



Mooroolbark Christian Fellowship

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Pentecost...

1. For the church today



By Joseph Tkach

We can read what happened, but we simply cannot experience what Jesus' disciples felt after Jesus was resurrected. They had already seen more miracles than most people would ever believe. They had heard the message for three years and still did not understand it, and yet they continued to follow Jesus. His boldness, his confidence, his sense of destiny made him strangely attractive. But the crucifixion was a devastating blow. All their hopes were smashed. Their excitement turned to fear--they locked the doors and made plans to go home, back to the jobs they used to have. They probably felt shell-shocked, psychologically numbed. Then Jesus showed up, and by many convincing proofs he showed himself to be alive. What a stunning turn of events! How could anyone cope with such a bewildering experience? Dead people don't live. They don't talk, don't eat, don't appear behind locked doors. What the disciples had seen and heard and touched defied all their previous understanding of reality. It was incomprehensible, disorienting, mystifying, electrifying, energizing, all at the same time. And then a cloud lifted Jesus into the sky, and the disciples stared into the sky, probably speechless. Two angels told them that Jesus would come back (Acts 1:11). So the disciples went back and, with spiritual conviction and a sense of purpose, they prayerfully sought a new apostle (vs. 15-26). They knew they had work to do and a mission to fulfil, and they knew they needed help in getting it done. That was an understatement. What they needed was the Holy Spirit. For a God-sized job, they needed God. For decades of dedication, they needed more than adrenaline. They would have to face persecution from friends and strangers. They would have to look at old Scriptures in a new way. They would need divine authority, divine wisdom and divine direction. They needed power, a power that would give them new life for the long haul, power that would regenerate them, renew them, transform them. They needed the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost--a Christian festival

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to

speaking in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability" (2:1-4, NRSV).

In the Torah, Pentecost was described as a harvest festival, coming near the end of the grain harvest. Pentecost was unique among the festivals in that leaven was used in the offering (Lev. 23:17). In Jewish tradition, Pentecost was also associated with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

Nothing in Torah or tradition would have prepared the disciples for the dramatic arrival of the Holy Spirit on this particular day. Nothing in the symbolism of leaven, for example, would have made the disciples expect the Holy Spirit to cause them to speak in other tongues. God was doing something new. This was not an attempt to upgrade or update the festival, or to change the symbols or to assign a new method of keeping the old festival. No, this was something completely new.

People heard them speaking in the languages of Parthia, Libya, Crete and other areas. And many began to ask, what was the meaning of this amazing miracle? Peter was inspired to explain the meaning, and his explanation had nothing to do with the old covenant festival. Rather, it fulfilled a prophecy of Joel about the last days.

We are living in the last days, he told his audience--and the significance of that is even more amazing than the miracle of tongues. In Jewish thinking, "the last days" were associated with numerous Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah and the kingdom of God. Peter was saying, in effect, that a new age had dawned.

Other New Testament writings fill in the details about this change in ages: the old covenant became obsolete, and the era of faith, truth, Spirit and grace replaced the era of the law of Moses (Gal. 3:23; John 1:17). Although faith, truth, grace and Spirit existed in the old era, the old was dominated by and characterized by law, in contrast to the new era, which is characterized by faith in Jesus Christ.

Pentecost is a powerful reminder of this for the church today. We do not observe it as an old covenant festival, nor as a required festival, but because it is part of church tradition--not only our denominational tradition, but the tradition of many churches.

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We need to ask, as they did in the first century, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12). We need to listen to Peter for the inspired meaning: We live in the last days, in the end times, in a new and different age. No longer do we look to a physical harvest, at agricultural life in a tiny part of earth. No longer do we look to the law of Moses, or to the leavened loaves of the Temple rituals. Now, we look to the Spirit, whom God is pouring out on all flesh, on men and women, on slaves and free (vs. 17-18). God is calling all nations to faith and eternal life in his Son. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (v. 21).

