

Text: Ac 19.6-7

Proposition: Christians need to depend on the Bible for objective truth, not the claims of experience, including personal experience.

Today we will touch on the controversial topic of tongues as we come across it again in Acts 19.

When we were in Acts 2, I had two messages dealing with this subject. When we were in Acts 8 and saw Phillip's ministry in Samaria, we talked about it again. I didn't deal with it much when it came up again in Acts 11, the conversion of Cornelius.

Our passage today is the last reference to tongues in the book of Acts. Consequently, I think it is important to touch it once again.

You know we are looking at the account of the twelve disciples of John whom Paul encountered in Ephesus. Let's read the whole passage to have the context in our minds.

Read Acts 19.1-7, text primarily v. 6

The topics of the "filling of the Holy Spirit" and the sensational gifts (tongues and prophecy) are issues of controversy today, as you know.

The reason for the controversy:

- Since the first century, church history saw only occasional claims of the sensational gifts among fringe groups [very rare]
- Through that whole time, the church of course believed and taught the indwelling and filling of the Spirit
- About 120 years ago, a new emphasis in the United States saw a rise in the claims of the sensational gifts, causing a lot of controversy in the church
- In the last 50 years or so, the so-called "charismatic" churches have become the majority among evangelical churches (with all kinds of variations, including heretical groups)

What should Christians make of this controversy?

1. They should search the Scriptures
2. They should submit to objective Biblical teaching over subjective experience

Today, our aim is to do just that, occasioned by the mention of tongues in our passage.

I. The key point of the experience: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit

A. Recalling our teaching on this passage

1. These men were religious, disciples of John
2. Despite their religion, Paul sensed something deficient and questioned them
3. When they understood the true message of John, they trusted Jesus and Paul baptized them

We believe that these men became Christians at that moment – before they were religious, but lost.

B. The next step contained in verse 6

1. Paul laid hands on them
2. They received the Spirit

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them

3. Note:

- a. This experience came after their conversion
- b. It also came after their baptism

In other words, Paul accepted their Christian testimony, even though they had not yet received the Spirit.

C. Comparing the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts

1. Clearly, at Pentecost (Acts 2) the coming of the Holy Spirit occurred *after* salvation and baptism
2. In Acts 10.44 (Cornelius) the Holy Spirit came *before* baptism

Ac 10.44-47 ¶ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.⁴⁵ All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,⁴⁷ “Surely no one can refuse the water for

these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?"

3. In Acts 8.12-16 and here in our passage, the Spirit came *after* baptism

Ac 8.12-16 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.¹³ Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.¹⁴ ¶ Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

In this case, the coming of the Holy Spirit didn't occur until several days later, after Peter and John arrived from Jerusalem.

4. Additionally, both here and Acts 8.17, the coming of the Spirit followed the laying on of hands

Ac 8.17 Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

"It should also be noted that the reception of the Holy Spirit in Acts does not follow any set pattern."¹

Conclusion #1: The record of the book of Acts can't be a pattern for Christianity going forward.

¹ Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 409.

D. Key doctrinal point concerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life

Rm 8.9 ¶ However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

1. Paul teaches that Christians have victory over the flesh through the indwelling Holy Spirit
2. He adds, if you don't have the Spirit, you don't belong to Christ: *i.e.* you are not a believer

Conclusion #2: The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a mark of genuine Christian life, it is not an experience repeated again and again.

For these men, the big thing to note is the coming of the Spirit in confirmation of their Christian faith.

II. The attendant circumstances of this experience: the tongues and prophesying

A. A key defining distinction

1. In the New Testament, tongues are clearly human languages
2. The modern claim to tongues is unintelligible gibberish, not human languages

Early in the Charismatic movement, its promoters thought they were speaking foreign languages, so sent missionaries with no language training to India. They expected instantaneous communication, but experienced dismal failure.

B. The New Testament teaches that tongues were temporary

1 Cor 13.8 ¶ Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away.

1. Each of these (prophecy, tongues, knowledge) are sensational gifts (knowledge isn't "book-larnin" here)

2. We could translate the verb in the verse, “they will cease of themselves” (middle voice)
3. Other passages imply that tongues would or did cease in the New Testament era

Ep 2.20 [the church] having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets...

Heb 2.3-4 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴ God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

2 Cor 12.12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

- a. The church is founded on the apostles and prophets
- b. The great salvation came to us from
 - 1) The Lord
 - 2) Confirmed by the apostles
 - 3) And their signs
- c. The signs were signs of the apostles and their age

The *implication* of these passages is that tongues and prophecy were temporary gifts.

C. The meaning of this experience, the experience of the Ephesian twelve

“The phenomenon of the separate conversion and Spirit baptism experiences of some Christians that Luke recorded in Acts may need further clarification. It seems that God wanted to highlight the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that He would send the Holy Spirit to be in and with believers (John 14:16–18, 26; 15:26). To do so God made the coming of that Spirit obvious until the church generally appreciated the fact that it normally occurred at the time of regeneration.”²

III. The instructive value of the experience

A. Salvation depends on a right relationship (by faith) with Jesus Christ

B. Spirit-indwelling is a consequence of salvation: no born-again person is without the Spirit

Note: how do we know? By faith. The word of God says so, we believe it.

C. The sign-gifts of the New Testament speak to a specific period and time

1. Miraculous gifts in the Bible are limited to three major eras

a. The time of Moses and the Exodus

b. The rise of the prophets, beginning with Elijah and Elisha

c. The apostolic era, the beginning of the church

2. Most of history involves saints believing in God with a record of signs, but not an experience of signs

a. The children of Israel through most of its history

b. The church after the first half of the first century

² Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 19.6.

Conclusion:

Proposition: Christians need to depend on the Bible for objective truth, not the claims of experience, including personal experience.

You see, we have something sure in the Bible. We depend on its message. We trust its word.

The way we see the transformation now is not by signs and wonders, but by changed lives.

- Values change
- Worldview changes
- Direction of life and interests change

And we become useful in the service of the kingdom. We depend on the Bible for truth, we live our lives for service.