

SIGNS AND WONDERS IN GOD'S REDEMPTIVE PLAN

(CP Mk 16:17–18) It is plainly evident here that signs and wonders are an integral part of God's purpose for New Testament believers throughout the entirety of the church age. *Them that believe* in V17 refers to every believer in Christ throughout the history of the church (CP Mt 28:19–20). Here Jesus qualifies the life-span of everything He has committed to the church with His declaration in V20 "...and Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (KJV). *World* here means age. Jesus is referring to the end of the church age. This means that signs and wonders will follow all who are totally consecrated to the service of God and completely yielded to the authority of Jesus until the church is taken up to Heaven at the end of the church age (CP Jn 14:1–3; 1Cor 15:51–58; 1 Th 4:13–18).

Signs and wonders were not limited as the first century church, as some teach, any more than Christ's command to preach the Gospel and baptize repentant sinners was (CP Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15–16; 2Cor 5:18–20). Signs and wonders are the evidence to a lost world that Jesus is alive—He confirms the ministries of committed Christians with signs following (CP Mk 16:19–20; Ac 5:12). Signs and wonders are a demonstration of the Spirit and of power in believers that awakens unbelievers to a consciousness of the presence and the power of God, which raises their faith in Jesus, and they get saved (CP Ac 2:41–47; 3:1–9; 4:1–4, 31–33; 5:12–14; 8:5–13; 9:36–42; 13:6–12; 16:23–34; Ro 15:18–21; 1Cor 14:22). These scriptures all show signs and wonders as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit's empowering of believers for God's service. This empowering accompanies the baptism of believers in the Holy Spirit which is promised to every believer in Christ (CP Ac 2:37–39). This also proves that signs and wonders extend across the entire church age. *All that are afar off* then includes believers today and all who will come to Christ in the future.

There is much confusion in the contemporary church concerning the baptism in the Spirit. It is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. There is so much clear teaching on it in scripture, yet there is no other aspect of Biblical truth so misunderstood by Christians. That is why the church is so devoid of spiritual power in a world where it is so much needed. Warfare in God's service is spiritual and the church must be spiritually equipped to fight the war. To be spiritually equipped means being baptized in the Spirit (CP Lu 24:49; Jn 16:7–15; Ac 1:4–8). Jesus teaches here that the purpose of the baptism in the Spirit is to endue believers with power for their witness to Christ in the world.

Sadly, most Christians do not have this power because they have not yet been baptized in the Spirit. Many think they were baptized in the Spirit upon their conversion to Christ. But that is not correct, as scriptures plainly teach. Upon their conversion to Christ, Christians are born again of the Spirit who baptizes them into Christ and His body, the church (CP 1Cor 12:12–14). Here the church is called Christ and is compared to a body with its many members. This teaches how the church is constituted: upon their conversion to Christ the Holy Spirit unites the new converts with Christ as members of His body, the church. Being baptized in the Spirit and being baptized

into Christ and the church are two separate and distinct operations of the Holy Spirit, and believers need to know the scriptures which teach this (CP Ro 6:3–5). We learn here that upon their conversion to Christ, believers are born again spiritually and the power of sin over their lives is broken.

Ro 6:3–5 is widely taught in the contemporary church as referring to believer's water baptism, but that is not correct. If it were, then Paul would be teaching baptismal regeneration, which is totally unscriptural. Paul is simply teaching that when believers are baptized into the church—when they are born again spiritually and united with Christ as members of His church—the power of sin over their lives is broken and they can now live a Godly life in Christ. That is the *newness of life* Paul refers to in V34. It speaks of the new life imparted by the Holy Spirit at the believers' new birth—their conversion to Christ—which is a motivating energy providing both the desire and the power to live a Godly life. This is the theme of Paul's teaching throughout Ro 6 and elsewhere in scripture. It was nothing whatsoever to do with water baptism or the baptism in the Spirit (CP Ro 6:1–23; Ga 2:20; 3:26–28; Eph 4:1–6; Col 2:8–13; 3:1–10). In Eph 4: 1–6, which is also taught as referring to water baptism, Paul illustrates the seven fold spiritual unity of God and man: one body—the church; one Holy Spirit; one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God (CP Eph 4:1–6). When kept in its context, it is easily seen that this has nothing to do with water baptism either. In V1–3, Paul exhorts the church to be unified in the Spirit because, as he points out in V4–6, there is only one body in Christ and we were all baptized into that one body, which is the church. Ga 2 and 3, Eph 3 and Col 2 and 3 all bear witness to what Ro 6: 3–5 teaches.

