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The Baptism of the Holy Spirit: What Does it Mean?

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I. Introduction

Today there is a controversy over the concept of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a controversy associated with the Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is generally an experience that a believer passes through subsequent to conversion, and that it is related to speaking in tongues; others do not agree with them.

In this paper I will attempt to explain as carefully as possible the two positions. I leave aside the important question of whether speaking in tongues is a gift only for the apostolic age, or for this age also.



II. The Pentecostal View

The “Pentecostal view” is held, by and large, not only by the Pentecostal denominations but by most Christians who are associated with the charismatic movement, a movement putting emphasis on gifts of the Spirit and speaking in tongues in particular.

A. The Work of the Holy Spirit

According to the Pentecostal view, most churches today lack the real working of the Holy Spirit. The churches are weak, the Christians are almost dead, because the Holy Spirit is left out. The Holy Spirit, after all, can be grieved (Eph. 4:30). By contrast, with the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of Christians, they will have the power (2 Tim. 1:7), the love (Gal. 5:22–23), and the reality (2 Cor. 3:18) which they seek. Pentecostals are very mindful of this broad subject of the work of the Spirit in believers. and for this emphasis the whole church can only be grateful. However, the great majority of Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit becomes fully and most powerfully active in a believer only when he has been

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“baptized with the Holy Spirit” in an experience after conversion. This experience is accompanied by the “sign” of speaking in tongues.

Let us see how they support this doctrine from Scripture. If, so it is reasoned, we are to find the answer to how to regain the lost power of the church, we will do well to follow the pattern of the book of Acts. The disciples were men of power and bold witness after the Day of Pentecost, whereas they had hid behind closed doors before (John 20:19, 26 vs. Acts 4:13). The difference was in the coming of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were Christians. i.e., believers in Jesus Christ, before Pentecost, for they had seen the risen Lord. But they were in the same position as most Christians today—without power. The remedy was for them to be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) after their conversion. So too today. Disciples “receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon” them—power to be witnesses (Acts 1:8, 4:33).

B. The Place of the Miraculous

According to the Pentecostal, this witness is powerful not only because of the boldness of speech of the witnesses (Acts 4:13, 31) and the movement of the Spirit in the hearts of the hearers (Acts 2:37), but because of the “signs accompanying (Mark 16:17), particularly miraculous healing. The New Testament writers do appeal to the confirmatory evidence of signs performed by ministers of the gospel:

...while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will. –Heb. 2:4.

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience. with signs and wonders and mighty works. –2 Cor. 12:12.

...by the power of signs and wonders. by the power of the Holy Spirit. so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. –Rom. 15:19.

The signs authenticated the apostleship of the workers. Furthermore, in Acts there are several examples of hearers moved or arrested by the miraculous signs, and the subsequent use of these opportunities by the apostles. We have the cases of the speaking in tongues at Pentecost (Acts 2:6–21), the healing of the lame man by Peter and John (Acts 3:9–13, Philip’s miracles in Samaria (Acts 8:5–8:13, 18–19), Paul’s blinding of Elymas (Acts 13:9–12), miracles at Iconium (Acts 14:3), Lystra (Acts 4:8–11, 15–18), and Ephesus (Acts 19:11–17).

Here is a matter for any churchman to take seriously. Has God indeed ceased for all time to give, e.g., gifts of healing to His church? Or are the Pentecostals right in criticizing the

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almost total lack of miraculous signs in the denominations? This may well be cause for repentance and humility among other churches, all the more because Pentecostals are not only teaching that miracles should be a part of the church's ministry, but demonstrating it.

