

The *Praying in the Spirit* Series

How the Prayer Language Comes

Robert Graves

The charismatic experience of tongues that accompanies the baptism in the Spirit has been forgotten by a large portion of the Church, mainly because the Church has forgotten what Spirit baptism is. Let's look at it first in the light of an analogous experience the Church has not forgotten: water baptism.

Though there are various methods, water baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is a distinctive practice of Christianity. The Lord Himself commanded His disciples to go into all the world and baptize believers (Matthew 28:19). Virtually everywhere there are Christians, there are baptized persons.

Wrapped in camel's hair and desert dust, John the Baptist came calling on his listeners to repent of sin and be baptized. But when Jesus came to John, John's ministry of water baptism diminished. And John had the distinct privilege of proclaiming what would seem to be a greater baptism. Greater than water baptism, you ask? Greater than the ordinance that every Christian is commanded to undergo? Greater than this distinctive feature of Christianity known on every continent of the world?

Yet these are the words of John the Baptist himself; and all four Gospel writers recorded them (an obvious indication of its importance). The earliest, Mark, inscribed these words of the Baptist to his disciples: "I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (1:8). Luke makes it clear that John believes his ministry will be superseded by Jesus' and his water baptism surpassed by the baptism of the Messiah: "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come. . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (3:16). Matthew and John repeat this promise (3:11; 1:33).

John did not think that water baptism was enough, nor did Jesus, for He commanded His water-baptized disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they were baptized in the Holy Spirit and thus empowered for ministry (Acts 1:5-8). And the words of Peter that recommend water baptism (Acts 2:38) are made with one thought in mind: Believers need to receive this gift of the Holy Spirit—a gift subsequent to salvation, available to all, yet missing from the lives of many Christians. Peter, in his Pentecost sermon, tells us that repentance and water baptism make ready the believer to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Spirit Baptism is an Observable Event

Have you been baptized in water? How do you know? A seemingly foolish question. First, you had a knowledge of what water baptism was; then you were conscious of the physical experience that matched your mental conception.

But what of Spirit baptism? There is no reason to think that you would be any less conscious of it than of water baptism. After all, it is a greater baptism performed by a powerful Baptizer. Not only that, but Paul implied that believers could know if they have been baptized in the Spirit when he asked the Ephesians if they received the Spirit after they believed (Acts 19:2); they would later receive this gift *after water baptism and with charismatic evidence*. Paul's question to the Ephesians is meaningless if they could not sense such a baptism.

Not only is it perceptible to the recipient, but its evidence is observable by others. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). This power, though personal, will spill over into your individual ministry and lifestyle. Because this evidence is perceptible to others, the twelve disciples could direct the church to choose men for service who were "full of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 6:3). And Paul could see that certain Ephesian Christians were not filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, he commanded them not to be "drunk on wine ... instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Something must have made their deficiency discernible to Paul.

The verses immediately following Ephesians 5:18 suggest the evidences of the filling: “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (19-21).

Incidentally, do these verses suggest a connection between worship and the filling with the Spirit? Look again:

- (1) Speak with psalms, hymns, and songs.
- (2) Sing and make music to the Lord.
- (3) Give thanks to God.
- (4) Submit to one another for Christ.

Can you imagine what kind of worship would exist in a church where there were no speaking of psalms, no singing unto the Lord, no giving of thanks unto the Great Creator and Sustainer, and, finally, no caring for one another? No wonder Paul sensed that something was wrong at Ephesus!

If we desire to worship, let us be filled. If we are filled, we will evidence it by (1) speaking; (2) singing; (3) giving thanks; and (4) submitting. I call these lifestyle evidences. These come to mind when we are considering men and women for responsible ministries in the church. These are lifestyles, but before there was time for a lifestyle of worship to develop, there had to be an initial moment when the believer was introduced to this dimension of Christian living. Pentecostal/charismatics identify this moment as Spirit baptism.

Although faith, love, or joy may be a result of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, these are characteristics that may go unnoticed initially, especially by others. These long-range evidences are certainly important, but the Bible indicates that there is immediate, observable evidence to confirm that Spirit baptism has taken place. What is the immediate confirmation in the mind of the believer, and what is the evidence—the “wet clothes” of water baptism—to convince the believing community?