And in this new age, what do we do? We preach Christ, just as Peter did. The dramatic manifestations of the Spirit were not his focus--Peter spent most of his sermon on the identity of Jesus Christ. He could have repeated these words: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). We live in an age of good news--an invitation to enter the kingdom of God through faith, through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

How should we respond to the message? Peter answered the question in this way: "Repent"--turn toward God--"and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). And we respond further by devoting ourselves "to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (v. 42).

Points from Pentecost

The Christian church continues to commemorate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In most traditions, Pentecost (also called Whitsunday) comes 50 days after Easter. The Christian festival looks back to the beginnings of the Christian church. Based on the events of Acts 2, I see numerous valuable lessons in the festival:

The necessity of the Holy Spirit

We cannot preach the gospel without the Holy Spirit living in us, empowering us for the work of God.

Jesus told his disciples to preach to all nations--but first they had to wait in Jerusalem until they were "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The

church needs power--we need enthusiasm (literally, God in us) for the work set before us.

The diversity of the church

The gospel goes into all nations, is preached to all peoples. God's work is no longer focused on one ethnic group. Since Jesus is the second Adam as well as the seed of Abraham, the promises are expanded into all humanity. The diverse languages of Pentecost are a miraculous picture of the worldwide scope of the work.

We live in a new age, a new era. Peter called it the last days; we might also call it an age of grace and truth, or the church age, or the age of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant. There is an important difference in the way God is now working in the world. The message now focuses on Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, bringing salvation and forgiveness to those who believe. The sermons in Acts rehearse the basic truths again and again; the letters of Paul give further explanation for the theological significance of Jesus Christ, for it is only through him that we can enter the kingdom of God, and we do it by faith, and we enter it even in this age. We share in the life of the age to come because the Holy Spirit lives within us.

The Holy Spirit unites all believers into one body, and the church grows through preaching about Jesus Christ. The church is to be characterized not only by the gospel mission, but also by discipleship, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Doing these things does not save us; rather, the Spirit leads us into such expressions of our new life in Christ.

We live and work by the power of the Holy Spirit; it is God within us who brings the joy of salvation, perseverance in the face of persecution, and the love that transcends cultural differences within the church. Friends, fellow citizens of the kingdom of God, blessings to you as you celebrate the Pentecost of the new covenant, transformed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Joseph Tkach

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Pentecost...

2. Power for the gospel

Jesus promised his disciples: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Luke repeats the promise in his introduction to Acts: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in

a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5).

We see in chapter 2 that the disciples received the promised gift on the Day of Pentecost — they were baptized with the Holy Spirit, which clothed them with power from God. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4).

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We therefore focus on the Holy Spirit during the Pentecost season. Jews traditionally connect Pentecost with the giving of the law and the ratification of the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. Today, we can have a fuller understanding, based on the New Testament. We connect it with the Holy Spirit and the covenant God has made with those from all nations who are in his church.

Called to testify

On Pentecost, we remember that God has called us as the new people of God: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

What is the purpose of our calling? Why does God call us to be his people? To declare his praises. Why does he give us the Holy Spirit? To be witnesses to Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit empowers us to preach the gospel, to announce the good news that humans can be part of God's kingdom through his grace and mercy and through what Christ has done for us.

God has made a covenant, an agreement, with us. God promises us eternal life, and the Holy Spirit is like an advance payment that guarantees our salvation.

God's promises (his part of the agreement) are characterized by grace and mercy and the Holy Spirit. We have been called and given the Spirit — now here is where we come in — so that we might be living witnesses to the mercy of God as shown in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. That's the mission of the church, the reason for the church's existence and the reason each member is called into the church, the body of Christ.

The church is commissioned to preach the gospel, to tell people about the salvation available through the sacrifice of Christ for us (Luke 24:46-48). The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles on Pentecost so they would be bold witnesses for Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8).

The commission of the church is part of the picture given to us by the festival of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit unites Christians so that we might continue the work of the gospel.

The Day of Pentecost commemorates the dramatic birth of the New Testament church, and it can also remind us of our spiritual birth into the family of God and the continual renewal, power and courage God gives us through the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is a reminder that the Holy Spirit leads the church into truth, and guides, inspires and empowers God's people, transforming us toward the image of Christ (Romans 8:29) and interceding for us (verse 26).