C. The difference that the baptism of the Holy Spirit makes

Let us return to the main argument. The Pentecostal position is that, as the twelve disciples had to be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a post-conversion experience in order to be empowered for service, so must Christians today. In their zeal some Pentecostals emphasize the importance of this post-conversion experience so much that the outsider may receive the impression that the Holy Spirit is just not at work at all among non-charismatic Christians. Actually, according to Scripture the Holy Spirit is at work in every Christian believer; "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3), and "anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9). The Spirit is at work in regeneration, since every believer is "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5), and whatever fruits are manifest in a believer's life are the work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

What, then, is the "extra" which a Pentecostal considers the result of a second experience? For one thing, the Spirit-filled believer has power for service and witness. However, it must be admitted that one unacquainted with the Holy Spirit may have a certain power, e.g. Apollos' "bold speaking" at Ephesus, "though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25–26). The difference is rather one of full freedom and effectiveness in the Lord's service. It is my impression that many times the distinction is viewed as one between, on the one hand, the unconscious and subconscious work of the Spirit in every believer's life, in a way independent of his conscious assent, and, on the other hand, a more conscious and willful direction of the Spirit in addition in those baptized with the Holy Spirit. In particular, only by a certain conscious submission to the Holy Spirit may one exercise the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (e.g., miracle-working, healing, exorcism, prophecy, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues); therefore these appear only among those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

The difference can be put in other ways. Jesus, in promising the coming of the Spirit, said, "[the world] neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you"¹ (John 14:17). "With you" and "in you" are emphatic. Jesus was speaking

¹ The Greek is *par' humin menei, kai en humin estai*. There is a textual difficulty at the crucial point, in that some manuscripts have "is in you" (*en humin estin*) instead of "will be in you." If the original text had *estin*, the passage is not about the Pentecostal distinction at all. Still, the Pentecostal position as a

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of the role of the Spirit in the disciples' lives before and after Pentecost. Pentecostals see this difference mirrored in the lives of believers today, before and after their personal Pentecost, when they are baptized with the Holy Spirit. The Protestant view, of which I will say more later, considers this difference in John 14:17 rather as a difference between the Old Testament and New Testament dispensations.

The Pentecostal may explain the difference between “with you” and “in you” in still another way. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 13) —this is conversion.² Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8)—this is the Pentecostal experience. The first baptism is in the work of regeneration, by which one is made new. For example, in 2 Cor. 5:17 we find “Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come”; and in Ephesians and Colossians, “You have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, ...” (Col. 3:9–10). However, there remains a second baptism, where Jesus Christ baptizes us with, or in, the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”). We see this distinction in Acts 8:16 in the case of the Samaritans. “For it [the Holy Spirit] had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

whole does not really depend upon the reading, and “with you” vs. “in you” is still a convenient way to understand the distinction that the Pentecostals make.

² I am aware that Pentecostals are divided on the interpretation of I Cor. 12:13. Does it apply to all Christians, or not? Some men, e.g., Harold Horton, (*The Gifts of the Spirit*, p. 39-41) go to considerable trouble to justify an interpretation which applies the verse only to Spirit-baptized Christians. The “all” of 1 Cor. 12:13 refers only to the Corinthians, those who had received the Holy Spirit, those who possessed spiritual gifts. It is they who are baptized by one Spirit. It is the “one” in I Cor. 12:13 that is emphasized, not “all.” Thus the text may not be taken to refer to all believers indiscriminately. So goes Horton’s argument.

However, in order to interpret I Cor. 12:13 in this restrictive sense, Mr. Horton himself admits that he must come to the passage with a doctrine of the baptism that he has derived from other sources, e.g., Acts. Moreover, this interpretation becomes involved in insuperable difficulties if it is carried through consistently. The crucial question is “Are other believers, not baptized with the Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal sense, in the body of Christ? If so how did they get there?” The Apostle’s point in 1 Cor. 12:13 is surely that baptism is the work of this Spirit. If some members of the body gain entrance by another way, the whole figure of the unified body (I Cor. 12:14ff), unified by the Spirit, collapses. The point truly is that it is one Spirit baptizing us, and no one is in the body by any other means. The logical conclusion must be that non-Pentecostal believers are not in the body of Christ, which is the church (Col. 1:18)! Now, clearly, one cannot stop without having excluded these non-Pentecostal believers from every one of the blessings of salvation (e.g., cf. Eph. 1:22–23, 3:6,10, 16). And how does one deal with Eph. 2:13–21, which clearly indicates that the Gentiles are in Christ’s body in virtue of Christ’s death on the cross? There is no indication in Eph. 2 of a further need for Spirit-baptism, as a thing distinct from Christ’s work. Thus this interpretation cannot, I believe, be carried through to all of Scripture.

