

"The clearest, kindest and most theologically intelligent treatise on a key doctrinal issue."
—Rev. Canon Ronald Douglas McConnell



Pentecost REVISITED

WHY TONGUES OF PENTECOST DIVIDE
—AND HOW THEY CAN UNITE
THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

*A veteran pastor,
U.S. Navy chaplain
and missionary
takes a fresh look
at the traditional
Pentecostal view*

R. GLENN BROWN

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INTRODUCTION

This book introduces a theological debate that is long overdue. It confronts the division within the body of Christ between the burgeoning Pentecostal/charismatic community and the traditional evangelical community. With a foot in both camps, I began a search to determine the cause or causes for this separation. Unexpectedly, my search led to a struggle with my own church, the Assemblies of God, where I encountered an entrenched religious tradition and its attendant bureaucracy.

I also encountered some understanding, loving, spiritual leaders whose active intercession on my behalf protected me from the “protectors of the tradition.” I honored their labors on my behalf by never publicly voicing my doctrinal dissent while serving as pastor. For the sake of my church’s future, I am now constrained to bring this issue into the public arena. I do so in love and with the secure knowledge that an honest search for truth will be honored by Him who is Truth personified.

This truth-seeking process encompassed a period of forty years, beginning in 1969 during the Vietnam War and concluding during the current economic upheaval of 2009. I have recorded the history of my journey because I believe it has relevance not only for the Assemblies of God, the church in which I was reared, but for the entire Pentecostal/charismatic community, indeed, for the whole body of Christ. I examine the claims of humanistic materialists who deny the possibility of supernatural events as well as those of evangelical cessationists who claim the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were limited to the apostolic age. I will clearly describe my differences with the Assemblies of God

concerning speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism and present a sound scriptural and historical alternative position. (This alternative interpretation in no way diminishes the importance of speaking in tongues when this “sign” accompanies the baptism in the Holy Spirit.)

I believe the value of Spirit-inspired language is significantly increased when manifested in keeping with God’s purposes for this gift. I will demonstrate that there are two primary purposes for speaking in tongues. One is to edify the individual believer who exercises the gift of tongues in private devotional time with God. The other is to combat racial and cultural prejudices among different people groups and thus promote Christian unity amongst diverse peoples. I believe this purpose is clearly depicted in the book of Acts.

In more than fifty years as an ordained Assemblies of God pastor, Navy chaplain and missionary, I have discovered that, as it pertains to speaking in tongues, some ministers feel threatened when asked to even consider an idea that differs from their accepted traditional views. But it’s truth that I pursue, for that is what frees. My understanding of scriptural truth has led me to write this book. I write as a convinced Pentecostal believer who longs to see us become all that the Lord intended when He dispatched the Holy Spirit two thousand years ago.

I believe a major hindrance to achieving this goal has been our insistence that speaking in tongues must accompany every valid Spirit baptism. This is the story of how I reached that conclusion and the radical course of action I propose for my beloved church. Dr. George Wood, our General Superintendent, recently wrote that growth of the Assemblies of God in the United States has reached a plateau. I believe the course of action I suggest in this book is biblically sound. Equally important, I believe it will

promote the unity among believers for which Jesus Christ so ardently prayed.

Along my journey I deal with the following interrelated topics:

- 1) **Are supernatural events possible?**
- 2) **Are the gifts of the Spirit and accompanying miracles limited to the apostolic age or are they intended to be operative today?**
- 3) **Must the baptism in the Holy Spirit always be initially accompanied by tongues?**
- 4) **If tongues are not intended to be the sign to believers of Spirit baptism, what is their purpose when they accompany an outpouring of the Spirit?**
- 5) **What is the biblical evidence that one has been baptized in the Holy Spirit?**
- 6) **Where do we go from here?**

It all began in 1969 when the Holy Spirit prompted me to be “up-front” about my developing disagreement with my church’s dogma concerning speaking in tongues. I have since come to see there is a far more significant purpose for this manifestation. That important purpose is a major theme of this book.



