

Reasons for Holding a Non-Charismatic Position



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Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary has gone on record in its Definition and Direction Statement as holding a non-charismatic position (section 1), i.e., we believe that the sign gifts of the New Testament are no longer in existence. The board of directors, administrators, faculty, and staff members annually agree in writing with this position (section 6). In this article Dr. Myron Houghton, professor of theology at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, explains reasons for this non-charismatic position.

In this article the term charismatic refers to a belief that all of the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:14 are available today. This list would include speaking in tongues and exercising the gifts of prophecy and the word of knowledge. Many Christians who love the Lord believe that these gifts exist today. This article does not question either their salvation or godliness.

On the other hand, many godly believers do not believe that these gifts are available today. They believe that the above mentioned gifts were temporary, intended by God only for the first-century church. Four lines of reasoning explain this position.

Reason #1—Transition from Israel to the Church

Why did people speak in tongues in the book of Acts? In order to answer this question, we must carefully examine the kingdom message of John the Baptist as found in Matthew 3:1:12. He exhorted his listeners to repent because

the kingdom was at hand, and he performed baptism based upon that repentance, refusing to baptize those he suspected had not yet repented (3:7-10).

In verse 11 John identified the coming King as one who would baptize, or place, those who had repented with [or better, in] the Holy Spirit.¹ The point of Matthew 3 is that the coming kingdom (3:2) is tied to the baptism in the Holy Spirit (3:11). John the Baptist understood the kingdom he proclaimed as identical to what the Old Testament prophets had predicted. That is why he gave no definition of the kingdom or made any distinction between the kingdom he proclaimed and the one predicted by the prophets.²

We know that the kingdom offered to Israel was rejected and postponed. However, in Acts 1:1–8, during the forty days between Christ's resurrection and ascension, He spoke to His disciples about the coming kingdom of God (1:3). So they must have been startled to have Jesus command them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father (1:4).

Even more amazing was the Lord's statement in Acts 1:5: John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. The disciples no doubt connected that statement with Jesus' words in Matthew 3:11 and assumed Jesus would set up His kingdom right then. So the question that the disciples asked Christ in verse 6 was only natural: Will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

Christ did not directly answer their question, but He simply responded, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (1:8). The Lord indicated by these statements that God was making a change in His program. He was transitioning from the kingdom to a new body called the church.

With this transition clearly in view, we can see that speaking in tongues served two purposes in Acts, both of which make tongues speaking unnecessary today.

The first purpose of tongues speaking in Acts was to get the attention of the Israelites on the Day of Pentecost to announce this transition.³

To celebrate this festival, thousands of Jews flocked to Jerusalem from different countries. While all of them understood Greek as a trade language, each group would also speak their native language. The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak the wonderful works of God in those native languages, and the people were amazed because it was obvious the authors were Palestinians and had not learned those languages (Acts 2:4–11).

When Peter had the people's attention because of the sign gift, he stood up and spoke to the men of Israel (2:14). He announced that because they had rejected their Messiah, God was setting aside the nation temporarily and doing something new (2:22–36). God was no longer working with Israel as a nation. Now He would invite individuals, both Jews and Gentiles, to receive forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit as a gift through faith in Christ and to demonstrate that faith by being baptized by the authority of Jesus Christ (2:38, 39).⁴

So speaking in tongues in Acts 2 attracted the attention of the gathered Jews to hear that God was instituting a new program. That event, with its accompanying sign gift, was a one-time occurrence, which indicates that speaking in tongues did not need to be repeated.⁵

The second purpose of speaking in tongues in Acts was to convince Jewish believers that God was giving others exactly what He had given them at Pentecost. Notice that God purposely withheld giving the Samaritan believers the

Holy Spirit until Peter and John from the Jewish believers in Jerusalem came to Samaria to endorse their conversion by laying hands on them (Acts 8:14–17). Immediately the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit.

While the text does not say that the Samaritan believers spoke in tongues when they received the Holy Spirit, it is clear that some outward, observable manifestation occurred, causing Simon the sorcerer to offer Peter money so that he could produce the same manifestation (Acts 8:18–25).

In Acts 10:43–48 the purpose of Cornelius and his household speaking in tongues was to convince the Jewish believers who had come with Peter that God was now incorporating Gentiles into the church program.

The men with Peter were able then to confirm Peter's words to the Jewish believers at Jerusalem. And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave to us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:15–17).

Finally, Acts 19:1:6 records the account of a group of individual Jews who had responded affirmatively to the kingdom message of John the Baptist. Paul preached the Christian gospel to these kingdom disciples. They believed, were baptized, and spoke in tongues demonstrating that along with the Jewish people, the Samaritans, and the Gentiles, the kingdom Jews were also brought into the new church program.