It needs to be re-stated here that being baptized in the Spirit and being baptized into Christ and His body, the church, are two separate and distinct operations of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself teaches this (CP Jn 14:16–17). Here we see that the disciples were already born again of the Spirit. "...for He dwelleth with you"—but that soon they would be baptized in the Spirit "...and He shall be in you". Jesus teaches there that when believers are baptized in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit indwells them, not just abides with them. Believers become the temple of the Holy Spirit (CP 1Cor 3:16–17; 6:19–20). Being born again of the Spirit and being baptized in the Spirit were two separate and distinct operations of the Spirit in Jn 14, and they are two separate and distinct operations of the Spirit today. Christians who are already baptized in the Spirit need to know these scriptures so that they can share them with those who think they are, but are not really baptized in the Spirit (CP Lu 24:49; Jn 16:7–15; Ac 1:4–8).

The promise of the baptism in the Spirit is not for a select few in the church, but is for every believer in Christ. Neither is it limited to time, but is for the entire church age (CP Lu 11:9–13; Jn 7: 37–39; 14:12, 16–17, 26; 15:26–27; Ac 2:36–39). The analogy of *rivers of living water* in Jn 7: 37 is a declaration by Jesus that believers baptized in the

Spirit will have unlimited power to do the work of God. *He that believeth on me* in Jn 14:12 refers to every believer in Christ throughout the church age, proving once more that there is no time limit on signs and wonders as the outward manifestation of the baptism in the Spirit. Being scripturally baptized in the Spirit means the difference between a life bearing much fruit, and a fruitless life; a life of spiritual power and a life of carnal defeat. It means boldness and power to accomplish the work of God and to make believers' witness in the world and proclamation of the Gospel effective (CP Ac 1:8 with 3:1-9; 4:1-4, 29-33). Over 5,000 souls got saved as a result of the beggar being healed in Ac 3.

Believers today must never sit under any teaching that suppresses their faith to believe that they have the same mandate to operate in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power the same as the apostles and disciples did in the first century church (CP Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lu 3:16; 24:49; Jn 1:33-34; 16:7-15; Ac 2:32-33, 37-39). Signs and wonders include speaking in tongues, which is the sure evidence that one is baptized in the Spirit (we will examine this aspect of being baptized in the Spirit next); casting out demons; healing the sick; making the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak; raising the dead; prophesying; controlling the elements; walking on water, and the working of miracles etc. Jesus did all these things and He declared that believers would also do them and more (CP Jn 14:12).

Now let us look at speaking in tongues as the sure evidence of being baptized in the Spirit. Scriptures are quite clear on this point and believers must be also. If believers do not speak in tongues, it is because they have not received the baptism in the Spirit (CP Ac 2:14-18). Peter quoted the Old Testament prophet, Joel in V17-18 here to show the Jews that speaking in tongues was the outward manifestation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which the disciples had just received in accordance with Joel's prophecy (CP Joel 2:28-29). This is the most profound prophecy in the Old Testament concerning the future baptism in the Spirit for believers in Christ. Isaiah also prophesied that New Testament believers would speak in tongues (CP Isa 28:9-12 with 1Cor 14:21-22). We see here that Paul quoted Isa 28:11-12 to the church in Corinth in 1Cor 14:21 confirming that tongues are an integral part of God's ongoing redemptive plan which spans the whole of the church age. We learn also in 1Cor 14:22 that tongues are a sign for unbelievers of the supernatural presence of God among His people, as well as being the sure evidence that one is baptized in the Spirit (CP Ac 2:4). This passage speaks for itself: as soon as the disciples were baptized in the Spirit, they spoke in tongues (CP Ac 8:9-21).