A CONSCIENCE PROBED IN VIETNAM

THE YEAR WAS 1969. The place was the USS *Okinawa* (LPH-3), a helicopter carrier engaged in counteroffensive combat operations against the Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops near Da Nang off the coast of South Vietnam. This bathtub-shaped launching pad for helicopters was loaded with heavily armed Marines. The carrier had been my home since I had come aboard as ship's chaplain in July, 1968. On November 2, 1968, we sailed for Vietnam, cruising at twenty knots. In late November we anchored in the Da Nang harbor preparing to take aboard approximately two thousand additional "guests."

OKI-3, as she was affectionately called, was the flagship for Amphibious Squadron Five. Our senior "guest" was the Commodore with his staff of twenty officers; another sixteen hundred guests were Marines who comprised Special Landing Force Alpha under the command of a battle-experienced colonel. Battalion Landing Team 2/26 was the major combat force of SLF Alpha. These were the troops ferried in-country by "choppers" to engage enemy forces. Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 362 was tasked with flying the Marines into battle. They employed twenty-five helicopters with air and ground crews to accom-

plish their mission. In addition, there were two medical units assigned. One was a skilled surgical team with five surgeons and thirteen assistants who could handle anything short of brain surgery. Another team of three general practitioners plus twenty-two corpsmen cared for less serious wounds and illnesses. There was a 100-bed hospital ward to house wounded returned from combat.

The same choppers that carried Marines into combat returned the wounded to the ship. During combat operations everyone in ship's company had an assigned battle station. The chaplain's station was on the flight deck where it was easier to greet the incoming wounded, most of whom were victims of booby traps and personnel mines.

Confronted by the horror and destructiveness of war, I became very aware of my own mortality. I was actually in a safe environment while aboard ship—the bad guys were on shore. I sometimes felt guilty about not sharing the danger of the young men in combat and sought opportunities to go ashore whenever possible. One such opportunity involved a twelve-year-old Vietnamese girl who lost her leg just below the knee after being trapped in cross fire between American and Vietcong forces.

Our surgical team wanted to sponsor her for a prosthesis and asked me to go to her village and seek her parents' permission to transport her to a facility for the procedure. The Marine assigned to fly me into the village was a veteran helicopter pilot. I put on the protective armor usually worn when going in-country and carried my only weapon—an 8 mm movie camera. After lifting off the *OKI-3* deck, the pilot flew high enough over the green jungle to stay out of range of small arms fire. When we were over the landing zone,

he spiraled down swiftly so that we would not be an easy target for enemy snipers.

The girl's parents listened intently as my interpreter and I carefully explained what we wished to do. After a brief conference, they smiled and said they would gladly accept our offer. While they made the necessary preparations for their daughter to leave, the villagers gave me a tour of the village. They were especially eager to show off their school. The facilities were crude and primitive but the children were precious, like children everywhere.



A MILITARY STYLE WAKE-UP CALL

We were on the ground no more than half an hour. The chopper crew remained with their bird as the pilot let the engine idle. With the aid of a single crutch and village friends, the crippled girl made her way to the entry hatch of the chopper. I saw the makings of a great human interest story so I paused to record the scene with my movie camera. This incensed the Marine pilot who chewed me out in very salty language, emphasizing that every second on the ground was a dangerous second, especially after being in one place so long. The angry Major growled that even a short delay could jeopardize lives. It was a sobering lesson for me and I took it to heart.

This and other in-country experiences made me increasingly aware that war can suddenly produce death and destruction to the unwary. It forced me to search my conscience and ask myself, "Glenn, are you ready to die?" It wasn't a question of salvation. No, it was a matter of resolving an issue with my church that I found painful to face because serious consequences could result. However, I didn't want to suddenly appear before God

with unfinished business between us, so I knew I had to “bite the bullet.”

God had been probing my conscience about being honest with the Assemblies of God, my ecclesiastical endorsing agency. Let me explain. Every minister granted credentials by

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the Assemblies of God must submit an annual credential renewal form which contains the following key question: “Do you fully subscribe to the Statement of Fundamental Truths as contained in the General Council Constitution Article V?” For eleven years I had checked “yes.” However, close scrutiny of Scripture was slowly but surely convincing me that I could not “fully subscribe” to

one of the statements. This is the statement that troubled me:

“The baptism of believers in the Holy Spirit is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance.”