Pentecost can also remind us that the church consists of all in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Pentecost is an annual prod to strive for the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). Most of the Christian world observes this day in commemoration of the Spirit we have in common.

Pentecost reminds us that the Holy Spirit is given to us not to exalt ourselves but that we might be witnesses of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8). The church is not simply a

place to be taught principles of sound and virtuous living; it exists for the purpose of proclaiming the praises of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9). Although we all want to become better persons, more like Jesus, this is not the only goal we have. Christians have a mission — a mission empowered by the Holy Spirit, who inspires us to declare the Lord Jesus Christ, to bring the message of reconciliation through faith in his name to the whole world.

Pentecost pictures a result of a life led by the Holy Spirit — a life that testifies to the righteousness, power and mercy of Jesus Christ. A faithful Christian life is one that gives witness to the gospel. Such a life gives evidence; it reveals the truth that God is working in us. It is a walking, talking advertisement of the gospel.

A spiritual harvest

Pentecost was originally a harvest festival. But the church is involved in a spiritual harvest — the fruit or result of the church's commission to spread the gospel. "Open your eyes and look at the fields," Jesus told his disciples while they were in Samaria. "They are ripe for harvest." Jesus was talking about a spiritual harvest, in which people are given eternal life: "Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together" (John 4:35-36).

At another time, Jesus saw the crowd and said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:36-38). That is what Pentecost should inspire us to do. We should ask God to help us see the people around us who are ready for spiritual harvest. We should pray for more labourers, because we eagerly desire for more people to share in God's spiritual blessings. We should desire for the people of God to be declaring the praises of him who saved us.

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). That was his life, his nourishment, and his energy. He, in turn, is the source of our life. He is our bread, the bread of eternal life. Our spiritual food is to do his will, to do his work, which is the gospel. We are to follow in Jesus' footsteps, in his way of life, allowing him to live in us. We should allow him to transform our goals in life. We should live for him and his purposes and his glory.

Message of the early church

Pentecost points us to the book of Acts, and the book of Acts points us to evangelism. The book is full of evangelistic speeches. The message is given again and again, and the message centres on Jesus Christ as Saviour, Lord, Judge and King. Even a gentile like Cornelius knew the message. Peter told him, "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36).

And Peter summarized the message that was already so famous that Cornelius knew it: "You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached — how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and

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how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem" (verses 37-39). Peter continued to preach the gospel by noting Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and then he summarized the church's commission: "He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (verses 42-43).

So, we preach about salvation and grace and Jesus Christ. Of course! He has been the greatest blessing we will ever know. The truth about our salvation is exciting, and we want to share it so that others might rejoice in the same blessing! And this is why the church is given the Holy Spirit; this is why we are called together and told to work together in harmony so the church may grow.

When the church was persecuted for preaching the message about Jesus, they prayed for boldness so they could preach even more! "After they 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.... With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:31,

33). The Holy Spirit was given to them for the express reason that they might preach Christ.

For every Christian

And yet the Holy Spirit was not given to the apostles alone, or simply to the church as a whole. The Holy Spirit is given to each Christian. Each of us can be a living witness to Jesus Christ; each of us has hope in Christ, and each of us can give an answer for our hope. After Stephen was stoned for preaching about Jesus Christ, a great persecution came on the early church, and all except the apostles fled from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). As they scattered, they spoke the word, proclaiming the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:19-20). Luke paints a picture for us of hundreds of Christian men and women fleeing from Jerusalem because of their belief in Jesus Christ. They could not be silenced, even at threat of their lives! It did not matter whether they were elders or laypersons — each of them gave testimony to Jesus Christ. As they travelled, no doubt they would be asked why they were moving away from Jerusalem. No doubt they told all who asked.

This is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, this is the spiritual harvest pictured by Pentecost. These people were ready to give an answer! It was an exciting time, and that same excitement should be in the church today. The same Holy Spirit is energizing us; the same Jesus Christ is leading the church today. We can pray for the same boldness today!

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What the Bible Says About...