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This leads us to a consideration of the texts in Acts that are used in support of the position of the Pentecostals. Do we see instances of the baptism of the Holy Spirit taking place subsequent to conversion in the early church? The argument is, "Yes, we do." Acts 8 is the first recorded case after Pentecost. The Samaritans were converted under Philip's ministry, but received the Holy Spirit only when the Apostles had come to them and laid on hands. A second instance is in Acts 19. Apollos "had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25). Apollos was a Christian, for he knew "the way of the Lord." But, like most Christians today, he had been baptized with water at conversion—the baptism of John—without having received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Priscilla and Aquila, the early-church equivalents of the Pentecostals, "took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately." (Acts 18:26). They introduced him to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This accounts for the peculiar condition of the disciples at Ephesus, where Apollos had preached. They too had been baptized "into John's baptism" (Acts 19:3) and did not have the Holy Spirit. So they received the Holy Spirit at the hands of Paul, subsequent to their conversion under Apollos.

D. Speaking in tongues

So far I have left to one side the question of the relation of speaking in tongues to the baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, the question is really not separate in the minds of Pentecostals. They see speaking in tongues as the natural accompaniment of the presence of the Holy Spirit in a body of believers, and hence the lack of tongue-speaking in other denominations is more or less conclusive evidence that these people lack the Holy Spirit in power. Scripturally, this attitude is based on the correlation in Acts between the descent of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues; experientially, it is based on the evidence of churches around them—relative lifelessness in all the churches where there is no speaking in tongues, life in those that speak in tongues.³

Within the Pentecostal church there are at least two major opinions about the relation between speaking in tongues and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The majority of Pentecostals regard tongue-speaking as the physical evidence of the baptism with the

³ Of course, not everyone sees the contrast in such black-and-white terms. However, some Pentecostals see the contrast very clearly (from their own point of view) and consider it as weighty evidence for their doctrine. Their individual attitudes depend, I suspect, a good deal on what their experience with different churches has been.

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Holy Spirit; others regard it as an evidence. For the latter group, tongue-speaking, though accompanying the baptism as a rule, may very well be absent.⁴

Another general opinion among Pentecostals is that the sign of tongues and the gift of tongues are different things; though once again there are some who argue strongly for the unity of the two.”⁵ Those who do distinguish explain the matter thus: “The speaking in tongues in this instance [the baptism with the Holy Spirit] is the same in essence as the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:4-10, 28), but different in purpose and use.”⁶ The gift of tongues is for edifying the church in public worship (1 Cor. 14:5); the sign of tongues, for confirming the presence of the Holy Spirit in the newly Spirit-baptized believer. The gift of tongues is exercised regularly in church, while the sign of tongues need occur only once, when the believer first receives the Spirit. However, a believer who receives the sign of tongues may continue to speak in tongues privately, for his own edification (1 Cor. 14:4), and is generally encouraged to do so. Not everyone has the gift, but everyone should have the sign.

In any case, one may, in the ordinary course of events, expect speaking in tongues as the initial sign of baptism with the Holy Spirit. This Pentecostals infer from the examples: Pentecost (Acts 2:4), Samaria (Acts 8:17—speaking in tongues is inferred from the fact that Simon saw the effects of the Spirit), Caesarea (Acts 10:46), and Ephesus (Acts 19:16).

