

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU (3)

Acts 19:1-7

I want to tell you about three individuals with whom you may not be familiar, each of whom, in their own ways, played a key role in one of the most important movements in the Christian faith in the 20th and 21st centuries. Their names are Charles, Agnes, and William. The movement (or “flavor” of the Christian faith) with which they are identified is Pentecostal Christianity, taking its name from what happened in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus in great power on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus.

What sets Pentecostal Christians apart from other Christian traditions is their belief that the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as experienced by the believers in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, accompanied by the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (languages) not known by the speakers, is to be the experience of every Christian. Pentecostal Christians believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace, subsequent to conversion (meaning that it most often takes place sometime after a person comes to faith in Christ), and always evidenced by glossolalia (speaking in other tongues or languages). You can be a Christian without this baptism of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals acknowledge, but you can't be a truly spiritual Christian without it and the accompanying experience of speaking in tongues, as the first Christians did on the Day of Pentecost.

Speaking in tongues, as described in Acts 2 and elsewhere in the New Testament (particularly 1 Corinthians 12 and 14), was mostly unheard of at the beginning of the 20th century. Based on his study of the Book of Acts, Charles Parham, a Bible teacher in Topeka, Kansas, began teaching that speaking in tongues was to be the initial and conclusive evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a person's life, even though he had never experienced it himself.

On New Year's Day 1901, one of his students, Agnes Ozman, taking his teaching to heart, asked Parham to lay his hands on her in the biblical fashion so that she might receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What happened, she said, was this: “As his hands were laid upon my head ... the Holy Spirit fell upon me and I began to speak in tongues, glorifying God. I talked in several languages, and it was clearly manifest when a new dialect was spoken.... It was as if rivers of living waters were proceeding from my innermost being.... I was the first one to speak in tongues in the Bible school.... I told them not to seek for tongues but to seek for the Holy (Spirit).” (Quoted in F. Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 120)

One historian of the modern Pentecostal movement writes: “Although Agnes Ozman was not the first person in modern times to speak in ‘tongues,’ she was the first known person to have received such an experience as a result of specifically seeking a baptism of the Holy Spirit with the expectation of speaking in tongues. From this time [on], Pentecostal believers were to teach that the ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ should be sought and that it would be received with the evidence of ‘tongues.’ For this reason the experience of Agnes Ozman is designated

as the beginning of the Modern Pentecostal Revival” (Klaude Kendrick, *The Promise Fulfilled: A History of the Modern Pentecostal Movement*, 52-53, quoted in Bruner, 120).

Agnes was not alone for long. Soon other students at the Bible school and Charles Parham himself began to speak in tongues as well.

By 1903 Charles Parham wasn't in Kansas anymore. He had moved to Houston, where he trained a young African-American Holiness minister named William Seymour. Seymour accepted a call to lead a black Holiness mission in Los Angeles in January 1906. But his teaching that speaking in tongues always accompanied baptism in the Holy Spirit got him fired almost immediately. He began conducting meetings in a home, and on April 9, 1906, both Seymour and others in attendance began to speak in tongues, as the first believers had on the Day of Pentecost. Word spread and the crowds grew, forcing Seymour to move his meetings to a rundown old church building at 312 Azusa Street, where the Pentecostal movement caught fire. It went viral (via the “social media” of word of mouth and newspapers), sweeping first across America and then around the world. The Azusa Street Revival, as it is known, is generally viewed as the genesis of Pentecostal Christianity as we know it today.

Theologian Wayne Grudem defines the word *Pentecostal* in his *Systematic Theology* this way: “*Pentecostal* refers to any denomination or group that traces its historical origin back to the Pentecostal revival that began in the U. S. in 1901 and that holds to the doctrinal positions (a) that baptism in the Holy Spirit is ordinarily an event subsequent to conversion, ... (b) that baptism in the Holy Spirit is made evident by the sign of speaking in tongues, and (c) that all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are to be sought and used today” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 763). The term applies not only to denominations (like the Assemblies of God, for example) and other Pentecostal groups, but to individual believers as well who hold these doctrinal beliefs.

Related to the word *Pentecostal* is the word *charismatic*, which comes from the New Testament word *charisma* and refers to the gifts – spiritual gifts – that the Holy Spirit graciously and sovereignly gives to particular Christians, according to His (God's) good pleasure. Paul writes of these spiritual gifts or *charismata* in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, and Ephesians 4. The name *Charismatic*, Grudem says, “refers to any groups (or people) that trace their historical origin to the charismatic renewal movement” that took root in “the 1960s and 1970s,” that “seek to practice all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament (including prophecy, healing, miracles, tongues [and others]), and [that] allow differing viewpoints on whether baptism in the Holy Spirit is subsequent to conversion and whether [speaking in] tongues is a sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit” (Grudem, ;763).

I'm sure this is old hat for some of you. It is familiar territory. For others of us, terms like baptism in the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal, and charismatic may be new and even a tad confusing.

Last Sunday, I shared with you a portion of the EPC Position Paper on the Holy Spirit, adopted by the General Assembly of our denomination in 1986. Here is another excerpt from the Position Paper:

“Q. Is the EPC charismatic?”

“A. If you mean, are we Pentecostal, the answer is no. If you mean, are we open to the gifts [*charismata*] of the Holy Spirit, the answer is yes.

“We believe that the word ‘charismatic’ should not be limited to specific manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues. However, ‘charismatic’ does refer to the fact that every Christian receives a gift, or gifts, from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11).” (EPC *Position Paper on the Holy Spirit*, Adopted by the 6th General Assembly of the EPC, June 1986).