We have an important clue in the reaction of Simon to his Samaritan neighbors who received the Holy Spirit. This story demonstrates the presence of an immediate, observable phenomenon that accompanies and verifies the Spirit baptism event (Acts 8:18). Here was a man who was considered to be more than mere man. As an accomplished and respected sorcerer, they called him “the divine power known as the Great Power” (Acts 8: 10). It was said that Simon amazed the people, but when Philip came into that city with the power of almighty God, it was Simon who was amazed. It was said that the people followed Simon; now it was Simon who followed Philip. So great were the signs and miracles Philip exhibited that even Simon the magician believed and was baptized.

Yet apparently something was missing. The people believed; the people were baptized in water. Wasn't that enough? When Peter and John arrived in Samaria they found out that the people “had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (8:16). The Holy Spirit had not come upon them. Though they had “received” the Holy Spirit as a salvation event, they had not “received” the Holy Spirit as a vocational event.

When Peter and John discovered that the Spirit had not fallen upon them (and how did they know unless something observable or perceptible was missing?), they laid hands on them and prayed for them and the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit. How did anyone know that they received the Holy Spirit? Something happened to them! And it was so powerful, so spectacular that Simon actually saw it and tried to buy this power from the apostles.

Since Luke writes that exorcisms, healings, miracles, and great joy (Acts 8:7-8,13) occurred during Philip's ministry and Simon was privy to all these, it is safe to assume that what Simon saw was something other than these phenomena.

What was the evidence? An examination of all passages in which the immediate, observable evidence of Spirit baptism is described yields one common denominator: glossolalia, that is, speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues ... declaring the wonders of God” (Acts 2:4, 11). The “gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God” (Acts 10:45). The “Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6).

While some mistakenly think there were only three or four instances of Holy Spirit baptism in these accounts, there were in fact no fewer than 162 (allowing ten for Cornelius' household and twenty for the Samaritan “Pentecost”). This number makes for an undeniable pattern: Of the 162 Spirit baptisms described in Scripture, the only common, immediate, external evidence is not wind or fire or love or joy or prophecy, but singularly and invariably *glossolalia*.

Pentecostals believe that this evidence given for New Testament believers is the same for twenty-first-century believers. We agree with St. Paul that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and we believe that Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, would not draw a distorted picture of the early Church for the later Church to emulate. The book of Acts gives facts about water baptism and Spirit baptism, both are vital parts of Luke’s portrayal of the foundational and dynamic Church.

Some Christians have been unnecessarily sheepish about using the historical works of Scripture for formulating doctrine. Certainly it would be a concern if the historical veracity of the documents were in question or if accretions of myth and legend needed to be peeled away. But such is not the case; the New Testament documents are indeed reliable. And these documents make it unmistakably clear that God entered human time and space in the Incarnation. And this, the very basis of Christianity, is the great rebuttal of those who would emasculate the historical books of their doctrinal content.

Have you been baptized in the Spirit? Or has this become *the missing baptism* in your life? Just remember:

1. John the Baptist prophesied it (Matthew 3:11),
2. Jesus proclaimed it (Acts 1:54),
3. The early church practiced it (Acts),
4. The Spirit demonstrated it (Acts 2:6,8:18; 10:44-46; 19:6), and
5. We must continue it (Acts 2:39; Ephesians 5:18).

With your mind set on worship and your passion on a needy Church and lost world, open your heart now and ask your Savior to baptize you in His Holy Spirit. What begins as an initial moment of spiritual utterance can become a lifestyle of worship: speaking, singing, thanks-giving, and submitting. But we must first experience that initial moment of Spirit baptism. For it is through this that the prayer language comes.

You Can Have This New Testament Experience

Although books have been written outlining “steps” to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, there is no simplistic $x + y$ formula that, with scientific inevitability, guarantees this spiritual manifestation. God’s workings are not so mechanical. We are not on a celestial scavenger hunt through which we can obtain this and that and finally win the prize. We do not *win*; we do not *earn*. We simply *believe*. My Calvinist friends may even teach that this *belief* within me is God’s doing and not my own, further stressing that this spiritual manifestation is not a result of living a holy life or meeting certain conditions.

Let me say, first, that it is impossible for a non-Christian to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17). The baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs within the context of salvation. If you are a Christian, you are all that you have to be to experience the baptism in the Spirit.