The word *matter* in V21 here is from the Greek word **logos**, which means something said, utterance, word, speech, divine expression. Simon wanted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit because he heard those believers talking in tongues as the evidence of being baptized in the Spirit, when the apostles laid hands on them (CP Ac 10:44-46). This further confirms that speaking in tongues is the outward manifestation of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Jews with Peter knew Cornelius and the other Gentiles here were baptized in

the Spirit *for they heard them speak with tongues* which V46 clearly highlights (CP Ac 19:1-6). Here again, speaking in tongues is the explicit evidence of being baptized in the Spirit. After Paul baptized these believers in water, he laid hands on them and they were baptized in the Spirit and spoke in tongues.

The point all these scriptures make is that tongues are the sure evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. If there are no tongues spoken, then there has been no baptism in the Holy Spirit. It is as simple as that otherwise those scriptures are meaningless. They all teach that when anyone is baptized in the Spirit, they speak in tongues. In spite of this body of truth, there are many in the contemporary church who teach that Christians are baptized in the Spirit upon their conversion to Christ. They claim that tongues are not valid for today; that they ceased with the first century church. Some even go so far as to say that tongues are from the devil which is tantamount to saying that the baptism in the Spirit is from the devil also because tongues validate the baptism in the Spirit. Those teachers not only ignore the plain fact of scripture, they violate what Jesus Himself teaches. He did not limit any manifestation of the Spirit to the first century church (CP Mk 16:17-18). Furthermore, neither Isaiah nor Joel's prophecies have been fulfilled yet and they cannot be until the very last repentant sinner is saved and baptized in the Holy Spirit.

It is ludicrous to suggest that tongues are not valid for today, yet declare that the baptism in the Spirit is. They go together—one cannot be had without the other. If one is still valid, so is the other, the same as repentance and water baptism are still valid. They are all integral to God's redemptive plan which is ongoing. They did not cease with the first century church and neither did tongues or any other manifestation of the Spirit. They will all cease one day, but that time is not yet (CP 1Cor 13:8-12). *When that which is perfect is come* refers to the eternal state at the end of this present age when Jesus comes again to take the church back to Heaven with Him (CP Jn 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58; 1Th 4:13-18). When believers see Jesus face-to-face in the eternal state, there will no longer be any need for tongues or any other manifestation of the Spirit and they will cease. Until then however, they must remain while ever the church is on earth.

Let us look now at some other facets of the baptism in the Spirit. Not least of all baptism in the Spirit is also the doorway to the treasures God has laid up in store for the church—the gifts of the Spirit (CP 1Cor 12:7-11). These are nine gifts listed and following is a brief outline of each:

1. **Word of Wisdom** is a wise utterance applying the revelation of God's word or a flash revelation given by the Holy Spirit for a specific situation or problem that may already exist or which will arise in the future (CP Ac 27:27-44). This is not to be confused with the wisdom we are to seek from God for our daily living (CP Jas 1:5).