I determined to be as forthright as possible when I dealt with this issue on my next credential renewal form. Ironically, I knew that to do so might cost me my career as a Navy chaplain. If I were dropped from the Assemblies of God, dismissal from the Navy Chaplains’ Corps would surely follow. This could create dire consequences for my wife and daughter. Loss of income could be recouped elsewhere but retirement and medical coverage would be difficult to replace. Believe me, I did not take this lightly. I believed God had called me into the chaplaincy and I loved this ministry. But I was also convinced that God was directing me to be open and honest with the Assemblies of God

about a phase of doctrine I could no longer fully subscribe to in good conscience. The consequences must be left in His hands.

By no means was the Marine chopper pilot the only person who sensitized me to my mortality and my need to have everything “squared away” with God. Other men and events affected me much deeper emotionally. In the midst of war and death, I was learning important lessons about life, lessons about integrity and about making tough, costly decisions. These cumulatively hardened my determination to resolve the doctrinal issue with my denomination and let the chips fall where they may.



A NAVY CORPSMAN TEACHES ME ABOUT INTEGRITY

There are some people you know all too well and would like to forget; there are others you meet in passing but will remember forever. “Doc” is one of the latter. It’s been forty years since I last saw him and time has erased his given name, if I ever knew it. The Marines he so selflessly served called him “Doc” and that’s how I’ll always remember him.

Doc was a young Navy corpsman, possibly twenty-one years old, attached to BLT 2/26, the Marine infantry unit that was part of SLF Alpha. He wasn’t a big man physically, maybe 5 feet 9 inches, 150 pounds, but he exuded gentle inner strength and moral toughness. A few freckles were scattered across a face that was topped by close-cropped sandy hair. He spoke with the soft, slow drawl of the Deep South. As I got to know him better, I discovered his Christian faith ran deep without any tinge of self-righteousness. I first met Doc on the crowded hanger deck of USS *Okinawa* as the units of BLT 2/26 prepared to board the helicopters for a vertical assault on the Vietcong’s turf. Somehow, amidst the organized confusion and din of milling troops and

A SCRIPTURAL AND REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE TO OUR TRADITION

ONE PARTICULAR PASSAGE of Scripture that grabbed my attention so powerfully is 1 Corinthians 14:20-23:

“Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the law it is written: ‘Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,’ says the Lord. Tongues, then are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church come together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”

Let’s take Paul’s injunction seriously and approach this passage without preconceived ideas, analyzing it as carefully as we can.

What is the setting for the loosely quoted passage from Isaiah 28:11-12? It refers to the captivity of reprobate Israel in the land of Assyria. The “strange tongues” refers to the language native to Assyrians but strange to Israelites.

Through the judgment of the Assyrian captivity, God is trying to get the attention of His disobedient people but they will not listen. It is these captive Israelites who are the unbelievers, not the Assyrians. From this example, Paul draws this principle: “*Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers.*” But just below this verse he states that if unbelievers come in while everyone is speaking in tongues, the unbelievers will conclude the speakers are insane.

How are these passages reconciled? Scholars have struggled with this, and various suggestions have been offered. J.B. Phillips, the biblical scholar who gave us *The New Testament in Modern English*, gave up hope of reconciliation and placed this footnote at the bottom of the page:

“This is the sole instance of the translator’s departing from the accepted text. He felt bound to conclude, from the sense of the next three verses, that we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul or, more probably, a copyist’s error.”

But it definitely is not a slip of Paul’s pen nor a copyist’s error. It is a foundational truth that has been overlooked or ignored by American Pentecostals. Charles Parham and other early Pentecostals leaped to the conclusion that speaking in tongues must always initially accompany Spirit baptism. Apparently they were so fascinated by the spectacular that they failed to search Scripture for some far more significant purpose.

The book of Acts is a historical record of what happened in the beginning days of Christianity. It relates the story of believers who were baptized in the Holy Spirit and went forth to proclaim the gospel in the power of the indwelling Spirit. Acts specifically indicates that in several instances those who were filled with the

Spirit spoke in other languages unknown by them. That is the “WHAT?”

But history is not intended to affirm doctrine; to jump from the historical account to Parham’s conclusion is totally unjustified. The epistles are the place to look for doctrine. The letters of the inspired apostles provide the “WHY” of the “WHAT.”



TONGUES ARE A SIGN TO UNBELIEVERS, NOT BELIEVERS

There is only one place where the “WHY” of tongues is clearly delineated.