Speaking in Tongues

(Part 1 of 3)

JESUS' PROMISE

"What you are seeing is real," a church member told the visitor. "These people are filled with the Holy Spirit." The visitor was seeing a hundred men and women speaking in tongues, raising their hands in the air and singing praises. It was real, not imaginary -- but were these people really filled with the Holy Spirit he wondered?

Speaking in tongues was a dramatic miracle that helped the Christian church begin (Acts 2). The book of Acts records two other occasions on which the Holy Spirit caused people to speak in tongues, and in his letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul gave instructions about speaking in tongues.

Some churches emphasize the practice of speaking in tongues. They teach that every Christian should speak in tongues as evidence of receiving the baptism of the

Holy Spirit. Some of these churches are among the fastest-growing segments of Christianity.

Other churches allow the practice of speaking in tongues, but do not encourage it. In these churches, tongue-speakers may form charismatic fellowship groups within the larger congregation. (*Charismatic* is defined in the glossary at the end of this booklet.) Still other churches forbid their members from speaking in tongues.

Speaking in tongues has been vigorously debated during the past century. The major questions are these:

- *Does every Christian who receives the Holy Spirit speak in tongues?*
- *Does speaking in tongues prove that the Holy Spirit has come to a person?*
- *Are those who speak in tongues more spiritual or closer to God than those who do not?*

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- *What role should tongue speaking have in church meetings?*

To answer these questions, we need to consult the Bible. First, let's see what Jesus said about tongues.

Mark 16:15-18

Giving his disciples their commission, Jesus said: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-18). Then Jesus predicted what would happen: "These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well" (verses 17-18).

These verses do not predict how often these signs would occur, or whether every believer would be involved in each of these signs, or whether believers should make special efforts to display these miracles. To answer such questions, we need to look at other scriptures.

The book of Acts describes incidents of casting out demons, healings and supernatural protection against deadly things. However, believers did not go out of their way to find demons or to be exposed to deadly things. In the case of healing, we know that there were times when it did not happen (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, for example).

Mark 16:17-18 simply lists a few of the many types of miracles that God's church would experience. This list is neither a command nor a promise for every Christian. To answer our questions about speaking in tongues, we must examine other scriptures.

Acts 2:1-4

Shortly after Christ had risen into heaven, his disciples were observing the annual festival of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (verses 2-4).

What kind of tongues were these? They were foreign languages. "There were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ... We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!'" (verses 5-8, 11).

The people, amazed and perplexed, asked one another, "What does this mean?" (verse 12). Peter first explained that they were seeing a fulfillment of a prophecy about God's Spirit (verses 14-21). He then preached a message about Jesus as the Messiah or Christ, and the need for repentance and baptism (verses 22-40). The miraculous languages got the attention of the crowd and allowed Peter, even though he was not a rabbi, to speak with authority to the people.

This experience on the Day of Pentecost is the most dramatic "tongues" incident described in the Bible. This is the most complete description. Let's note a few details about it:

- There were three miracles: a miraculous sound, an appearance like fire and speaking in other tongues.
- The "other tongues" were languages currently understandable by Jews from other nations. No interpreters were needed.
- The crowd may have thought the miracle was in the hearing (verses 6, 8, 11), but the biblical writers call it a miracle of speaking (verses 4, 18).
- Some people ridiculed the apostles and accused them of being drunk (verse 13).
- There is no indication that Peter's sermon, beginning in verse 14, was given in a miraculous "tongue."
- Peter proclaimed to those who accepted his message that they should repent and be baptized and thereby "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (verse 38). This promise applies to Christians of every century, but the verse does not make clear whether the "gift of the Holy Spirit" means that the Holy Spirit is the gift, or whether Peter meant that, in addition to receiving the Holy Spirit, they would receive speaking in tongues or some other manifestation of the Spirit as the gift.
- Peter spoke of repentance and baptism, but he did not describe any other action needed for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Thousands were baptized, and many miracles were done (verses 41-43), but there is no further mention of miraculous tongues on that occasion.

The way the story is told in Acts, the apostles' miraculous ability to speak in foreign languages was only one of many kinds of miracles experienced by the early church. Acts describes many other miracles as God guided the new church into growth through the Holy Spirit. None of those miracles is presented as a requirement for every Christian.

