

## “PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT”

George O. Wood

General Superintendent Assemblies of God

Scripture Reference: I Corinthians 14:14-15

*For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do?  
I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind;  
I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.*

### Introduction

- A. “When people are no longer being baptized in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues, the Pentecostal Movement is over.” – Dr. Vinson Synan, Dean Emeritus School of Divinity at Regent University
- B. We are now into the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and even 5<sup>th</sup> generation of Pentecostals.
- C. What will we do with what our forefathers and foremothers Pentecostal experienced?

### 1. The public use of tongues.

- A. Deeply imbedded into our Pentecostal experience is speaking in a language we do not learn. It’s called speaking in other tongues, or praying in the Spirit.
- B. There are three different functions for speaking in tongues.
- C. Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. Like Corinth, this is a gift that’s been abused and misused – and because of that, now largely not used.
- D. The problem at Corinth was speaking in other tongues within a group setting was a badge of spirituality. What if I come up to you and say, *Bi te Zousoba Jesus Christ la nyam na pam fagere?* You will not know that I just said in the Mossi language, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.”
- E. Three rules:
  - a. Exalt Christ
  - b. Edify (constructs) believers
  - c. Witness to the unsaved
- F. We must always remember the position of 1 Corinthians 13. A focus on speaking in tongues without an even greater focus on love will damage the body of Christ.

### 2. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

- A. *All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2:4*
- B. Baptism – overwhelmed
- C. Three baptisms in the New Testament—Hebrews 5—elementary doctrines about Christ... instructions about baptisms...
  - a. Into Christ’s body. *For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 1 Corinthians 12:13*
  - b. Into water
  - c. Into the Spirit
  - d. How do these 3 baptisms differ: Candidate, Element, Agent

<i>Baptism</i>	<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Element</i>	<i>Agent</i>
Into Christ	Me	Christ	Spirit
Water	Me	Water	Baptizer
Spirit	Me	Spirit	Christ

### 3. Receiving the Spirit

- A. *The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.* John 1:33
- B. Five times in the Book of Acts when persons receive the Baptism in the Spirit, That Baptism is always accompanied by speaking in other tongues – either explicitly stated or implicit.
- C. Frame it another way: Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost: *Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now **see and hear** . . . Repent and be baptized, everyone one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. And you will receive gift of the Holy Spirit. **The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all** whom the Lord our God will call.* Acts 2:33,34,38,39
  - a. After baptism into Christ and baptism into water, there is a powerful experience waiting – the baptism in the Spirit. But, notice the word **all**. And this promise is one that is seen and heard – visual and auditory qualities.
  - b. On the Day of Pentecost, they **all** spoke in languages they had not learned. At Cornelius’ house the Holy Spirit fell on **all** – and Peter and the 6 with him knew it because they had received the same gift for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. 1 Corinthians 10:46. The 12 at Ephesus **all** speak in other tongues and prophesied (not some spoke in tongues and some prophesied) when Paul lays his hands on them.
  - c. The word **“all”** is critical in our understanding. This baptism with the initial physical evidence is not just for some. God is no respecter of persons. When Paul says, “Do all speak in tongues?” he’s not referring to the Baptism in the Spirit, but to the public and vocal use of the gift of tongues, which requires interpretation.
  - d. All the apostles and writers of the New Testament had this experience. They were baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. I don’t want anything less than what they experienced.

### 4. Initial Physical Evidence

- A. To put a definition to this experience, we use the words “initial physical evidence.”
  - a. It’s initial – the opening. There’s much more to follow.
  - b. It’s physical – see and hear.
  - c. It’s evidence – how we know personally we have received.
- B. What this is not:
  - a. Someone beating you on the back
  - b. Someone manipulating your jaw
  - c. Going unconscious or catatonic
- C. *They all **begun** to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.* Acts 2:4 (Beginning speech may not much like that of a young child.)

- D. And speaking in tongues is volitional: *I will pray with my spirit . . . I will sing with my spirit.* 1 Corinthians 14:15
  - a. Repentance is a demand; but without desire – it amounts to nothing.
  - b. Water baptism is a demand; but without desire – it amounts to nothing.
- E. The same applies to baptism in the Spirit. Sure, it’s a demand – but it must be a desire! *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
- F. The first thing the Baptizer Jesus wants to grab by giving us the Baptism in the Spirit is our tongue – and make it an instrument of praise.
- G. Why then do so many not receive this great blessing? (And, let’s not minimize all the experiences that lead up to this.)
  - a. Two reasons: (1) their experience (2) Because they have a false idea of what it means to be baptized in the Spirit – becoming unconscious and later when they wakened someone told them they had spoken in other tongues.
  - b. “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and *began to speak* as the Spirit enabled them.” Once they had begun to speak the words poured out even as the Spirit was poured out.
- H. There is a story of the cat that fell into a pail of milk and he cried out, “Oh for a capacity equal to my opportunity!” We fall into the depths of the Spirit in Spirit baptism – the element into which we are placed is the Spirit – the Spirit who brooded over the chaos that brought forth creation, the Spirit who inspired the Word of God, the Spirit who conceived Mary, who anointed Jesus, who raised Him from the dead, the Spirit who will raise our bodies also from the dead! This same Spirit is the element into which we are placed! No wonder we cannot find enough words in our own vocabulary to express ourselves.