*“Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues
God will speak to this people, to whom he said, ‘This
is the resting place, let the weary rest’; and, ‘This is
the place of repose’—but they would not listen.”*

This text from Isaiah 28 reveals to Paul the purpose and function of tongues. It is foundational and applicable to every instance where “other tongues” are spoken, from Isaiah’s day down to the present.

I suggest that Paul is looking at the grand scheme and purpose of tongues in their historical setting. The purpose has always been and continues to be just as Paul affirmed: *“Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers.”*

Let’s use the principle laid down by Paul and apply it to the instances in the early church where the Spirit was outpoured accompanied by the sign of speaking in tongues. I believe it will remove the difficulty surrounding this passage.

RACISM WITHIN THE PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

I SAID EARLIER THAT one purpose of tongues was to be a sign to cessationists that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit were being restored to the church. The cessationists missed the sign, largely because the Pentecostals assigned an erroneous significance to tongues that was not clearly supported by Scripture. As a result, the cessationists not only rejected the sign but also the reality of the spiritual gifts to which the sign pointed.



AT AZUSA STREET REVIVAL

The outpouring of the Spirit accompanied by tongues conveyed another sign to unbelievers. This was true in both the first century and the twentieth. The early church comprised of Jewish believers was persuaded to accept the Samaritans, the Gentiles, and the polyglot society of Ephesus into the church because they heard believers speak in tongues just like the one hundred twenty in the upper room. Tongues were God's sign that He would not tolerate racism in His family. It was no accident that God chose a half-blind African-American pastor to lead the revival on Azusa Street.

Racism was still rampant in America less than fifty years after the Civil War. People of color, particularly blacks, were still treated as second-class citizens by white Americans. When the revival at Azusa Street was launched, powerful demonstrations of God's power drew people from all races and walks of life. They worshipped together; they cried together; they laughed together; they were one in the Spirit together. For a short time there was genuine evidence of the equality of people groups within a Christian community.

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The worldly culture, immersed in prejudice and racial bias, was quick to condemn the interracial demonstrations of Christian unity. One Los Angeles newspaper spoke of the “disgraceful intermingling of the races” and described Pastor Seymour disparagingly as a “one-eyed, illiterate Negro.” The beautiful spirit of unity and harmony at Azusa

Street began to crumble under the onslaught of racism. But it wasn't external racism that produced the collapse of mutual love and respect. Prejudice imbedded in the church brought about the ignominious failure of this attempt by the Holy Spirit to create interracial harmony. The church had missed the sign.

One of the great “what-ifs” of the last century is: What if the church had not missed the sign of racial unity and equality tongues was meant to convey? Fifty years of humiliating abuse and injustice to our black brothers could have been averted. Race riots of the fifties and sixties could have been prevented as black and white Christians reached out together to transform our racist culture. We missed the sign and instead interpreted tongues

as physical evidence that individuals had been filled with the Holy Spirit. They had been filled with the Holy Spirit but the purpose of the Spirit was to empower them to help bring about racial equality just as the Spirit did in the first century.

Sadly, the chief perpetrator of racial bias came from within Pentecostal leadership ranks. It was Charles Parham who mentored William Seymour, son of a former slave, and taught him that tongues were the initial physical evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit. When Parham heard of the great revival taking place in Los Angeles under the leadership of his former pupil, he went to investigate.

Parham was repulsed by the intermingling of the races. Also, he apparently was jealous of Seymour's place of leadership and tried to assert his authority over that of the black pastor. Fortunately, this was resisted not only by Seymour but by the congregation. Parham left and later wrote scathing attacks against the intermingling of the races such as he had witnessed in the Azusa Street revival. He described it as a "horrible, awful shame." The negative criticism by Parham birthed further criticism by whites, and the grand potential of Christian racial unity came to nothing.

Harvey Cox, Victor Thomas Professor of Religion at Harvard University, has written an objective critique of Pentecostalism entitled *Fire from Heaven*. In it he relates the sordid history of how William Seymour was treated by some white pastors who were former allies and supporters. One was Parham, the other William H. Durham, and both had roles in Assemblies of God history. Cox describes Seymour's response to attacks from these men.