2. **Word of Knowledge** is an utterance inspired by the Holy Spirit that reveals certain knowledge about people or circumstances which the speakers could not possibly know by themselves. It is often connected closely with prophecy (CP Mt 16:13-17; 17:24-27; Lu 22:10-12; Jn 4:5-19; Ac 5:1-10; 27:8-26).
3. **Faith**, as a gift of the Spirit, is the supernatural ability to believe God implicitly without human doubt, unbelief or reasoning, for the extraordinary or the miraculous to happen (CP Ac 3:1-8; 14:8-10; 28:1-6). This is not to be confused with the faith we received to believe for our salvation (CP Ro 10:14-17). Neither is it to be confused with the faith given by God to every Christian with which to appraise or measure the character and extent of any spiritual gifts they have (CP Ro 12:1-3). Nor is it to be confused with the faith we have to exercise to believe that whatever we ask according to God's word, He will do it for us (CP Mk 9:23; 11:22-24; 1Jn 5:14-15).
4. **Gifts of Healing** are supernatural powers bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon certain individuals, empowering them to heal all manner of sicknesses and diseases or any physical ailment whatever without any human aids or the use of any medicines (CP Lu 13:10-13; Ac 28:7-9). Gifts of healing are not to be confused with the authority of believers to lay hands on the sick or to pray over them for their healing, or to stand in agreement with other Christians believing for someone to be healed (CP Mt 18:19; Mk 16:18; Jas 5:14-15).
5. **Working of Miracles** is a supernatural power to alter the normal course of nature and to counteract natural laws (CP Mk 4:35-39; Jn 2:1-11; 6:1-14; 15-21; Ga 3:5; He 2:3-4). Working of miracles manifested many times in the Old Testament too - when Moses held out His rod toward the Red Sea (CP Ex 14:15-29), also Elijah performed 16 recorded miracles, and Elisha recorded 32 (CP 1Ki 17:1-2 - 2Ki 2:12 with 2Ki 2:13-9:3; 13:20-21), etc.
6. **Prophecy** is a supernatural utterance in the speaker's native tongue. It is a spontaneous utterance of a revelation directly from God under the impulse of the Holy Spirit to strengthen the faith of the congregation and to build up their spiritual life and moral resolve to remain faithful to Christ and His teachings. It can also expose the condition of an unbeliever's heart and bring him or her to a conviction of their need for God. It is the gift of the Spirit believers should covet the most (CP 1Cor 14:1-12, 22-26, 39). The gift of prophecy here should not be confused with the ministry gift of prophet in Eph 4:11 which Christ gave to the church to prepare and equip it for God's service. That is a ministry gift given only to certain ones in the church whereas the gift of prophecy as a manifestation of the Holy Spirit is potentially available to everyone baptized in the Spirit (CP Ac 2:17-18, 19:1-6).
7. **Discerning of Spirits** is a special ability to properly discern and judge prophecies and to distinguish whether or not any utterance is inspired by the Holy Spirit, demon spirits, or the human spirit. It is also the ability to detect the spirits behind certain human activities (CP Mt 24:4-5; Lu 9:51-56; Ac 8:18-23; 13:6-12; 16:16-18; 1Jn 4:1-6).
8. **Divers Kinds of Tongues** are supernatural utterances in other languages not known to the speakers. The speakers are communicating directly with God under the influence of the Holy Spirit, completely bypassing their minds. They may be offering up prayers, praise, blessings or thanksgiving to God, or they may be bringing a message for the congregation from God. Speaking in tongues must be regulated in meetings. Tongues are a sign for unbelievers to know that God is present in the midst of the congregation, but they will also put unbelievers off if the congregation does not regulate their use (CP Isa 28:11; Mk 16:17; Ac 2:1-11; 1Cor 13:1; 14:1-23, 27-28).
9. **Interpretation of Tongues** is the ability bestowed by the Holy Spirit upon individuals in the congregation to understand and make known the meaning of an utterance spoken in another language. This ability may be given to the one making the utterance or to someone else. Those who have the gift of tongues should also pray for the gift of interpretation. Tongues in the congregation must be accompanied by an Holy Spirit inspired interpretation that communicates the content and meaning of the utterance to the congregation. This is to edify (build up) the church. Tongues plus interpretation equals prophecy. Tongues on their own do not edify but prophecy does (CP 1Cor 12:10; 14:5-13, 27-28).

These are all visible and tangible manifestations of the Holy Spirit operating through individual believers for the common good of the church. They are given according to the will of the Holy Spirit when need arises and according to the earnest desire of the believer (CP 1Cor 12:7, 11). It should be noted here that it is unscriptural and unwise to assume that because someone exercises a spectacular gift, that this person is more spiritual than one with less spectacular gifts. Neither does possessing a gift mean that God approves of all the possessor does or teaches (CP Ac 10:34-35; 1Cor 12:20-25). The Gifts of the Spirit are not an end in themselves either, but like tongues, representative of the deeper life in the Spirit.

Scripture does not make any allowance for believers not being baptized in the Spirit, and those who are not, need to be shown from scripture how necessary it is to be spiritually equipped to fulfil God's purpose for them. This is not teaching that Christians who are not baptized in the Spirit according to scripture cannot make it to Heaven, but to challenge them to want to avail themselves of God's promise to the church, and see His purpose fulfilled in their lives. How inconsistent it is with scripture to teach that

God only empowered the first century church for service and that the same empowering is not for today. If the contemporary church is also to fulfil Christ's commandment in Mt 23:19 to disciple all nations, it needs the same empowering the first century church had. The church Christ is building is not yet complete, and until it is, every believer needs to be baptized in the Spirit, for the Kingdom of God is not in word, but in power (CP 1Cor 2:1-5; 4:20).

