they were saved when it says that "they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ . . . Samaria had accepted the Word of God' (8:12,14). Those of the charismatic persuasion believe that although glossolalia is not specifically mentioned, it occurred because something striking must have taken place to evoke Simon's request (offering the apostles money that he too may also have "this power"). Acts 8:19 seems to give the clue to Simon's request, the fact that he wanted "also this power." The striking thing that took place then led to Simon's request was power, not glossolalia.

It is also evident that Phillip expected some manifestation as a result of his message which he did not see, thus it is argued that this manifestation must have been glossolalia. Why couldn't it have been power which these "believers" did not evidence? One thing clear about this passage is that one cannot be dogmatic concerning the true meaning of it.

Cornelius' Household (Ac 10:44-48)

This passage is used to argue for the confirmation that glossolalia is not unique to Pentecost itself but is intended for each manifestation of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But is this the thrust of the passage? Luke states here:
"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God" (Ac 10:44-46).

This incident came some eight years after Pentecost. God has dealt specially with Peter to get him to undertake preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. At last, after being prepared by a vision and the voice of God from Heaven, Peter went with the messengers sent by Cornelius and told Cornelius and his family how to be saved. Immediately they trusted in the Savior for whom their hearts had hungered and were filled with the Holy Spirit.

In the following chapter Peter was called before the Circumcision Party and accused by them. They said, "You went into the house of circumcised men and ate with them" (11:3). And Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning to them and told of the miracle of the sheet let down from heaven and the wild beasts and creeping things and fowls of the air, and the voice from heaven, saying, "Arise, Peter; slay and eat," and how God made it clear to him that he was not to call anything common or unclean which God had cleansed. He told how the three men came from the house of Cornelius in Caesarea and how the Holy Spirit told him to go with them. To make sure that he would not be misunderstood, Peter had taken six brethren with him as witnesses. Peter said then:

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said:

'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

so if God gave them the same gift as He gave us, who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?"’ (11:15-17).

It was "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (10:45). Peter says that gift of the Holy Spirit was obvious to him and his six Jewish witnesses and that he thereby decided that God had given to the Gentiles "the same gift as he gave to us, who believe on the lord Jesus Christ. The knowledge of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentile household was obtained specifically from the evidence of the speaking in tongues. Apart from this evidence, of course, Peter's Jewish Christian companions could hardly have been convinced of the event's parity with Pentecost.

In chapter 11 Peter tells the church at Jerusalem what had happened at Caesarea (as previously referred to). Peter here stresses that the Holy Spirit had come upon the household of Cornelius. It should be noted here that Peter does not say that the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius' household "Just as He always does with everyone." Had Peter said this it would have to be concluded that in the early church the Holy Spirit was always, or at least, normally, given with the manifestations present at Pentecost. Is the explanation, here, perhaps, instead that the only parallel Peter knows to give to Caesarea is what had happened "at the beginning" thus reinforcing the fact that outside Pentecost itself the Pentecost manifestation were not normative, perhaps not known?
Disciples at Ephesus (Ac 19:1-17)

The last instance of speaking in tongues recorded in the book of Acts occurs in chapter 19 verses 1-17 where Paul, on discovering a company of Ephesian disciples who were not acquainted with the Holy Spirit, proceeds to instruct them and thereafter baptize them. "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (19:6).

This passage is most frequently cited to silence the objection that speaking in tongues occurred exclusively in apostolic times, and only for the verification of the promised gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles (ch.10) as well as to the Jews (ch. 2). This seems to be a proper interpretation for here glossolalia occurred almost a generation after Pentecost and half generation after the events in Caesarea. However, this passage is also used to prove that glossolalia is normative and must occur if a person is truly baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The teaching of this passage is that the Ephesians lacked the Holy Spirit not because of their failure to ask intentionally for tongues, but because they unintentionally had been baptized into John's baptism rather than into Jesus Christ's.

It is also stated here as in the other instances where people were baptized with the Holy Spirit, that the evidence in addition to glossolalia is power for witnessing: "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months" (19:8).

If there is biblical proof that speaking in tongues is required as the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then it seems that the recorded cases in the New Testament (or at least in the book of Acts where the age of the Spirit is ushered in) of people baptized with the Holy Spirit would mention that they spoke in tongues. It should be pointed out, however, that wherever people are baptized with the Holy Spirit there is always mention of the evidence of power.

Who are some of these people who were baptized with the Holy spirit but did not speak with tongues (at least there is no record of it in the biblical account)?

In Acts 4:31 it states:

"After they had prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

The same nine words are used here as in Acts 2:4: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit . . ." Yet there is not mention of tongues. Rather, the result of the filling of the Holy Spirit was that they spoke God's Word "boldly" (=with power).

Another case is the passage concerning Stephen. "This proposal pleased the whole group. they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit . . ." (6:5). The rest of the sixth chapter and the entire seventh chapter of Acts are given to Stephen, the Spirit-filled deacon, and there is not a hint of speaking in tongues, but there is of power (6:8).
Barnabas, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit: "He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith and a great number of people were brought to the Lord" (11:24). Barnabas is repeatedly mentioned but no word is said about him speaking in tongues. However there is mention of power for witnessing: "And a great number of people were brought to the Lord" as a result of the fact that he was a man "full of the Holy Spirit and faith."

There are numerous places in the New Testament (other than in the book of Acts) where people were filled with the Holy Spirit without a hint that they spoke in tongues. In each instance, however, there is mention of power of witness in their lives. Some of these are: John the Baptist (Lk 1:13-16), Elizabeth (1:41-42), Zacharias (1:67), Jesus (3:21-22).