These are the main beliefs of Pentecostals that distinguish them from other denominations. Nevertheless, as Hoekema has pointed out (op. cit., p. 35–36) the baptism with the Holy Spirit, especially during the historical beginnings of the Pentecostal movement, was connected with the doctrine of instantaneous sanctification, still found in some Pentecostal churches.

III. The Classical Protestant View

Now I will explain what I shall call the classical Protestant position (though, of course, it is not really common to all Protestants). In particular, I will consider alternative explanations of the passages used to support the Pentecostal position.

A. The meaning of Pentecost

First of all, according to the Protestant view, the events of the Day of Pentecost did not properly concern only the disciples, those in the upper room. It was rather a matter of the inauguration of a new age, brought about by the giving of the Holy Spirit once and for

⁴ Anthony A. Hoekema, *What About Tongue-Speaking*, p. 37.

⁵ Cf. T. J. McCrossan, *Speaking with Other Tongues – Sign or Gift – Which?*

⁶ Hoekema, p. 38, quoted from...*In the Last Days*. p. 31.

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all to the church. God poured out the Spirit in fullness upon the church, in contrast to the not-so-fun and not-so-universal work of the Spirit in Old Testament times. In this sense, under the Old Testament dispensation, the Spirit may be said to be with the disciples (John 14:17), as we have seen, and even to all his servants on occasion (Luke 1:15, 41, 67). But on the Day of Pentecost, he was given to all Christians continually. He has been given to the church and to all believers; no second experience is necessary. John R. W. Stott has given an admirable exposition of the distinctiveness of the new age in *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 4ff.

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Thus, the baptism with the Holy Spirit may not, after the Day of Pentecost, be separated from a man's entrance into the church which has received the Spirit (Eph. 1:23). There is one baptism (Eph. 4:5), the baptism of the believer by Jesus Christ with (or in) the Holy Spirit into Jesus Christ (or the body of Christ). It is quite proper to call Jesus Christ the baptizer in one place (John 1:33) and the person into whom we are baptized in another (Gal. 3:27) because it is indeed Jesus Christ who moves us to himself, and a single figure is not really rich enough to contain the mystery. We will return to this point in making a final decision between the two positions.

Speaking in tongues, in particular, is to be regarded as a gift of the Spirit, which we should not expect everyone to possess (I Cor. 12:30). According to the Protestant view the distinction between sign and gift does not exist and is an imposition on Scripture to extricate Pentecostals from an untenable position. Be that as it may, a Protestant may not use this excuse to justify what, to Pentecostal eyes, is a very dire lack of spiritual gifts among the churches. In pointing out all the evidences of speaking in tongues in Acts, the Pentecostal is making a very real point, that the paucity of spiritual gifts today is cause for real soul-searching and re-evaluation. However, the dispute at hand is a matter of exegesis, not of the spiritual state of the churches.

B. The events of Acts 8 and 19

Briefly, the Protestant interpretation of Acts 8 and 19 is that in both cases there were special circumstances. In Acts 19 the disciples were not Christians at all: they had still to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, a water baptism (Acts 19:5). Apollos knew "the way of the Lord" in the sense that John preached it, the announcement of a coming Messiah; but from the text of Acts we cannot tell whether he even knew about the crucifixion and the resurrection. In Acts 8 the situation was one with Christians. God, through circumstances, caused the Apostles themselves to confirm and authorize the believers. That gave them status, so to speak, before the congregation of Jerusalem.

John Stott has given a more thorough exposition of these matters in *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 9-12. His conclusion: "We must insist that both the timing

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and the means of the gift were atypical; neither a two-stage experience, nor the laying-on of hands is the norm for receiving the Spirit today” (p. 12). Here is the conversation that might follow between a Pentecostal and a Protestant of the classical view:

“But,” says the Pentecostal, “this is not altogether satisfactory. How can one be so sure that these things in Acts are not indeed ‘the norm for receiving the Spirit today?’”

The Protestant might reply, “On the basis of doctrinal passages in the epistles. The doctrinal teaching is that one receives the Holy Spirit when one receives Christ.”