Now, for those not yet baptized in the Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, you filled the main conditions for baptism in the Spirit when you appropriated the promise of God for your salvation, and by faith received Christ as your Saviour. Now you simply appropriate the promise of God for the baptism in the Spirit and receive it by faith the same way as you received your salvation (CP Lu 11:9-13; Ga 3:2; Jas 1:17). Do not be looking for some sort of "feeling" or emotional experience, or special anointing to come upon you. Just receive the baptism in the Spirit by faith, and as you do, the evidence of being baptized in the Spirit—speaking in tongues—will follow. Do not be concerned with what to say, as the language you speak will be spoken supernaturally and spontaneously. The Holy Spirit will give you the utterance. You can prepare to receive the baptism in the Spirit now by praying a simple prayer as the following:

"Heavenly Father, I come to you in Jesus' name believing with all my heart that I only have to ask, and you will give me as your word promises, the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

I ask you now dear Lord to baptize and fill me with your Holy Spirit.

I believe I have now received the baptism in the Spirit, and I thank you for it Lord. I now expect to speak in tongues in accordance with your word as the Holy Spirit gives me the utterance."

Immediately you have finished praying, you must put your vocal chords into operation and mouth the words as the Holy Spirit gives you the utterance. God fills you, but you must begin to speak—it is your voice He uses. Do it aloud and do not be concerned with how it sounds. Just keep speaking the words out. Soon you will become fluent in your new language.

Now that you speak in tongues, you need to know why they are such an integral part of God's redemptive plan. When believers speak in tongues, they are communicating with God direct. Neither they nor anyone else can understand what is being spoken—they are speaking mysteries that only God Himself understands (CP 1Cor 14:2). When believers pray in tongues, they are praying from the Spirit and again communicating with God direct by bypassing the mind, so they have no understanding of what they are praying (CP Ro 8:26-27; 1Cor 14:14). It is of the

utmost importance that believers keep praying in tongues to build up their faith (CP 1Cor 14:4; Jude 20). The tongues referred to here are the believer's new language for communing directly with God. They are for permanency and not to be confused with the gift of tongues, one of the nine gifts of the Spirit that we studied earlier which are given according to the will of the Holy Spirit only for specific occasions (CP 1Cor 12:1, 4, 7-11). It needs to be restated here though that tongues are not an end in themselves; the goal to which believers should attain. Important as they are, they are but the doorway to a deeper spiritual life in God. They signify the supernatural power with which believers have been endowed to be Christ's witnesses in the world, enabling them to do everything to which they are committed in Christ (CP Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-18; Lu 24:29, Jn 14:12; 16: 7-15; Ac 1:4-8).

Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, circumstances in life no longer dictate to baptized in the Spirit believers—they dictate to their circumstances. God wants believers to have ruling power in the Spirit so that they can be stabilised in life and participate in all of God's blessings and resources (CP Eph 3:16-19). Being baptized in the Spirit, as evidenced by speaking in tongues with signs following, is the inherent right of every believer in Christ from the day of Pentecost onward. It ensures their effective witness to Christ in the world. The devil does not want this to happen though and has deceived countless numbers of Christians into believing they have been baptized in the Spirit when they really have not. That is why the contemporary church is so devoid of the manifestation of Holy Spirit power.

The devil wants a weak church. He does not want to have to contend with a powerful witnessing church, operating in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power today, like he had to contend with in the first century church. He knows that signs and wonders awaken unbelievers to a consciousness of the presence and the power of God which raises their faith in Christ and they get saved. There is absolutely no suggestion whatsoever in scripture that the manifestations of the Holy Spirit's empowering of believers for service to God is limited to the first century church and does not extend to the church today. Believers today have the same mandate to work miracles and do everything that the first century church did, as is plainly evident in scripture. God has intended signs and wonders to continue throughout the Church age until Christ comes again to take the church back to Heaven with him (CP 1Cor 1:7; 12:28; Php 3:20-21).

Sadly, many in the contemporary church are vehemently opposed to tongues regardless of what they signify, and will not tolerate them in their assemblies. In those instances, members of those assemblies who earnestly desire the baptism in the Spirit in all its fullness as recorded in scripture, are advised to join a Pentecostal fellowship where tongues and the other manifestations of the Holy Spirit baptism are the norm for baptized in the Spirit believers.