In the book of Acts the phrase, "filled with the Holy Spirit," is used six times. In every case except one it is explicitly told that those filled with the Holy Spirit witnessed for God. In the single exception, Acts 13:52 states concerning the disciples at Antioch of Pisidia, "And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit." And it is quite reasonable to suppose that they, too, received power and witnessed for the Lord when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Four other times in the book of Acts the slightly different phrase, "full of the Holy Spirit," is used. Two of these times the phrase, "full of the Holy Spirit," is used about the deacons in the sixth chapter of Acts, and there are three separate instances where people in the book of Acts are reported to have been "full of the Holy Spirit." And in every single case it is told about their soul-winning testimony! Stephen's included wonders and signs as well (6:8).

It is significant that the greatest evangelists that God has given to His people down through the centuries have testified that they have been filled or baptized by the Holy Spirit without talking in tongues. Some of these are: D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, C. G. Finney, John Wesley, Whitfield, Spurgeon, J. Wilber Chapman, Gipsy Smith, Billy Sunday, George Truett, Charles Fuller, Hudson Taylor and Billy Graham. These men, remarkably used of God in soul winning, have never talked in tongues. Does anyone dare accuse these godly men of not having been baptized with the Holy Spirit because they did not speak in tongues?

The following statement was made by R. A. Torrey and seems to be quite biblical in view of the preceding study:

"There is not one single passage in the Bible, either in the Old Testament or the New Testament, where the baptism of the Holy Spirit is spoken of, where it is not connected with the testimony or service . . . The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not primarily for the purpose of making us individually holy. I do not say that it is not the work of the Holy Spirit to make us holy, and it is only through His work that anyone of us can become holy. I do say, however, that it is not the primary purpose of the baptism with the Holy Spirit to make us holy. The primary purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to equip us and fit us for service."1
Glossolalia then was one of the evidences of the baptism, not the only evidence. Power for witness, however, seems to the major or normative evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Also it seems that in the Pauline epistles the infallible sign of spiritual fullness is moral and religious (Gal 5:22-6:2; Eph 5:18-20; Col 3:16).

What is the purpose of glossolalia in the instances recorded in the book of Acts?

The coming if the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost was mainly to Jews; in fact Luke says that there were Jews "from every nation under heaven" (Ac 2:5). One can assume that the 5,000 people mentioned as being saved in Acts 4:4 were mainly Jews. And the same deduction can be made for the "crowd" mentioned in Acts 4:32.

The coming if the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles at Caesarea was mainly to Gentiles (Ac 10:1-44) but Jews were present (10:45).

And the people who received the Holy Spirit in Samaria were obviously Samaritans, not Jews.

The groups upon whom the Holy Spirit came as related in Acts 14:19-23 were obviously Gentiles. In fact, it was the Jews who refused to listen to Paul's message and even tried to stone him to death outside Lystra (14:8-19).

The coming of the Holy Spirit to the disciples of John the Baptist (Ac 19:1-17) was to Jewish men. This deduction is made on the basis that the disciples of John went out to preach before there had been any offer of the Gospel made to the Gentiles. The groups upon whom the Holy Spirit fell were mainly Gentiles as is evidenced by Paul's travels through Asia Minor which was populated mainly by Gentiles. This, however, is not to say that Jews were not among his converts.

Also the ministry of Paul recorded in chapters 20-28 of Acts was mainly to the Gentiles.

The interpretation of these observations above shall be attempted. It should be noted that in the first part of the book of Acts (chapters 1-7) the ones ministered to were mainly Jews. On only one occasion in these chapters were tongues spoken. The next time tongues were spoken was at the occasion of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles but "they of the circumcision" were also present. The next time tongues were spoken was the occasion with John the Baptist's disciples who unquestionably were Jews.

What is the significance of tongues being spoken when the Holy Spirit came upon the Jews (or when they were present) and not being spoken when the recipients were mainly Gentiles? Furthermore why did they not speak in tongues on those occasions immediately following Pentecost when even larger groups of Jews (mainly) were saved?

In reference to the first question it should be pointed out that, according to Apostle Paul, the Jews were a people who sought for a sign to be assured of the working of God (1 Co 1:22). A sign was a miracle or a phenomenon. The first of such was given to Noah following the flood:
"And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant I am making between you and Me and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between the earth and Me’" (Ge 9:12-13).

This token—the rainbow—was a sign between God and His people that He would never again destroy the earth by water (Ge 9:15).

This idea of a sign given to show that God was working is similarly seen in the giving of the plagues by Moses upon Egypt.

"If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second" (Ex 4:8).

The sign referred to here had to do with the changing of Moses' rod into a serpent and the latter making his hand leprous then healing it.

Again God said that His leading out of Egypt would be a perpetual sign to His people (Ex 13:9). Moses warned his people of false prophets arising and they too would present signs (Dt 13:1-5) but they were to turn away from such signs. This matter of God giving sign continues throughout the Old Testament. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, God told Joshua to instruct one man from each of the tribes to place a stone in the river "to serve as a sign among you" (Jos 4:6). Gideon asked the Lord for a sign (Jdg 6:17) to assure him that God was with him in going against the Midianites. Again, Eli, the priest, was told that his two sons would die in the same day as a sign God gave Jonathan a sign to show him that the Philistines would be delivered into his hand (1 Sa 14:10).

Hezekiah looked for a sign from the Lord that he would heal him (2 Ki 20:8). Isaiah told Hezekiah later of another sign from God which had to do with the coming Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom and the escape of Judah (Isa 37:21-32). Even the coming of the Messiah by way of a virgin was a sign to the people (7:14). Evidently the matter of God giving signs is going to continue even up to the end. This is seen in Isaiah’s prophesy which has to do with the end time when He says, "I will set a sign among them" (66:19).

NOTES

1