The book of Acts describes two other occurrences of speaking in tongues -- one in Caesarea and one in Ephesus. We'll examine those passages next. (Some scholars say that Acts 8:14-18 reports a tongue-speaking incident in Samaria. The Holy Spirit came upon people in some noticeable way, but there is no mention of tongues, so we do not learn anything about tongues in that passage.)

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Acts 10:44-46

The second description of speaking in tongues comes when non-Israelites were first added to the church -- perhaps 10 years after Christ's death and resurrection. Up until that time, the church had been primarily Jewish. The apostle Peter had been invited to the house of Cornelius, a gentile (non-Jewish) army officer in Caesarea who worshiped the true God (Acts 10:24-25). Many people were in the house, and Peter told them about Jesus Christ, faith and forgiveness (verses 27, 34-43).

"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message" (verse 44). The Jews 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" (verses 45-46).

It is difficult to discern from this brief mention what these "tongues" sounded like. It says nothing about interpreters, for example, or foreign languages. Nor does it say that the gentiles were seeking the gift of tongues; they simply listened to the gospel and believed. The "tongues" were regarded as miraculous, and Acts 11:15 indicates they were similar to the tongues mentioned in Acts 2.

The miraculous tongues of Acts 10, combined with the miracle of Acts 2, helped Jewish Christians realize that God was adding non-Jewish people to the church. Since religious Jews had traditionally separated themselves from gentiles, God used a special sign to demonstrate to the Jewish Christians that he had also accepted gentiles as his children (Acts 15:7-8).

Acts 19:1-6

Christianity continued to expand to new geographic regions and include more people. The third and final example of tongues from the book of Acts occurred in the city of Ephesus. Paul found some disciples who followed the teachings of John the Baptist. They didn't know about the Holy Spirit, so Paul informed them more fully, and taught them that John told people to believe in Jesus (Acts 19:1-4).

Whoever believes, repents and is baptized will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. No further steps or tarry meetings

"On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (verses 5-6).

Again, it is impossible to tell what these tongues sounded like. All we know is that these disciples were rebaptized so they could receive the Holy Spirit. Whether they were expecting the gifts of tongues and prophecy isn't stated.

The tongues in Acts 2 and 10 came with significant developments in the expansion of the church. But in Acts 19, we are not told why this group of John's disciples was significant enough for special mention. We do know that it emphasized the need for all Jews, even those who already lived repentant, obedient lives, to accept Christian baptism. It also showed that

Paul was an apostle of Christ and that his mission to the gentiles was approved by God.

Tongue-speaking in the book of Acts - conclusion
Let us go back to our first question: Does every Christian who receives the Holy Spirit speak in tongues? The book of Acts records many healings and other miracles, but only three incidents of tongues. This suggests that tongue speaking was not a common occurrence, but rather a miraculous sign for special occasions as the apostles preached the gospel and established the church.

It seems that most New Testament Christians did not speak in tongues. Several verses tell us that people were "filled with the Holy Spirit," but without any mention of tongues. Let's notice the following verses: Not long after Pentecost, the apostles were praying for God's help. After they finished praying, "the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). The apostles had already been filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Here they are filled again. Miraculous shaking is mentioned, but speaking in tongues is not.

There is no mention of tongues when the Holy Spirit came on converts in Samaria (Acts 8:14-17), when the Ethiopian eunuch was converted (Acts 8:38), when Saul, who became Paul, was converted (Acts 9:17-18), when he confronted a sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11) or when Paul first preached in Asia (verses 44-52). This doesn't prove that tongue speaking did not occur, but it does indicate that it was not important to mention it. Last, we note that the Gospels do not describe Jesus himself as speaking in tongues.

The evidence, so far, is limited. Acts is primarily a story of what happened; the book doesn't contain many commands or promises. Like many histories, it focuses on unusual or groundbreaking events. There is little attempt to describe ordinary practices. The book of Acts gives us only a limited picture of speaking in tongues. However, Paul wrote a great deal about tongues in a letter to the Corinthian Christians. His instructions help us understand whether tongue speaking is evidence of God's Spirit, of deeper conversion, or of being closer to God.