If you are not a Christian, you need to pause here and simply confess your belief in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. You may faithfully attend church, you may regularly give money to worthy causes, you may lead an exemplary moral life, you may even fast and pray and read the Bible, but if you have not sacrificially submitted your *self* to the will of Christ, you have not been made regenerate, that is, a Christian. This you must do. Stop and pray now. If you do not know what to pray, use the following prayer as a model:

Heavenly Father,

I know I’ve sinned. I need a Savior; I need Your Son, Jesus. He is the light of the world; He is the light that I need because I walk in darkness. Come into my life, Lord Jesus. I believe that You died on the cross and rose again to wash me clean of my sin. Come into my life and take control; I commit myself to You. Thank You for coming into my heart and saving me, Lord Jesus. In Your name I offer this prayer. Amen.

This prayer may sound simplistic to you—too easy to be true. That’s because Christ Jesus has taken all the complexity, all the work out of the salvation event. Once you begin studying the Scriptures you’ll discover more about God’s salvation; you’ll discover the magnitude of the cost of your salvation and the

cosmic struggle. Even now, unfathomable powers of evil are working (and have been for millennia) to keep men and women, boys and girls from repeating with sincerity the above prayer. On the other hand, angels in heaven are rejoicing over those who have repented and entered into eternal life with God (Luke 15:10). Only a very foolish person would not give up what he cannot keep (the pleasures and wealth of this world) to get what he cannot lose (spiritual blessings, even eternal life). Some of you are not Christians and did not pray the above prayer; I urge you now to defy the forces that would turn you away from life with God and return immediately to that prayer of salvation and rejoice with the angels of heaven, now and forever!

As God has taken the labor out of our salvation, so He has taken it out of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. There was a time when the disciples of Jesus had to tarry for the coming of the Holy Spirit, but now He has come once and for all. There need be no tarrying for Christians today. If you are a Christian, the experience of the Holy Spirit is your birthright. As a Christian, the Spirit of God has taken up residence with your spirit and awaits to be released into the rest of your being-soul (mind, will, emotions) and body.

I said earlier that the salvation event is the context of the release of the Spirit. Salvation is indeed the only prerequisite for this experience. This is not to say, however, that the Spirit preempts or overrules a Christian's will and forces the experience upon him. The Holy Spirit would never do this. He looks for believers who are willing to participate in this faith experience. There is no danger of a Christian with a bias against this experience finding himself speaking praises unto God in a heavenly language. Furthermore, there is little possibility that a person will express himself in tongues while harboring even honest doubt about the experience. You need to declare a moratorium on your doubt. Set aside any preconceived negative notions that you might have. Rest assured, your heavenly Father will not allow you to receive anything that will do you harm, especially when you are asking for something for the benefit of the Kingdom of God, and not for yourself. Jesus said,

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke 11:11-13

Since the Pentecostal baptism comes by faith, doubt and disbelief must be left behind. If the Spirit is to find release within you, faith must become desire, not only desire to be used of God but desire to communicate with Him on a higher plane.

Naturally, your desire will be controlled by some motive, and if you desire to speak in tongues for the wrong reason, you are setting yourself up for a sad experience. Dennis Bennett has written that "the *first* purpose of the baptism in the Spirit is simply joy (Bennett, *How*, p. 94), that it is the Christian's joy that motivates him to witness. The baptism in the Holy Spirit brings joy, for service. The words of Jesus to His disciples were, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In Acts 4 a group of Christians "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (verse 31). This filling resulted from the prayers of Peter, John, and others who, facing threats of the Jews, had refused to be silenced (4:18-31). The highest purpose of Spirit baptism is witnessing to our Savior's love; therefore, to want to be a better representative of Christ Jesus is the purest motive for desiring the charismatic experience.

Are You Ready for the Spirit's Release?

If you desire the baptism in the Holy Spirit but have been taught against it all of your Christian life, the time to test its validity has come. You will not receive this gift by learning more theology; in fact, you may have to shed yourself of years of erroneous theology before you are free to believe and thus receive. If you sincerely want this experience so that you might draw closer to the Lord and become more like Him, there is no reason to further delay.