“Seymour’s altercation with Durham created a painful crisis for him. During his first years at Azusa Street, he had put central emphasis on the gift of tongues both as the clearest evidence of baptism in the Spirit and as a harbinger of the Last Days. But now he began to change his mind. Finding that some people could speak in tongues and continue to abhor their black fellow Christians convinced him that it was not tongues speaking but the dissolution of racial barriers that was the surest sign of the Spirit’s Pentecostal presence and the approaching New Jerusalem. The early white Pentecostals disagreed. Uncomfortable under black leadership and embarrassed by the opprobrium heaped on them for ‘worshipping with niggers,’ they finally opted to reject interracial fellowship and keep the tongues.... Seymour had come to believe that the breaking of the color line was a much surer sign than tongue speaking of God’s blessing and of the Spirit’s healing presence.”¹

Having reached my own conclusion simply from a study of Scripture and before I read Cox’s book, I was surprised to learn that Seymour had reached the same conviction nearly a century earlier. His was based on personal experience and I believe Scripture overwhelmingly confirms his conclusion.

Parham is falsely depicted by some as the father of the Pentecostal movement. I believe he is the father of the erroneous teaching that the baptism in the Holy Spirit must be initially evidenced by speaking in tongues. This “evidence” or “sign” was not for the believers who had been baptized in the Spirit. As Paul stated, it was a sign for unbelievers. A sign of what? Most of those baptized in the Spirit at Azusa Street were African-Americans. Some, like Pastor Seymour, were children of slaves. When the Spirit filled them and they spoke in tongues, God was

giving evidence that this people group were first-class children in His family and must be treated with respect. And who were the “unbelievers”? Why, of course, prejudiced white Christians who had adopted the culture of the world.

It was very interesting to learn that the majority of the founding fathers of the Assemblies of God first had ministerial credentials with the Church of God in Christ. This was a mixed racial holiness denomination, but primarily black, which had been formed in 1897 after being rejected by Baptists for their holiness teaching. One of their leaders, Elder Charles Mason, visited the Azusa Street revival and came back to Tennessee preaching and teaching the Pentecostal message. He led the recently formed integrated denomination into the Pentecostal orbit.



WITHIN THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

In 1914 a group of white ministers met to discuss the founding of a white Pentecostal fellowship. White ministers ordained by the Church of God in Christ withdrew to help form the new denomination called the General Council of the Assemblies of God. The racial integration of Christians demonstrated at Azusa lost its last significant representation. The failure of the church to recognize the sign given by the Spirit at Azusa was now distressingly evident. Segregation would remain the norm within the Assemblies of God for more than fifty years, although not officially sanctioned.

In 1948 the Assemblies of God was involved in the formation of the all-white Pentecostal Fellowship of North America. There were no black Pentecostal churches invited to participate. I was a twenty-year-old airman stationed at Hickam Field, Hawaii, at the time. That year President Harry Truman signed the executive order that integrated the armed forces of the United States. I

TONGUES OF *Pentecost*

MUST HOLY SPIRIT BAPTISM BE INITIALLY EVIDENCED BY SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

With heartfelt conviction, this veteran Assemblies of God pastor lovingly, but boldly, declares that his church has long mistaken the true purpose of speaking in tongues.

He describes clearly his doctrinal differences with the church and presents a scriptural alternative. *Pentecost Revisited* offers biblical evidence that tongues, correctly understood, will reverse Babel and help unite the body of Christ around the world.

DISCOVER ANSWERS TO THESE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

- 🔥 Is speaking in tongues always the initial evidence of Holy Spirit baptism?
- 🔥 Why is there ongoing division between Pentecostals and other evangelicals?
- 🔥 Are miracles and gifts of the Spirit limited to the apostolic age?
- 🔥 What does Jesus say is the evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit?
- 🔥 Why is it easier to change doctrine than to change tradition?
- 🔥 Why do atheists so bitterly oppose Intelligent Design?
- 🔥 How does speaking in tongues combat racial bias and promote Christian unity?
- 🔥 and more...



ROBERT GLENN BROWN has been an ordained Assemblies of God minister for over fifty years. A retired Navy chaplain, he served in the United States Army, Air Force and with the Marines. He pastored for nineteen years in the U.S. and since 1993 has traveled regularly to Eastern Europe establishing an orphanage and ministering to the local military. Brown is a graduate of the University of Denver, Princeton Seminary, Denver Seminary and Navy Senior Chaplains' School. He and his wife Donna live in Sequim, WA.

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