## 5. Experience

- A. If you have been to the Grand Canyon – describe it verbally. You really cannot fit it all into words – because it is an experience. Speaking in other tongues gives us that ability to express the magnitude of something that goes outside our ability to use known verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs.
- B. Speaking in other tongues enables us to express the absolute glory of God. It declares the reality of the Spirit’s being poured out on us.
- C. John Sherrill, They Speak with Other Tongues, 1964.  
*What’s the use of speaking in tongues? The only way I can answer is to say, ‘What’s the use of a bluebird? What is the use of a sunset?’ Just sheer, unmitigated uplift, just joy unspeakable and with it health and peace and rest and release from burdens and tensions. Marianne Brown, housewife, Parkesburg, PA.*
- D. The Spirit baptizes us into Christ, and Christ baptizes us into the Spirit. At the baptism in the Spirit, out of our innermost being flow rivers of living water! Jesus put it this way, *If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.* John 7:37-39

## 6. Praise, Power, and Purity

- A. What is the connection between praise, power and purity? After all, Acts 1:8 says, *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses unto the ends of the earth.*
  - a. *The Holy Spirit comes upon you – praise*
  - b. *You will receive – power*
  - c. *You will be my witnesses – purity.*
- B. Persons who are not praising God have no power. Praise is the engine that drives the power. Praise is the fuel that leads us to be bold in our witness for Christ. But, I've found I am unable to pray in the Spirit when I have sin I have not dealt with. The Holy Spirit comes to purify us. And, we are poor witnesses if there is no difference in our life choices from those who do not belong to Christ.

## 7. Intercession and private prayer.

- A. First, a focus on intercession: 1 Samuel 1:12-15 (Amplified) *Now as she continued praying before the Lord, Eli noticed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. Eli said to her, How long will you be intoxicated? Put wine away from you. But Hannah answered, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I was **pouring out my soul before the Lord.***
- B. Psalm 42:7 *Deep calls to deep*—Intercessory is the calling forth of the depths in me to the depths in God.
  - a. The depths in nature call the swallow to migrate thousands of miles.
  - b. The depths in the moon call the tides to rise and fall.
  - c. The depths in God call forth the depths in me.
- C. Isn't that why Paul says in Romans 8:26, The Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. Spirit-filled Christians groaning!!! These groanings are the longings, heartaches, aspirations that well up from the spiritual depths and cannot be imprisoned within the confines of every day words.
- D. What a privilege it is to engage in intercessory prayer in the Spirit. There are such great needs all around us. Especially praying for persecuted believers, praying for difficult situations for which there seems to be no human solution.
- E. God, I'm pouring out my heart to you. That's what David says in Psalm 62:8 . . . Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.
- F. Psalm 42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul.
- G. Lamentations 2:9 Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches? Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord.

## 8. A focus on personal prayer

- A. 1 Corinthians 12-14 deals with Spirit-filled Christians who were using spiritual gifts as a badge of pride. Their public services were chaotic. Paul talks to them about proper spiritual order – including a limit of the number of tongues and interpretation in a service. However, we get a glimpse of his personal prayer life when he says this: *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind . . . I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you.* 1 Corinthians 14:14-15, 18. Earlier in chapter 14, he states that the person who speaks in tongues speaks to God, and that the one speaking in tongues edifies (builds up himself).

- B. Clearly though the Apostle says that all the spiritual gifts, including the public and private use of tongues, are useless unless there is love. Speaking in tongues cannot therefore be used as a badge of pride, “I’ve got it and you don’t.”
- C. The regular private use of tongues is for prayer. That’s why Paul says I do it more than all of you, and I find that this type of praying builds me up.
- D. You can say this for sure, when there is sin in your life you are not praying in the Spirit; when there is an unclean conscience, you find that you cannot pray in the Spirit.

**9. There are two forms of human communication: verbal and non-verbal.**

- A. Example: the kiss is non-verbal.
- B. Now imagine that you turn to someone and without speaking, tell them the happiest moment in your life. It cannot be done without words.
- C. Now, how can we “kiss” God? How can we express our love for God that goes beyond our words?
- D. You love Jesus so much that words just don’t take you far enough. So, how do we tell the Lord that we love Him? With words – yes. With deeds – yes. But God has also provided another way – a very intimate way, speaking in other tongues. We cannot reach out and kiss the Lord, or put our arms around Him – so the Holy Spirit has given us this unique gift that helps us with intimacy with the Lord.
- E. Left-brain: analytical, logical, objective / Right-brain: intuitive, thoughtful, subjective.
- F. Pentecostals can have both sides of the brain working together.
- G. Back to Romans 8:26, *the Spirit himself intercedes (prays) for us with longings (groans) that cannot be articulated* -- longings, heartaches, aspirations which well up from the spiritual and psychological depths in us – longings that cannot be imprisoned within the confines of every day words.

**Conclusions**

- A. Paul encourages us in Ephesians 6:18, *Pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication*. None of the armor is good without this:
  - a. The belt of truth around your waist
  - b. The breastplate of righteousness
  - c. Feet fitted with readiness
  - d. Shield of faith
  - e. Helmet of salvation
- B. But all that is like going to a museum and seeing a metal knight – no one is in that metal – it has no living animation.
- C. So, Paul tells us to put on the **full** armor – and that includes the animation – what makes all the other parts work – *pray at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and intercession*.
- D. Jude adds to Paul – *But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith, and pray in the Holy Spirit.* v. 20
- E. So, let’s do that! All of us together – right now!