What must you do? James tells us that we have not because we ask not (4:2). Other Scriptures indicate that the baptism in the Spirit comes in a context of prayer (Acts 1:14; 4:31; 8:15; 9:11, 17; 10:30). It was several years after Pentecost that Luke recorded Jesus' assuring words that the Christian who asks (that is, prays) for the Holy Spirit will be given Him (Luke 11:13). In this same context, Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Luke 11:9). *You must ask (pray) for the Holy Spirit.*

If you are a Christian and you believe that Jesus stands ready to baptize you in the Holy Spirit, a privilege given to Him by the Father (John 1:32-34; Acts 2:33), and if you have asked this of the Father *with anticipation and expectancy*, God has fulfilled His part in your baptism. It is now up to you to allow the *release* of the Spirit. You must give Him your mind, your will, your emotions. You must sacrificially yield the members of your body to Him, not the least of which is your tongue, the most difficult member to tame, according to the Scriptures (James 3:3-12).

It is important that you understand that the Holy Spirit is not going to forcibly take control of your lungs, vocal chords, and tongue and make you speak. It is *you* who must speak forth the syllables that He places on your lips; it is you who must use your lungs to set your vocal chords in motion; it is you who must move your lips and tongue to speak forth the language of your spirit in concert with the Holy Spirit. The temple of your body is the matrix for your spirit *and the Holy Spirit*. As a resident within you since the salvation encounter and as a co-worker with your spirit, the Holy Spirit imparts divine meaningfulness to your speech, which would otherwise be gibberish.

Lift up your voice unto God. Begin worshiping Him for who He is and what He has done. If you understand what you are saying, that is, if you are speaking your native, learned language, stop! It is impossible to speak two languages simultaneously. Stop speaking in your native tongue and begin speaking syllables that the Spirit is impressing upon you. Remember, His presence within you gives those syllables meaning.

Some of you may be disappointed, thinking that the speaking is very much your own and not the Spirit's. Indeed, the speech is yours; you are right. but this is certainly biblical. The Scriptures say that at Pentecost the believers "began to speak in other tongues" (Acts 2:4). This happened to Gentile believers too: the Jewish believers "heard them speaking in tongues" (Acts 10:46). It is said of another group of believers that "they spoke in tongues" (Acts 19:6). Jesus, speaking of those who would follow Him, said that "they will speak in new tongues" (Mark 16:17). These verses show that it is the believer who speaks in tongues, not the Holy Spirit. Externally, speaking is a very natural phenomenon; it is only when it is done in faith by a believer that it becomes supernatural. Tongues outside of the context of faith (and the Faith) have been occurring for years. These counterfeit instances, disconnected from the Holy Spirit as they are, are vacuous, having no value and no meaning for the Christian. But as a Christian, you have within you the third Person of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit—who validates, certifies, and authenticates your speech. With the infinite richness of His power, He invests your utterances with spiritual meaning. Proper Christian glossolalia is human vocalization baptized with the divine authority and power of the Holy Spirit.

If you have desired this experience but have not spoken in the Spirit, your physical being is resisting your spiritual being as well as the Spirit of God within you. It has been my experience that the believer's faith is often helped by an atmosphere of prayer and praise. So if you know someone who, by laying their hands on other believers, has aided their faith, request that they pray with you. If you still have not received the prayer language, a spiritual inventory may be in order. Ask yourself: *Have I sincerely asked the Lord Jesus into my life? Have I forgiven others who have wronged me? Do I still harbor guilt, grudges, fears, or prejudices?* In faith, deliver these unto the Lord. Remember, you must believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift—it is not earned by spirituality. A look at the carnal Corinthians proves this. Also, you must believe that there is nothing "wrong" with you if you are at first unable to release the Spirit. But remember the instructions of Jesus, "Ask...seek ... knock" (Luke 11:9).

Recommended books for further help: Dennis and Rita Bennett's *The Holy Spirit and You* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1971); Robert Frost's *Aglow with the Spirit* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, revised ed. 1965); and Jack Deere's *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993).

Works Cited

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Robert W. Graves is the author of Increasing Your Theological Vocabulary, Praying in the Spirit (Chosen, 1987) and The Gospel According to Angels (Chosen Books, 1998). He is a Christian educator and a former faculty member at Southwestern Assemblies of God University in Waxahachie, Texas.

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