



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #18: "Going too Far in Sin"

Speaking in Tongues

"Where is the Spirit and power of Pentecost today?" many are asking. In the early Christian church when Peter and Paul were alive, God's presence was visibly manifest and the believers enjoyed a rich Spiritual experience of victory over sin. Is that power still available?

People are hungering and thirsting for something more than what they have found in religion in the past. Religion to many has been simply a social gathering where the preacher made everyone feel saved without a new birth experience that made them like Jesus in character. Many people have found their religion tame and lifeless, formal and empty. "Where's the power!" they demand. "Where's the real thing?" they ask.

Many have come to see the gift of tongues as the special mark of God's power, the signet and seal of His approval on the church. Because of this belief they spend much of their time seeking for and using this "gift."

What are the gifts of the Spirit? Who are they given to and what are they given for? Are they always spectacular? Is the gift of tongues the gift of the Spirit? Must everyone have this particular gift to be approved by God? Are you lost without it? These are important questions for all of us to Consider. Our study will answer these questions from the Bible. First, however, I would like to share with you some experiences that show that God is still giving the gift of His Spirit to men today.

The Holy Spirit's Gift to a Dying Man

by Mildred G. Lewis

It happened in the 1920's before the days of satellites, televisions, or rock music. Retirement centers, nursing homes, and the American welfare system had not been set up yet either. In my town elderly men who were poor and bedridden were housed in the basement of the county hospital.

As a young, junior-high school teacher, I shared my convictions about the poor and lonely conditions these older people had to live in. What a dreary place it was for these forlorn people to spend their last days of life.

"Let's give them a party once a month," one of my students suggested. The idea caught on quickly. The girls brought the men cookies, little jars of jam, and party favors. The boys furnished songs and stunts for entertainment. It was hard to tell who enjoyed the party more, the students or the men.

One day, unexpectedly, my faith was tested. The nurse called me aside and said, "You're the wife of the Adventist intern, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," I answered.

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"Good," she said, "then you can help me. Do you know the hymn 'Redeemed'? There's an elderly man near death in one of the rooms back there who keeps begging for someone to sing that song for him. I don't attend church, and I don't know the song. Could you sing it for him?" I had grown up in Adventist church school and knew well all the words of all the stanzas of that hymn.

When she led the way to the room and opened the door, tears came to my eyes as I viewed the pitiful sight. The man was thin and frail. His hands were trembling and his lips were quivering. I wanted with all my heart to sing for him, but *never* in all my life had I been able to carry a tune! The students had followed me to the room. I turned to them and asked, "Do any of you know the hymn 'Redeemed'?" No one did! I felt desperate! I saw that I would have to sing that hymn for him, but how could I?

Suddenly across my mind flashed the words of promises I had memorized: "He [Christ] longs to have you reach after Him by faith. He longs to have you expect great things from Him."

"As surely as the oak is in the acorn, so surely is the gift of God in His promise."

Silently but quickly I prayed, "Dear Father, I desperately need Your help; I claim Your promises." With that silent prayer, I opened my mouth and tried to sing:

"Redeemed! how I love to proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb,
Redeemed by His infinite mercy, His child and forever I am."

I could hardly believe it was real. My voice sounded clear and melodious! As I sang, the young people who knew I had never been able to sing even "America" in school, stood in silent disbelief I continued:

"I know there's a crown that is waiting in yonder bright mansion for me;
And soon, with the spirits made perfect, At home with the Lord I shall be."

The poor old man closed his eyes. As he rested his head on the pillow, an expression of such peace and joy came over his face that I knew the Holy Spirit had touched his heart and answered my prayer.

As we closed the door and moved away, the nurse remarked, "What a beautiful hymn, and you sang it so well."

"No," I replied, "I can't sing a note. It must have been an angel singing."

The old man died that night, but I have never forgotten that day. The scene and the song have remained vividly in my mind and heart for nearly 50 years. I feel confident that the God who loved him so much that He gave me the gift of song in answer to his plea will take him home on the resurrection morning to hear the angels sing.

Tongues in the Jungle

Hidden away, deep in the jungles of Papua, New Guinea, primitive tribes that practice cannibalism still exist. It was to these people that Elder Jim Harris, a missionary to the South Pacific Islands, was seeking to bring the message of the gospel.

In 1980 he took a 250-mile journey by canoe along the Sepik River and the May River to a little village called Sari. A little Christian church of 25 members met in a little thatched roof building in this village that had been a stronghold of Satan.

Pidgin English is spoken by most of the people in New Guinea, but these tribes are so isolated that even Pidgin English is unknown to many of them. Finding someone who knows the tribal dialect as well as English is virtually impossible, so preaching the gospel usually requires two interpreters instead of one.

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As Elder Harris presented the Gospel in the simple thatch roof building, the devil worked hard to disrupt the meetings. There was a man in the village who hated Christians and was determined to destroy their church. He began by trying to burn the church down. Carefully he made 12 torches. Just one was more than enough to burn the church like paper since the church was made only of dry thatch and thin wooden boards. Late at night, when the village was sleeping, he came stealthily to the church with his 12 torches. He stood outside, lighted one of the torches, and threw the flaming ball up onto the dry thatch.

As the torch hit the roof a big ball of flame immediately shot 30 feet into the air. Everyone in the village woke up and came rushing out to see what was going on. But the fire went out! The church didn't burn!

Again he tried as the villagers looked on. Again there was a tremendous flash, and flames leaped high, covering the church with fire. But just as quickly, the fire went out without burning the church.