“Very well. But if experience can depart from the norm then, why not indeed all the more now? There are special circumstances today, as there were then—namely, that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has not been clearly and forcefully taught and lived out in the churches. Is this special circumstance reason enough for departure from the norm? How can we tell? Only by looking at what is actually going on in the churches.

“The ‘norm’ is, indeed, for every Christian to receive the Holy Spirit at conversion, and this took place almost universally in the New Testament Days, which is why there is, in the epistles, no mark of controversy over the question of baptism with the Holy Spirit. But we have fallen away from this norm. Protestants may still argue that the Holy Spirit is present in their churches, but they must show, by evidence today, that He is present in a way that He was not present at Samaria before the Apostles came.”

The Protestant might reply as follows: “The ‘extraordinary circumstances’ in Acts were of a different kind than the ‘extraordinary circumstances’ today in the churches. In Acts, it was a matter of a first-time event, the first conversion of the Samaritans, which called, according to God’s own plan, for special dealing. But now, it is certainly not in God’s plan to delay the giving of the Holy Spirit. Can the Spirit really be delayed by man’s ignorance? In Acts the Holy Spirit was certainly given to people who did not know very much about Him (e.g., Cornelius and his friends). He was given by grace, not because of anything they, the believers, had done or learned.

“This principle, the principle of the complete sovereignty of God in giving the Holy Spirit, is never contradicted in the New Testament. And it is because of this principle that I take the stand that the Holy Spirit is given today to every believer. In other words, it is never the inadequacy of the believers, today any more than in Samaria, that determines whether the Holy Spirit is given (though the spiritual

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state of believers may well influence the exercise of spiritual gifts). We can expect that, the extraordinary ‘firsts’ of the New Testament times having passed, God will now give the Spirit in the normative way, i.e., at conversion. Another possible explanation is that there occurred a sort of overlap between the New Testament and Old Testament dispensations, so that we have, in effect, Old Testament-type believers appearing here and there in the first few years after Pentecost, but not after, say, 40 A.D.”

Thus, each side has its particular way of looking at Acts 8 and 19. There is yet another possible position, one which I incline to. It seems to me that, if the doctrinal passages are truly normative, a separation between conversion and baptism with the Holy Spirit simply cannot occur after the inauguration of the New Testament Age, and therefore did not occur in Acts 8 and 19. The problem is resolved if we consider the fact that Luke was not thinking of the events at Samaria in terms of the Pentecostal-Protestant controversy, but from an unproblematic viewpoint. And, as F. F. Bruce observes in his *Commentary of the Book of Acts*, p. 77,

We must distinguish the gift of the Spirit from the gifts of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself, bestowed by the Father through the Messiah; the gifts of the Spirit are those spiritual faculties which the Spirit imparts, “dividing to each one severally even as he will” (1 Cor. 12:11). Now it is true, as has frequently been printed out, that Luke thinks of the receiving the Spirit in particular relation to the impressive outward manifestations which so commonly accompanied that inward experience in the apostolic age; but the free gift which is promised in v. 38 [of Acts 2] to those who repent and are baptized is the Holy Spirit Himself.

Therefore, in Acts 8 Luke may well have described the receiving of gifts of the Spirit as “receiving the Holy Spirit” and have said simply, “It had not yet fallen on any of them [before the apostles came].” In fact, the believers already possessed the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), and had already been baptized with the Holy Spirit in the sense of 1 Cor. 12:13. Still, to the external eye, and the eye of Luke, He “had not yet fallen on any of them,” for they exhibited no miraculous signs. When Peter and John came, the Samaritans received spiritual gifts, and were perhaps filled with the Holy Spirit, but not baptized with the Holy Spirit. So much for Acts 8.

Generally, according to the Protestant view, a post-conversion experience with the Holy Spirit is a “filling with the Holy Spirit.” One may be filled with the Holy Spirit several times:

“And they were all filled (Gr. *eplesthsan*) with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2:4) “Then Peter, filled (*phestheis*) with the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 4:8) “And when they [the

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church] had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled (*eplesthdsan*) with the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 4:31).

