

LANGUAGE: THE KEY TO EXPECTING GOD'S TANGIBLE PRESENCE

William Whisenant
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INTRODUCTION

The Tower of Babel stands as a powerful demonstration of effective communication's potential. The people of Babel had a single goal and a common language, a communal relationship where nothing was lost in translation. Their ability to clearly and directly communicate intentions served as the source of their progress. Today, does the successful rise of Christianity depend upon this same type of effective communication with God? Effective communication exists whenever an expressed intention is interpreted with a reflective correlating response. Pentecostals argue that, for Christians, this only occurs through the tangible person of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's personhood is primarily a Pentecostal doctrine. An objective study of Scripture may, however, expand this belief. By addressing doctrinal influences and misperceptions, Paul's metaphors, and examining the promise of *allos* or another, New Testament believers can ascertain an inspired expectation surrounding the Holy Spirit's tangible presence.

THE PROBLEM OF CONFUSION

Before approaching the person of the Holy Spirit, one must first define tangibility. According to Erik Konsmo, "A tangible entity must be capable of being treated as a fact... capable of being understood, not necessarily in a complete sense, but [with] some measure of realization."¹ It must also possess "a material value or benefit."² Most Christians would probably not argue against the Holy Spirit fitting within this definition. However, the notion of this entity being a person who expresses God's will, in a present tense form, gives rise to denominational separation.

¹ Erik M. Konsmo, "How the Pauline Spirit-Metaphors Express the Intangible Spirit's Tangible Presence in the Life of the Christian" (PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008): 33, <http://0-proquest.umi.com.library.regent.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1490075101&SrchMode=2&sid=1&Fmt=6&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1320254588&clientId=3927> (accessed March 18, 2009).

² Ibid.

Pentecostals "helped set the debate and expectation surrounding the Holy Spirit in the 20th century church."³ Most Pentecostals live under a doctrinally defined "expectation of the spirit working tangibly in the lives of every believer... for the purpose of unity, growth and spiritual power."⁴ For Pentecostals, "The Spirit is both divine and personal."⁵ Today, however, many "well regarded theologians" from more traditional churches also advocate for the same expectations.⁶ This includes leaders such as "the reformed Protestant Jurgen Moltmann, the Roman Catholic Yves Congar, and the Evangelical Clark H. Pinnock."⁷ Their acceptance and advocacy point towards biblical truthfulness, not denominational doctrine.

The problem occurs when individuals base tangibility on Pentecostal and charismatic manifestations alone. Images such as speaking in tongues, "shaking, falling on the floor, kicking and jerking, holy laughter," and even "dancing in the spirit" shape the expectations of many believers.⁸ Consequently though, some Pentecostals believe the Spirit operates subject to the individual. Don Allen Tennison insists the Spirit operates differently "in persons of practical logical tendencies."⁹ Scripture supports this position through Paul, pointing out that "the Spirit of the prophets are subject to the prophets."¹⁰ In essence, temperament and expectation shape manifestation. Believers may indeed experience a tangible expression apart from a perceived loss of con-

³ Don Allen Tennison, "Logic of the Spirit: Toward an Understanding of Pentecostal Mythology in the United States 1901-1930" (PhD dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006): 1, <http://0-proquest.umi.com.library.regent.edu/pqdweb?index=2&did=1105008581&SrchMode=2&sid=2&Fmt=6&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1320254766&clientId=3927> (accessed March 18, 2009).

⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁵ Ibid., 129.

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 322.

⁹ Ibid., 320.

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 14:32 (KJV).

trol. The Holy Spirit is more than manifestations. An objective search for the Spirit's tangibility requires one to look beyond these manifestations; it requires a study of Paul's writings, a man who spoke a great deal on the subject.

Throughout the Bible, including the Old Testament, metaphors "bridge the chasm between the invisible spiritual and visible physical world."¹¹ Komsmo studied Paul's use of metaphors, revealing that "the presence of a naturally intangible spirit is tangibly experienced by Christians."¹² Paul's metaphors help shape New Testament expectations for such an experience. These metaphors provide a tangible expression of a literal expectation. By evaluating them in context, Komsmo believes one is able to "determine the meaning" and also its literal "existence."¹³ He further contends, "without [metaphors] individuals could know little or nothing about God. The same holds true for the Holy Spirit."¹⁴ Resolving the confusion and misperception surrounding the tangible experience, therefore, begins with a linguistic evaluation of Paul's choices. The possibility of God's true intention requires that Believers search outside the pages of the Bible alone.

THE SOLUTION

According to Komsmo, "Paul wrote in now dead Koine Greek," using spirit metaphors, and these "are not clearly understood without additional study."¹⁵ Paul's use of metaphors illuminate's "the Spirit's activity within the sphere of human activity."¹⁶ He used terms relative to

¹¹ Tennison, 34.

¹² Komsmo. 33.

¹³ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵ Ibid., 304.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the human experience, like "birth, marriage, death...walking, gift, giving, drinking."¹⁷ These all shape a tangible interaction. Paul also used metaphors, such as "outward mark, liquid substance to be ingested, a liquid in which to be immersed, a partner to journey with, a lifesaving weapon of spiritual warfare and so on."¹⁸ Kosomo's study reveals how each term carries a tangible expectation for intimacy or "closeness."¹⁹ Tennison supports this position, describing this same Spirit as an entity moving with the ability for "leading, speaking, sending, interceding," one who possesses a "will, knowledge, love and feeling."²⁰ He insists that metaphors, such as grieving, rejecting, and quenching the Spirit are sinful actions "only possible against another personality."²¹ As such, the Spirit must be a person like Jesus. In fact, Scripture depicts Jesus promising an infinite, omnipresent guide for every New Testament. He offers this promise through the term *allos*, an inspired word choice, conveying tangibility.