The angry man tried the third torch. Then the fourth and the fifth! He continued until he had used every one of his twelve torches up. Those simple village people witnessed a marvelous demonstration that led them to understand that God's power is stronger than Satan's.

The frustrated man went home to sulk. Undaunted, the angry devil worshiper tried another tactic. He owned an ax--not just a stone ax like most of the tribal people, but an ax with a steel head. He was determined that nothing would stop him from destroying the meeting house. If he couldn't burn it down, he would chop it down! He chose a post at the corner of the building and took a mighty swing. Before the blade struck the post, the ax handle broke and the ax head fell useless to the ground. Confused, he went home and carved a new handle. The next night he tried again, but again the handle broke in mid air. Once more he retreated to carve a new and better handle. But the same thing happened the third time. God had intervened.

After the third ax handle had broken, he decided to go in and learn about the God who was so powerful. Pastor Harris was giving a message to the people telling them of the hope of eternal life where there is no sickness, no death, and no hunger. It was a precious message to those needy people.

Their lives are filled with unending sickness. The villagers contract malaria by the time they are two weeks old. For the rest of their lives they suffer from recurrences of the malaria. This weakens them leaving them vulnerable to many other diseases. Food is scarce, so hunger is a constant companion. Death is a well known visitor to these tribal villages where people seldom live past 40 years of age and where half of their little ones die in infancy.

They can hardly comprehend what it would mean to not be hungry, not be sick, and live in a peaceful land where there is no death. They know too well the meaning of tragedy, pain, and sorrow.

Pastor Harris announced the title of his sermon, "Our Father in Heaven."

"The Big Pella Masta on Top," the first interpreter echoed. Then the voice of the second interpreter was heard translating from Pidgin into the tribal language.

"The Big Pella Masta on Top..... Is preparing a place for you," Elder Harris continued. Again the two interpreters translated. It was a lengthy, time consuming process. The people had no background in any religion except devil worship, so even the concept of what heaven is and who "Our Father in Heaven" is, had to be explained. With two translators, this simple message would take nearly 1 ½ hours to give.

About 1/2 of the way through the sermon Pastor Harris noticed that both translators were standing there silent. "Do you understand what I am saying?" He questioned them in English.

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To his utter amazement, before they could respond, the gathered people replied. "Yes Pastor, we understand, keep speaking." Thrilled, but awed by the obvious presence of the Holy Spirit, he completed the sermon. The people understood every word.

Upon finishing the sermon he taught them to sing two songs in English. What a sweet sound that must have been to hear those fierce tribal people as they began to sing the songs of Jesus.

"God is so good,
God is so good,
God is so good,
He's so good to me.

"He answers prayer,
He answers prayer,
He answers prayer,
He's so good to me.

"Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia, Praise the Lord!"

"He's coming soon,
He's coming soon,
He's coming soon,
He's so good to me."

The sound of harmonious singing drifted out over the jungle. Once again the presence of the Holy Spirit was felt as the people, most of whom had never even heard English before, sang with perfect understanding and flawless accents.

Pastor Harris was filled with a quiet, holy joy as he stepped into the canoe with his companion to return to his humble abode that night. As the reality of what had happened dawned upon them, they praised God for His marvelous works to the children of men. God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform. Instead of giving just Elder Harris the gift of tongues, he had given the whole audience the gift of tongue so that they could be taught more effectively the gospel of God's love. God wants them to know that He is powerful and that He loves them.

The Missing Translator

In South Africa, there are many different tribes among the black nationals. Many of the African tribes have their own cultures and dialects that have been developed over thousands of years. This makes it difficult to reach the many different tribes there. Learning each dialect and preparing material in each language would take many people years of labor. Yet Revelation 14:6 says that the gospel is to be taken to *every* nation, tribe, tongue, and people. These language differences create a very real problem that ministers in places like this must grapple with. Reliable translators are often few. They were for Hugh Stevenson.

One evening, while beginning a new series in one of these tribal villages, he began to get anxious as he waited for his translator to arrive. Time passed and still the translator didn't come. Hugh began to pray. What should he do? The people were gathering expecting to hear a message. How could he disappoint

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them and send them home? Besides, since he was white and they were black being unable to communicate with them would leave them wondering why he was there. Hostility might arise.

The situation was serious. The people were there—All curious—yet no translator. Hugh stepped forward to pray. But as he began to pray, a strange thing happened. He found himself praying in a new language! And he understood what he was saying! He looked at the people—they were understanding too!

Suddenly he realized he knew two languages—English and this new language of the African tribe. He seemed to know it perfectly. The sermon that had been prepared in English flowed freely and fluently from his lips in the dialect of the people. The Holy Spirit was there to move on the hearts of the people as they listened.

Night after night he continued to speak to the people. Never again did he need someone to translate for him into that language. God had given him the ability to speak that language. It was a gift of the Holy Spirit; the gift of a new language so that he could take the gospel to these people. One of the amazing things was that from that day on he never forgot that dialect.

Praising God??

A Chinese laundryman visited a charismatic church in which the members were speaking in tongues. One of the elders of the church recognized the Chinese man and visited his laundry business the following week. When he asked the Chinese man how he liked the church service, the man shook his head in disapproval.

The elder said, "What was wrong? I thought I heard a lady speak in tongues that sounded like Chinese."

The Chinese man said, "She did speak in Chinese, and she was cursing God the whole time."

This is just one of many such examples, of which I have heard, of individuals who believed that they were praising God, but who were in fact cursing Him.

How could this be? Certainly the Holy Spirit would not lead someone to curse God. Could the devil have a counterfeit of the Biblical speaking in tongues?