Seeking the Gift of Tongues

Pentecostal churches teach that Christians receive the Holy Spirit when they are first converted, but that they are not filled with the Spirit until they are baptized with the Spirit. This baptism of the Spirit is not considered necessary for salvation, but people are encouraged to seek it in order to receive additional power to witness.

Spirit-baptism, Pentecostals believe, always includes speaking in tongues. Therefore, those who desire Spirit-baptism will seek to experience tongue speaking. This is often done in a "tarry meeting" (tarry, an old English word meaning "wait," is found in the King James Version of Luke 24:49). The group holds a prolonged meeting, singing and praying and dancing. Emotions are kept high. The

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person seeking the "baptism" is encouraged to speak rapidly, to repeat words or syllables over and over, to continue in vocal activity until the tongue speaking happens.

The environment of a tarry meeting encourages ecstatic speech as such, but not a genuine biblical gift of tongues. In such an environment, tongue speaking can become merely a learned behaviour. The organs of speech continue to work, but the conscious control of them fades.

There is no biblical support for the practice of tarry meetings. Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray with meaningful words, not thoughtless, repeated words (Matthew 6:7). In the tongue-speaking incidents recorded in the book of Acts, the gift of the Spirit came unexpectedly. No one was getting emotionally worked up. The gift of tongues is given as God determines (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

If we need the Holy Spirit and its gifts to do God's work, God will provide it (Luke 11:13).

Modern attempts to imitate the tongues of Pentecost are attempts to imitate only one of the miracles of that day. The real lesson of Pentecost is not in the miracles, but in Peter's message: "Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Loosening the tongue does not necessarily require a miracle, but loosening the heart in real repentance does.

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Reading Through Romans

Israel's Opportunity for Salvation

A study of Romans 10

In Romans 9 to 11, Paul deals with Israel's role in God's plan. Does the new covenant mean that God no longer has a special interest in the Jewish people? Since salvation is by faith, is there a role left for Israel? In chapter 10, Paul develops but does not answer the question.

Israel's failure

Paul begins by expressing his hope that the Jews would accept the gospel: Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved (Rom. 10:1). Paul wants his own people to be saved.

Humanly speaking, we would expect the Jews to do quite well: For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God... (v. 2). But the problem is that their zeal is not based on knowledge. What knowledge did they lack? They did not know the righteousness of God. They knew that God is righteous, but they did not know how he would count humans as righteous. They therefore sought to establish their own.

This verse contrasts a righteousness based on the law, and a divine righteousness that comes through faith (9:30-31; 10:5-6). The Jews aimed at righteousness through their covenant with God, a relationship the Gentiles did not have. The Jews, focusing on the law, could not see a different means of righteousness, and could not see God working with other people.

As a result of looking to their works, they did not submit to God's righteousness (10:3). God's righteousness must come by grace, not works, and as long as people look to what they do, they fail to accept the gift of righteousness the gospel reveals.

So Paul concludes: Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (v. 4). Some translations say the "end" of the law; others say the "goal" of the law. If Christ is the end of the law, the law has come to an end. If Christ is the goal of the law, then the law points to Christ.

Both *goal* and *end* can be supported by other verses, but which emphasis did Paul intend here? Perhaps he meant both meanings. In a race, for example, the goal is also the end. When we reach the goal or purpose of some endeavour, the project is finished. The TNIV uses a different word: *culmination* or climax. Christ is the supreme expression of what the law was. Now that we have him, we do not need the preliminary, for he is the means of our righteousness.

Paul's conclusion is clear: Righteousness cannot be obtained through the law. Rather, it must be 1) given through Christ, 2) received by faith rather than works and 3) available to Gentiles as well as Jews. When it comes to salvation, Jews do not have special privileges. The law, which was unique to Israel, is not the means of salvation.

In verses 5 to 10, Paul will elaborate on faith, and in verses 11 to 13, he will emphasize that it is available to everyone.