All three are cases where there was, so to speak, a spiritual intensity: in Acts 2:4, Pentecost; in Acts 4:8, the crucial situation of Peter's answering to the Sanhedrin; in Acts 4:31, the church at prayer. Looking at the work of the Holy Spirit from a different point of view, Paul commanded us to be filled constantly: "...but he filled (*plerousthe*) with the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The present imperative "be filled" indicates that we are to be filled not as a once-for-all, complete act, but continually.

IV. Resolution

So, there are the two positions—the Pentecostal and the classical Protestant. Both agree that the Holy Spirit is the One who gives believers power and transforms them into the image of Christ. Both agree that today many believers do quench the Spirit. The question is, "How may His power be appropriated?" Pentecostals answer, "Be baptized with the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues; after the initial experience, exercise the gifts of the Spirit that you have been given," Protestants answer, "You have been baptized with the Holy Spirit into Christ. Now be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit." Or, seeing that the filling of the Holy Spirit is the work of God, not something we achieve by working ourselves into the proper mood, one might advise, "Look on what God has done and trust in Him to empower you in your work." Each side, as we have seen, has reasons for holding the view that it does.

Is the dispute only over whether to use the word "baptized" or "filled" in describing the same experience? Then it would not be very important. But I think that the difference in terminology indicates, in this case, a difference in attitude toward the experience. The theology of sanctification is inevitably affected by one's decision on the issue of "baptism" vs. "filling." Is belief in Christ sufficient for our sanctification, or is there something more to be done? Does one need a second, post-conversion experience to be a first-rate Christian? And are there two classes of Christians, one inferior to the other? The Pentecostal view cannot easily avoid making a church within the church by separating Christians into superior and inferior classes.

A. The unity of the church

Now I will explain my decision. I think that the classical Protestant view is right. It is necessary, for one thing, to preserve the unity of the church. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all ..." (Eph. 4:4–6). In particular there is one baptism. One might object that Paul's statement is addressed only to those believers who

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are baptized with the Holy Spirit. But such argumentation ignores the fact that the unity of one Spirit and one baptism is on the same level as unity in the “one hope to which we are called.” And surely all believers have the same hope of salvation in Christ.

B. Sanctification

Secondly, it seems to me that the Protestant view, rather than the Pentecostal, agrees with the Scriptural view on sanctification. It is Jesus Christ who sanctifies by his death and resurrection, who is, in fact, our sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30). Our sanctification is accomplished by seeing that Christ has accomplished it! Having died with Christ (Rom. 6:4), we now find our resources in Christ. “For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority” (Col. 2:9–10). “You have come to fulness,” involving a perfect participle, implies that the action is a past complete action whose effect extends to the present. The argument is that you need no additional esoteric teaching from the gnostics (or from whatever false teachers there are), because everything necessary for salvation, for sanctification, and for fulness of knowledge you have already obtained, in principle, when you received Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

It is not a large step, it seems to me, to apply this teaching of the Epistle to the Colossians to the Pentecostals. To those who today offer us a second experience, an initiation to the inner ring of Christianity, as the Gnostics claimed to initiate to an inner ring, we reply that in receiving Christ we have already received everything; in particular, we have received the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostal might reply, “Very true. But it is necessary to appropriate Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit as it is necessary to appropriate the other promises of the Christian life. The reason for lack of life among Christians is lack of appropriation of what truly belongs to them in Christ.”

Of course, everyone must agree that this is the problem with today’s Christians. Where, then, is the disagreement? It is a question of what one means by “appropriation.” Do we do something, or do we see, acknowledge, and rely on what God has already done in Christ? The Pentecostal, with his emphasis on prayer, or receptivity, or speaking in tongues, or yieldedness, can hardly avoid saying that one must do something. The next step is to say, or at least imply, that something has objectively, positionally changed about the believer when he “appropriates” the gift of the Holy Spirit. One progresses from one level to a higher level. The picture of Colossians is not a two-level Christianity, where one goes from one level to another by some spiritual experience. As a matter of fact, one of the purposes of the letter is to combat this very idea.