In other words, while Pentecostal Christianity is defined and identified by its emphasis on the gift of speaking in tongues as the essential sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit, and most Christians who call themselves charismatics (neo-Pentecostals is another term for them) have a similar emphasis on speaking in tongues and other more dramatic spiritual gifts like healing and miracles, there is a sense – a *biblical* sense that accords with the teaching of the New Testament – that every Christian is a charismatic Christian (whether or not you ever speak in other tongues or languages), because as a follower of Jesus, as a member of the body of Christ, you have received some gift or gifts (some *charisma* or *charismata* from the Holy Spirit to be used in ministry for the glory of God and for the good of others, to benefit and build up the fellowship of the church or to meet some need in our local community or the larger world, in the name of Jesus. We’ll talk more about these spiritual gifts and their purpose another time.

DID YOU RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Before any more time passes, let’s look briefly at the opening verses of Acts 19, which is one of the proof-tests to which Pentecostal Christians appeal in support of their belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace, separate from and subsequent to conversion or salvation. On his third missionary journey, Paul arrived in Ephesus, the leading city of the Roman province of Asia (in modern-day Turkey). There he found a group of 12 men whom Luke calls “disciples.” Whose disciples or what kind of disciples Luke does not immediately say. That they were serious and devout in their religious faith seems to be beyond question. But it wasn’t clear to Paul at first exactly what they believed, or if they knew and understood the gospel. Hence his question in verse 2 that has become the standard “Pentecostal question:” “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

It turns out that these Ephesian disciples had received only the baptism of John (the Baptist), which was a baptism of repentance from sin, not a sign of faith in Jesus and new life through Him. They knew of John’s call to repentance and his announcement of the coming Messiah, but evidently they did not know that the Messiah had in fact come. They did not know the good news of the gospel. They did not know about Jesus and His saving love. They did not know about His teaching and healing ministries. They did not know of His suffering, His death on the cross, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. They had not yet come to a living, personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because, until Paul shared the gospel message with them, they did not know Jesus.

Repentance, the act of turning away from sin and turning to God, is a necessary part of Christian conversion (or salvation or being born again). It is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin, to show us our need of God's grace, to move us to turn away from our sins, and to give us the gift of faith to believe the gospel:

- To believe that we are sinners who desperately need a Savior;
- To believe in Jesus as our Savior;
- To believe that Jesus is the only one who can save us from our sins and the hell we deserve because of them;
- To place our trust in Him to do for us what we can never do for ourselves.

Which He has done in His suffering and death for us on the cross.

Important as it is, repentance by itself is not enough. It was not enough to save these 12 men of Ephesus. Sorrow for sin will never save you – it cannot save you – unless and until it is united to a living, personal faith in Jesus and His saving work for you.

I believe our Pentecostal brothers and sisters (and they *are* our sisters and brothers in Christ, even if we disagree on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit) have misunderstood both the spiritual condition of these Ephesian disciples and Paul's question to them in verse 2. I believe Paul's question was intended to discern whether or not these men were true believers in the Lord Jesus. As it turns out, they were not. Not yet.

Though there are a few exceptions in the Book of Acts, such as the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost in Acts 2 and the conversion of the first Samaritan Christians in Acts 8, which was another decisive moment in the spread of the gospel across religious and racial boundaries, the normal and normative way God works is that we receive the gift – the person – of the Holy Spirit at the time of our conversion. At the moment we are born again. At the instant we are made spiritually alive in Christ. *Whether it is accompanied by the gift of speaking in tongues or not.* The baptism or indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer may include the gift of speaking in tongues. Or it may not. To insist that it should or must always be accompanied by the gift of tongues, as our Pentecostal brothers and sisters do, is, I believe, contrary to the teaching of the Bible. I'm just giving it to you straight.

This is not to say that you (or any Christian believer) should not or cannot have a deepening devotion to God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life. I pray that you do. I pray that you will. Nor is it to say that you should not or cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit on many occasions as you yield to His gracious work in you again and again. I pray that you may be. I pray that you will be.

If you are interested in learning more about the Holy Spirit and, in particular, what the Bible teaches about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, I have one very large book and one small book to recommend to you. The large book is Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*, which deals with much, much more than the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The little book is John Stott's classic *Baptism & Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*. Small in size but rich and deep in insight.

As for the 12 Ephesian disciples, their baptism in the Holy Spirit was not a separate experience of grace that took place after their conversion to faith in Christ. No. What took place in Acts 19 was their conversion itself. The Holy Spirit came upon them when Paul laid his hands on them because they had come to believe the gospel – because they had now come to believe in Jesus, their Savior and ours.

The Pentecostal revival that began around the beginning of the 20th century, a revival that includes the stories of Charles Parham, Agnes Ozman, William Seymour, and millions of other sincere Christian men and women, has helped to open our eyes and minds and hearts to understand more clearly the ways the Holy Spirit works today. In this we are blessed, even if we see some things differently than our Pentecostal brothers and sisters. One thing I know for sure is that Jesus loves them the same as He loves us.

The Holy Spirit is your birthright as a Christian, as a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ. When you receive Jesus as Savior and Lord of your life, you receive the gift – the person – of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn't ordinarily call attention to Himself. On some occasions, like the Day of Pentecost, He does. His main mission, though, is to draw our attention to the Savior – to Jesus, God the Son – and to exalt Him in our lives, in the church, and in the world.

You don't need the gift of speaking in tongues to know that the Holy Spirit is both with you and in you. It is not a litmus test of your spirituality. Nor is it given to every Christian. If the Lord chooses to give you the gift of tongues, receive it with a thankful heart, and let God show you how to use it to glorify Him, to grow in your relationship with Him, and to bless others in the church.

Whatever the case, rejoice that your life is in God's hands and that His gifts and grace are sufficient for every need at every moment in every circumstance, because *He* – our triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – *is sufficient*.

Lord, let it be so, to the glory of Your name. Amen.