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Contrast between law and gospel

Throughout this section, Paul looks to the Old Testament for support. Here, he quotes Leviticus 18:5: Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The one who does these things will live by them" (v. 5). The old covenant included faith, but it emphasized obedience. Since no one could do everything the law required, it could never be a means of righteousness. The new covenant, however, is based on faith, so it succeeds where the old covenant could not.

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (That is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (That is, to bring Christ up from the dead)" (vv. 6-7, quoting parts of Deut. 30:4, 12-13). Moses told the Israelites that God did not choose them because they were righteous, so they should have known that God could reveal himself to sinners, including Gentiles. Moses told the Israelites that the commandments are revealed rather than hidden. God's word for them was readily available. Paul applied this principle to Christ and the gospel—the word of God in the gospel is easy to obtain.

But what does it say? Paul asks in v. 8, and then he quotes Deut. 30:14: "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." Deuteronomy goes on to say "so you may obey it," but Paul does not quote that, for he is applying the principle to the gospel, not the law. He says instead, ... that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim. The message about righteousness through faith is not hard to get. Paul shows how accessible true righteousness is: If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (v. 9). Paul is not giving a new formula for salvation that requires spoken words—he is showing how the words *mouth* and *heart* apply to the gospel. It is Christ (not the law) that should be in the heart and mind.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (v. 10). Here, Paul puts faith and confession as parallel ideas, not distinctly different, and he puts justification and salvation as roughly equivalent terms. The law required obedience, but the gospel requires acceptance.

Everyone is invited

As Scripture says, Paul notes in v. 11, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame". This is quoted from Isa. 28:16, which says that God will lay a cornerstone in Zion for a sure foundation, and people who have faith in this cornerstone will not be found short on the day of judgment. Paul quoted the entire verse in 9:33; here he just repeats the part about believing in Christ as the key to salvation.

Paul then repeats a favourite theme: For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (vv. 12-13, quoting Joel 2:32). Salvation comes

by calling on the Lord, looking to him for salvation. In Joel, the Lord was Yahweh, but Paul uses the verse for Christ, showing that he accepted Jesus Christ as God.

Salvation comes by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord. The problem is that Paul's own people are rejecting the message. He highlights this in verse 14: How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? They have to call on the Lord to be saved, but if people think he is a crucified criminal instead of the Messiah, they won't call on him.

How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? (vv. 14-15). This is a general sequence of preaching and salvation. But simply sending more preachers can't solve the problem—preachers have already been sent, and most of the Jews still haven't believed. So where in the sequence is the problem for the Jews?

Israel hears but does not believe

In verse 15 Paul shows that messengers were sent: As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" This is quoted from the Greek version of Isaiah 52:7, which uses the common New Testament verb for preaching the gospel. In Isaiah's day, the good news was the prophecy of the people being restored to their land.

Paul says in verse 16: But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah [53:1] says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" People didn't accept the message back then, either—it is an old problem. Isaiah says that the message has to be believed—it's a matter of faith, one of Paul's favourite topics. So he says in verse 17: Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. Here, Paul seems to be completing the evangelistic sequence of verse 15. People need to hear the message before they can believe it—but simply hearing the message does not always lead to faith.

In verse 18, Paul asks: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." This is quoted from Psalm 19:4, which says the heavens declare the glory of God. So if the whole world has heard the message, the Jews have also heard.

Again, Paul asks in verse 19, "Did Israel not understand"? First, Moses says [in Deut. 32:21], "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." Yes, Israel understood, but they failed, and God told them in advance that he would work with other peoples. And this key verse revealed to Paul what God was doing in Paul's ministry: He wanted the salvation of Gentiles to make Israel envious, so the Jews would then accept the gospel. And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me" (v. 20, quoting Isaiah 65:1). Isaiah is talking about wayward Israelites, but Paul applies it

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here to Gentiles. If God can reveal himself to disinherited Jews, then he can do it to anyone. So God turned away from the zealous, and blessed people who didn't even know to ask. Paul concludes the chapter by saying, but concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (v. 21, quoting Isa. 65:2). God did not want the Jewish people to go astray, but they would not listen. Israel had an opportunity for salvation, but most were refusing it. But does that mean that God has given up on them? Certainly not, Paul says. But that is in chapter 11, and we'll see his conclusion in the next study

Questions for discussion

- Was I ever zealous for God and his law, but mistaken? (v. 2) Has that experience dampened my zeal? Should it?
- Is the gospel message in my mouth as well as my heart? (v. 8)
- Who was sent for me to hear the good news? (v. 15)
- Am I envious of a blessing given to someone else? (v. 19) Does that envy have good fruit, or bad?