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There remains an objection from the Pentecostal side: “Paul did not distinguish two levels, because it was understood, in those days, that when people became believers, they would have hands laid on them to receive the Holy Spirit. Only later does two-level Christianity arise.” However, let it be said that if Pentecostals use that argument, there is nothing that Paul could say that would dissuade them from their own position. He could say bluntly that every Christian has the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), and that is no argument, because it was in fact true at the time he wrote it, though possibly not true now. They have made it impossible for Scripture to contradict their doctrine, by saying that every contrary Scriptural teaching on the Holy Spirit applies only to New Testament times.

However, one cannot do this, especially with doctrinal passages. Let me illustrate this from Galatians. Paul says, “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal. 3:26). It is not, “You all have faith, and, as a matter of fact, you are all sons of God,” but “you are sons of God by means of, in virtue of your faith.” If every believer happens to be a son of God in Paul’s time, and yet need not necessarily be so, then Paul’s statement “through faith” is wrong. Again, “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:6). Paul says “because.” It is not that the two things, being sons and having the Spirit sent to you, happen to go together for the Galatians, but they are causally related. It must therefore be true today, no less than then, that if I am a son, God has sent the Spirit into my heart. To sum up: when we are dealing with a doctrinal passage, when Paul reasons, since you are this, you are that, the same reasoning must hold today. Paul is not merely observing states of affairs, but deducing them. The doctrinal passages are therefore applicable to Christians today.

Let us see where this leads us in the Galatians passage. Those who believe in Jesus Christ are sons of God (Gal. 3:26, John 1:12). They are heirs (Gal. 4:7). Heirs to what? The inheritance they receive, according to Gal. 3:18, is the inheritance given to Abraham by a promise. What was the promise? The promise of blessing to Abraham, including, in the New Testament Age, the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:14). Thus the Spirit is given to those who believe in Christ. “He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you” does so because of your faith (Gal. 3:5). God must give the Spirit because He has promised to do so in Abraham. In other words, it is the miracle-working power of the Spirit, among many other blessings, which is available to sons of God. They have it because they are sons. The “because” is wrong if it does not apply to us today. We today have the same Spirit, in power, because we are sons.

Thus Galatians 3 proves that the Spirit is given in power through faith in Jesus Christ alone, through what is called “saving faith.” This can be seen in another way. There is only one kind of faith spoken of in Galatians 3, faith in Jesus Christ and his work. This is the faith which contrasts with works of the law (Gal. 3:2), faith in virtue of which God

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works miracles and gives the Spirit (Gal. 3:5), faith that gave Abraham righteousness before God (Gal. 3:6–7), faith by which we receive the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14), faith by which we are justified (Gal. 3:24), faith by which we are sons of God (Gal. 3:26). By this faith we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27) and are one with Christ (Gal. 3:28–29). In Galatians 3 Paul so intertwines the passages on justification and the passages on the giving of the Spirit and unity with Christ, that it must be apparent that it is the same faith that does all. The conclusion is, if we have faith in Christ, we have all the resources of Christ, and we have the power of the Holy Spirit. No second experience is necessary, then or today. Galatians 3 really leaves no other choice for a man who does not deliberately impose his own theology on it.