THE PROMISE AND THE POSSIBILITY

The resurrection ushered in Jesus' promise of *another* for New Testament believers. John chooses the Greek word *allos* over *heteros*. According to *Vine's Expository Dictionaries of Old and New Testament Words*, "Allos expresses a numerical difference and denotes another of the same sort. Heteros expresses a qualitative difference and denotes another of a different sort."²² Jesus' promise contains the gift of One other than Himself but functioning in an identical role. One commentary suggests that the disciples had already been in the presence of both; however,

¹⁷ Ibid., 295.

¹⁸ Ibid., 305.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tennison, 130.

²¹ Ibid.

²² W.E. Vines, *Vine's Expository Dictionaries of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville: Nelson, 1997),

“the coming level of intimacy with both will be so much deeper that it is the difference between death and life.”²³ Aiden W. Tozer draws a similar line between the presence and the manifestation: "God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is manifest only when and as we are aware of His presence."²⁴ Believers may, in fact, be missing out on deeper intimacies, intimacies found only through a tangible expectation.

Allos provides believers with an objective expectation for expecting and sharing a intimately tangible relationship. The Holy Spirit lives as God's manifest presence on earth: He is to believers what Jesus was to his disciples. Believers can rest in the fact that Jesus lived intimately with His disciples, pouring out wisdom, correction, encouragement, and empowerment. In the Person of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would "remain in personal contact" with his disciples "although . . . in a new form."²⁵ If there are no orphans in the body of Christ, there can only be those who pass on the possibility of apprehending its benefits. Reflecting a triune relationship, New Testament believers inherit an intimate connection with the Father by Jesus Christ through the Presence of the Holy Spirit. This connection remains essential for effective communication.

THE POTENTIAL OF A UNIFIED PURPOSE

The offer of a promise indicates that God would not rely solely on the redeemed intellectual capacity of men for determining His will: “Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration).”²⁶ Emerson Powery posits the Spirit's “relationship to Scripture”²⁷ as an eliminating

²³ *IVP New Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=4&source=1&seq=i.50.14.2>

²⁴ A.W. Tozer. *The Pursuit of God: The Human Thirst for the Divine* (Camp Hill, PA: Wind Spread, 2006), 60.

²⁵ *IVP New Testament Commentary*.

²⁶ 1Timothy 3:16, Amplified Bible.

force behind inconsistent interpretation. Using Mark's gospel, he uncovers a critical connection between interpretation and Spirit. Jesus' "actions and interpretations are intimately linked with his pneumatically derived authority."²⁸ Powery suggests, "Only Spirit empowered interpreters are capable of adequately providing necessary selection, revision and meaning to the Greek and Hebrew Scriptures."²⁹ This, in part, is why Jesus argues against the Pharisees. The Apostle Paul's life lends credence to Powery's implications as well. Paul was well-versed in the Scriptures, but he did not have a revelation of truth until after he entered the new covenant relationship. Believers need God's tangible link for walking in the truth and refuting the leaven of misleading doctrines.

The body of Christ is Babel's vision redeemed. Christianity exists as a body of believers made up of denominational parts, each designed to function as a whole in its goal of touching heaven. This is achieved through the unified redemption of the world through obedience and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Where the people of Babel sought selfish glory, Christians seek God's glory by reflecting Christlikeness. Today, however, the church is walking in the confusion of Babel's judgment. Based on interpretations, Christians no longer speak the same language. The language of Scripture has not changed; unfortunately, the expectation of the Holy Spirit's role has. Instead of revelation and interpretation expanding unity, as it did in Scripture, the church finds itself continually divided, based on doctrinal interpretations. Interestingly enough, the writers of Scripture were never given divisive messages under inspiration.

²⁷ Emerson B. Powery, "The Spirit, The Scripture(s), and the Gospel of Mark: Pneumatology and Hermeneutics in Narrative Perspective," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. 2003: 184-198. <http://0-web.ebscohost.com.library.regent.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&hid=7&sid=f3b1c3c5-565c-4555-80e8-3f80b2621f08%40sessionmgr13> (accessed March 18, 2009).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

John writes, "When He, the Spirit of Truth (the Truth-giving Spirit) comes, He will guide you into all the Truth (the whole, full Truth)."³⁰ John also reminds the church: "The anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things ... you abide in Him."³¹ John cautions the church against abandoning their intimate connection with the Holy Spirit. Although God designed order through leadership, He leaves the caveat of testing the prophets. The Holy Spirit stands guard against messages of distorted leaven for those with listening ears. This guardianship pivots on an abiding expectation with the Spirit of truth. Under the guidance of the Spirit's voice, the parts of the body will stop pursuing their own divided interests.

CONCLUSION

It was Christ's prayer that the church would be one as He and the Father are One. Oneness is the New Testament Tower of Babel. In this rising edifice of unity, "the world may *know* that"³² God loves them and sent His Son as an expression of how deep that love is. In retrospect, the study of language style and word choice reveals a biblical foundation for expecting God's tangible presence. This foundation possesses eternal consequences, requiring more than a peripheral investment in Scripture or a reliance on the uncontested interpretation of men. Apart from expecting His tangible presence, the church will continue languishing well below its full potential.

³⁰ John 16:13, Amplified Bible.

³¹ 1 John 2:27, NAS.

³² John 17:23, NAS.

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