Michael Morrison

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Lessons from the Bible

The Gospel of Mark, LESSON 14: MARK 2:13-17

A Lesson About Assumptions

Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me" Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the "sinners" and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Pharisees assumed that if a person ate with sinners, that person was a sinner, too. Levi was a Jew who worked for the Roman government. He was a tax collector. Tax collectors were renowned for their dishonesty. If that were not bad enough, they were also ritually unclean. They rubbed shoulders with gentiles. Their clothing touched the unclean garments of gentiles. Their dishes and eating utensils weren't purified. Naturally, since Jesus and his disciples ate with such people, Jesus and his disciples were unclean, too. He ate not only with tax collectors; he ate with sinners in general.

Reversal

The Pharisees, of course, were right. According to the Law, an Israelite who placed himself in contact with

ritually unclean people became unclean as well (Leviticus 15:7; Numbers 19:22). But the Pharisees knew Jesus was no ordinary Israelite. They had seen his healing miracles. They had heard him forgive sins, and they had witnessed his power to cast out evil spirits. With such demonstrations, Jesus disturbed the Pharisees. Their authority was thrown into question. The applecart of their prestige and influence among the people was upset. Their agendas for preparing Israel for its Messiah conflicted with Jesus and his kingdom. Their interpretation of Israel's law was threatened. When they caught Jesus blatantly flaunting the Law by consorting with sinners and eating with impure hands from impure dishes with impure people, they knew such a man could not be from God. Their assumptions prevented them from seeing what was really going on. God was not interested in cleansed appearances; he was interested in cleansed hearts. Jesus was coming into contact with sinners. But instead of the sinners making him unclean, he was making them clean. From this passage, we learn that the grace of God ministered through Jesus Christ isn't limited to righteous people. It extends to sinners, even to the kind of sinners that disturb righteous people.

Foolish assumption

The Pharisees were not happy. Jesus was eating with people a good man would have no business eating with. Such conduct proved to them that Jesus was not a good man. Who could deny it? They saw it with their own eyes. They knew the facts. They knew the implications. And

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they were not the type to sit by and do nothing. They confronted Jesus' disciples.

Mark does not tell us what Jesus' disciples said. He only tells us that Jesus found out what the Pharisees were asking and answered the question himself. He told them that healthy people have no need of a physician, but rather those who have illness. It is interesting that the word Mark used here, which is translated "illness" in the NIV, and "sick" in most other translations, is *kakos*, which means "bad" or "evil." Jesus continued, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

It may be that the conversation between the Pharisees and the disciples, and the one between the Pharisees and Jesus, took place well after the meal was over. That would make sense, considering the fact that if the conversations had taken place during the meal, then the Pharisees themselves would have been present at a meal with tax collectors and sinners.

Regardless of when the conversations took place, the Pharisees made a foolish assumption. Of course, they did not know it was foolish. They assumed that they

were "healthy people," and that they had no need of a physician. They assumed that they were righteous, and that Jesus' call to sinners did not apply to them. They had found righteousness in their diligent faithfulness to do everything they believed God had required of his people in the law.

Trust and follow

Jesus said to Levi, "Follow me," and Levi got up and followed him. Levi found righteousness in the Son of God. He saw with his own eyes what the accusing Pharisees also saw but could not recognize. He saw what Paul described in his letter to the Romans: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith' " (Romans 1:17).

Levi made no assumptions. He saw, he listened, and he believed. He trusted the One sent from God because he trusted God. May we, too, live by faith, not by assumptions?

J. Michael Fezell

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For Reflection

- Can a person be righteous apart from Jesus? (Mark 2:17)
- Are you too sinful for God to forgive?
- Why did Jesus spend so much time with sinners?

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