On this question of sanctification, the Pentecostal-classical Protestant dispute is very like the older dispute between Wesleyan and Reformed theologians. Is there a second experience of sanctification which we ought to pass through? I have argued above that such a requirement cannot be found in Scripture. and that Gal. 3 and Col. 2 especially argue against it. Cary N. Weisiger, III (“The Reformed Doctrine of Sanctification.” *Christianity Today*, XI No. 23 (Sept. 1, 1967) and C. C. Berkouwer (*Faith and Sanctification*) treat the question more thoroughly. Weisiger observes, “...the fault lies mainly in description, and description is powerfully influenced by temperament, habit, and type of experience.” In particular, many have truly had a transforming experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit suddenly, at a point of crisis; it has been a turning point of their lives. Others have grown gradually and peacefully into a fuller spiritual life. The fault arises only if we assume that others’ experiences must be like ours, and make it a requirement for spiritual maturity that they pass through our experience.

Let us, then. rejoice with our brothers in whom God has worked a sudden transformation by filling with the Spirit, acknowledging that it is a real work of God; let us rejoice no less with those on whom God has moved quite peacefully, acknowledging that this is no less the work of God; let us pray that we all may be continually filled with the Spirit, by whatever ways God works in each.

C. New Testament use of “baptism” and “tongue”

There are some other points where, it seems to me. the Pentecostal position is weak. First, there is the issue of baptism. The Pentecostal usually takes the position that there are two baptisms, one where the Holy Spirit baptizes us into the body of Christ at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13) and another where Jesus baptizes with, or in, the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, Mark 1:8). However, the Greek phrases in these passages are very similar, pointing, I think, rather to only one baptism, where Jesus Christ baptizes us with the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. The phrase is always “baptize with (*en*) the Holy Spirit,” even in 1 Cor. 12:13. The only distinction found is between baptism with emphasis on the physical act

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("baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus") and baptism with emphasis on the spiritual process which water-baptism symbolizes ("baptism with the Holy Spirit").

Secondly, there is the issue of speaking in tongues. The Pentecostal position is that speaking in tongues, if not the invariable sign of baptism with the Holy Spirit, is at least the usual sign. But 1 Cor. 12:30 says clearly. "Do all speak with tongues?" the implied answer being "No" (Greek has "me" before the question, the sign that the answer is "no"). Tongues is one of many gifts of the Spirit, and is nowhere singled out for particular emphasis (though the subject of tongues and prophecy is dealt with extensively in 1 Cor. 14 because of the particular problems of the Corinthian church). Hence we may expect today, as then, that many people will have other gifts without the gift of tongues.

The Pentecostal reply is, "We must distinguish between the sign of tongues (e.g., Pentecost) given to all, and the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:30) given to some." This distinction was explained earlier. However, such a distinction is a pure imposition on Scripture; the Bible itself gives no support for it. The Greek phrase is "speak with a tongue (*laloun glosse*)," when referring to a single occasion, and "speak with tongues (*laloun glossais*)," when referring to the gift. or to a number of occasions, or to a number of speakers. The gift is also called "kinds of tongues (*gene glosson*)," or simply "tongues (*glossai*)." This holds true in both Acts and 1 Corinthians.

D. Conclusion

The main argument against the Pentecostal position is the teaching of books like Galatians and Colossians on how we receive the Holy Spirit. But the Pentecostal position is also weak in requiring distinctions between two kinds of baptism and between two kinds of tongue-speaking, distinctions that are not supported by any difference in phraseology of the Bible. Rather some have invented the distinctions to save a position which they had already arrived at without a thorough examination of Scripture.

However, we can sympathize with Pentecostals in some things. First, from their viewpoint Pentecostal doctrine offers a simple, plausible explanation of the deadness of many of today's churches, and a simple remedy for it—the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If untrue, it is still a very attractive, satisfying answer to have. Finally, one can only commend Pentecostals' concern for recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit, for getting belief in miracles back into the church, and for heart-level Christianity generally.

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Pe = Pentecostal, Pr = classical Protestant.

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Regarding hermeneutics and biblical interpretation, he would recommend starting with his books [*Symphonic Theology*](#) and [*The Returning King*](#). Other related books include [*Inerrancy and Worldview*](#), [*The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*](#), and [*God-Centered Biblical Interpretation*](#).

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