So speaking in tongues in Acts 8, 10, and 19 occurred to show Jewish believers who had been brought into the church program that Samaritans, Gentiles, and individual kingdom Jews were also being brought into the new church with equal standing as themselves (Acts 10:45–47; 11:15–18). This transition took place in the first century; therefore, speaking in tongues as a sign of receiving God's Spirit is no longer necessary.⁶

Reason #2—Temporary Nature of Some Gifts

The gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge were singled out and said to be temporary according to 1 Corinthians 13:8–10. What these gifts have in common is that they were means by which God gave new revelation. God used tongues (1 Cor. 14:2), prophecy, and knowledge (1 Cor. 13:2) to speak mysteries or new revelation. But this revelation was partial (1 Cor. 13:9) and would last only until divine revelation was complete (1 Cor. 13:10).

Further, in contrast to tongues, prophecy, and knowledge, which are said to be temporary, other elements such as faith, hope, and love are said to abide or remain (13:13). Love is described as the greatest of these because when Christ returns, faith will turn to sight and hope will turn into reality. Only love will last forever.⁷

The temporary nature of revelation from these sign gifts has been superseded by the complete revelation in the Scripture. Thus we adopt a non-charismatic position.

Reason #3—Association with Liberal Groups

Traditional Pentecostals believed in the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, and the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. They believed that a person became a true believer by placing his trust in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. They did not organizationally cooperate with those who denied any of these fundamental doctrines or with those who taught that forgiveness of sins comes through water baptism.

Their position has now changed. For example, the Assemblies of God had accepted the ordination credentials of David du Plessis (1905–1987) when he moved to America from South Africa. When he began speaking to ecumenical groups like the World Council of Churches, the Assemblies of God asked him to stop. He refused and

they revoked his credentials. However, in the 1980s the group restored his credentials. That change did not reflect a change in the practice of David du Plessis but in the Assemblies of God.

In the mid 1950s and into the late 1960s, speaking in tongues and related gifts were evident not only in groups that preached the gospel but also in liberal Protestant denominations and in the Roman Catholic Church as well. The Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship International helped to break down the barriers between the traditional Pentecostal denominations and the charismatics in liberal Protestant churches and in the Roman Catholic Church.

At Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary we believe this breakdown of organizational separation is unscriptural and therefore leads us not to participate in the charismatic movement.

Reason #4—Distortion of the Gospel

In some charismatic circles the content of the gospel has been changed from Christ died for your sins to God wants you to be healthy and wealthy. No longer is sin the problem. It has been replaced by sickness or lack of riches. One has only to turn on the television to certain programs to hear preachers saying that God wants all believers to be wealthy and prosperous.

The reason this situation does not exist, they say, is because many believers have not sent their seed money to them so that God can bless them. Instead of teaching Biblical principles of stewardship and loyalty to the local church, these leaders encourage people to send funds to their television ministry. Those who respond will be given a free book or a prayer cloth as well as offering envelopes for future contributions.

This prosperity gospel is rampant in charismatic circles, and while not all charismatic groups endorse this version of the gospel, very few voices are raised against it. The tolerance of this distorted gospel in the charismatic movement moves us away from participation with it.

We believe that there are doctrinal as well as practical reasons for refusing to be part of the charismatic movement. The setting aside of Israel and the establishment of the church took place in the first century, so speaking in tongues today is not necessary. Furthermore, revelation was completed with the New Testament canon, so the gifts that gave partial revelation during the first century are no longer necessary. Finally, the compromise in ecumenical activity as well as a willingness to tolerate the prosperity gospel are good reasons for not participating in the charismatic movement.

End Notes

1 Placing people in the Spirit is another way of saying Christ would place the Holy Spirit in them. That is why Paul later said, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you (Rom. 8:9). Ezekiel 36:24-28 makes it clear that when God's kingdom is finally established on earth, the Jews will be returned to their land and be cleansed of their sins, and God's Spirit will indwell them.

*2 Alva J. McClain gives many more details of the message of John and Jesus concerning this kingdom in *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, page 274ff.*

3 Speaking in tongues in Acts 2 did show that the disciples had received the Spirit (2:4), but the tongues functioned as an attention-getter for the Jews.

4 Acts 10, especially verses 43-48, explains the proper order: faith in Christ brings remission of sins (43) as well as the Holy Spirit as a gift (44). Water baptism should then follow (47, 48).

5 Once Peter had the attention of the Jews, he could use the keys given him by the authority of Christ (Matt. 16:19) to lock up the kingdom, i.e., announce to Israel that because of their rejection of their Messiah, the kingdom was not

going to be set up at that time. He then unlocked the church, which was a new element in God's program (Acts 2:38, 39).

6 The New Testament teaches that now all believers have received God's Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

7 Yet if faith, hope, and love remain after tongues, prophecy, and knowledge cease, then the phrase when that which is perfect has come cannot refer to Christ's return but rather to the completed canon of Scripture. Thus when the complete (revelation) comes, the (gifts communicating) partial (revelation) pass away (they are no longer necessary). Both what is complete and what is partial are revelational. So 'the perfect' refers to completed revelation. ("A Reexamination of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July—September 1996), 350. See the entire article for a more complete discussion of these verses in 1 Corinthians 13.)