



The Nuts and Bolts of Ministering Spirit Baptism Part Two

By: Tim Enloe

Misconception #2: Why

When it comes to understanding the “why” of Spirit baptism, I believe a major roadblock is built out of obsessively focusing on tongues-speaking rather than the true purpose of the gift. Why do we need to be Spirit baptized? Is the centerpiece really tongues?

I have heard sermons that are supposed to enable and encourage people to receive Spirit baptism digress into arguments over Greek verbs. While the substance of the arguments is true, the audience can easily misinterpret Spirit baptism as supplying “power to fight” rather than “power to witness.” The purpose and practice of the Pentecostal reality is sidelined while the theologians brain-wrestle. Many pastors may feel too frustrated to bother entering this arena — especially when they still have two funerals and a wedding before they can find time to study for Sunday’s sermon. The layperson must sit back wondering why they should even desire to receive the Baptism in the Spirit if all they have heard is tongues issues and impractical arguments.

I frequently ask leaders, “Why would someone want to receive Spirit baptism?” The typical answer is, “So they can speak in tongues and have a prayer language.” Somehow we have lost the simple purity of Pentecost. Suddenly the focus is an argument that we have to win rather than a gateway to Spirit-empowered ministry. The sad reality is that when many ministers see an inkblot of a dove, the first thing that enters their minds is tongues.

I am firmly convinced the first outward sign (or initial evidence) of Spirit baptism is speaking in unlearned languages (or tongues). But the reason I am convinced of this is not because it is a foundational truth of the Assemblies of God; rather, Spirit baptism has a specific, obvious, biblical function. “Function” is the key word, not “argument.” Our present culture has little tolerance for dogmatic religious types standing on soapboxes; people want practical truth they can personally engage and implement. The good news is Spirit baptism is such a truth, easy to understand and utilize.

The first two or three years of our ministry saw very few people actually receiving Spirit baptism. I was so frustrated. After all, that is what our ministry was supposed to target, yet there seemed to be some kind of barrier. After a few days of frustration and prayer, fasting and introspection, the Holy Spirit began to show me I was approaching this blessing with an argument. I began to reevaluate my approach alongside the Book of Acts, particularly the second chapter. Suddenly, the lightbulb turned on! I began to see that the why was functional in ways I had never previously understood.

On the Day of Pentecost, they were all filled and began to speak in unlearned languages as the Spirit empowered them. They began to speak out God-inspired words in another language as the Spirit enabled them. Then, some time afterward, a group of people gathering for the feast heard them. They had two basic responses. Some were amazed and some thought this noisy bunch was drunk. That’s where Act 2:14 comes in. Peter stops speaking to God in his unlearned, spiritual language and begins to address the gathered crowd — probably in Aramaic or Hebrew, preaching a most convincing and well-ordered sermon. His content was obviously beyond his natural ability.

This is where the utilitarian function of tongues helps us understand precisely why we need Spirit baptism: If you can trust God to order your words in the spiritual language, how much more can you trust Him to order your words in

your own language to unbelievers? Spirit baptism is about saying the right things: first, the God-inspired tongues, but also in our known languages, as we prophetically minister words from God's heart.

Since the day I began to understand Acts 2, I've never had to argue the initial, physical evidence of tongues with anyone. Biblically, tongues is a prophetic confirmation of a prophetic anointing to be a prophetic witness. That's why Peter explained the event as the fulfillment of Joel's oracle where one day everyone could be a prophet.

Suddenly, speaking in tongues takes on a vital, functional role for the believer who wants to be a prophetic witness. Why do we need Spirit baptism? It's all about God affecting what we say — plain and simple.

We need Spirit baptism not primarily so we can speak in tongues; we need it so we can speak to lost people. We also receive the added benefit of communing with God in a new language.

I often encounter people who say, "I've received Spirit baptism, but haven't received the gift of tongues." The wording of such a statement makes it obvious they need some clarity. But, if my response begins with correction — or an argument on why they are wrong or why their experience is invalid, they will close up and be polarized against biblical truth. If I genuinely appreciate the Holy Spirit's work in the person's life and present to them the possibility they can receive a prophetic anointing to dramatically increase ministry power in their lives, they most often discover themselves quickly experiencing Spirit baptism with its biblical, confirming sign of tongues.

This focus on what are really secondary issues has also produced a generation of ministers who suffer from what I call "acute pneumaphobia." That is, they are both convinced of the reality of Spirit baptism with evidential tongues, but at the same time, they are afraid it will ruin their church's dignified reputation. Is tongues speaking a necessary drudgery or a spiritually natural blessing? Is it like a vaccination, where you grit your teeth while the needle is going in before you can enjoy its long-term benefits? Do you "have to" speak in tongues or do you "get to"?

Speaking in tongues is not a liability, but a beautiful blessing. But power for ministry is the main feature of Spirit baptism. You don't have to be afraid of tongues ruining your church if you understand that the Baptism isn't just so people can speak in tongues but so they can speak to lost people with prophetic power.

If your approach to the Baptism is merely trying to convince the listener of a doctrine, the response will be limited. But if you teach that everyone can have a prophetic experience, trusting God to give them the right things to say to unbelievers, you'll be overwhelmed at the hungry response. I have discovered that how you approach people is critical — especially in a postmodern generation.

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