

Secularism Sucking the Pneuma Out of Spirit-Filled Christianity

Fewer **Pentecostals** are speaking tongues. Fewer Baptists are getting baptized. Wait, what? Yes, you read that correctly. But what are we to make of the decline of baptisms in water and in the Spirit? I'll get to that in a minute.

A couple of months ago, I wrote a column entitled, "Are We Pentecostals Losing Our Religion by Holding Our Tongue-Talking?." In it I referenced an AP report about a small **Assemblies of God** congregation that looks just like every other Pentecostal church service—except nobody is **speaking in tongues**.

What I didn't include are the stats from the Assemblies of God, the largest **Pentecostal** denomination in the world with 66 million members. At the General Council meeting in August, the AG talked about the decline **baptisms in the Spirit**.

According to the denomination's statistics, **tongue talking** decreased by about 3 percent to less than 82,000. That's the lowest rate since 1995. How is that even possible, given that **Pentecostalism** is one of the fastest growing sectors of **Christianity**? The Pew Research Center reports that at least 25% of the 2 billion Christians in the world are connected to the **Pentecostal** or **charismatic** movements.

"This is a long-developing phenomenon," Harvey Cox, an expert in Pentecostalism and professor of religion at the Harvard Divinity School, told the Associated Press. "They don't want what appears to be objectionable to stick out or be viewed with suspicion."

And it's not just the **Pentecostals** that are straying from the

defining characteristics of their faith. The Baptists are also reporting a decline in Baptisms. Indeed, the North American Mission Board (NAMB) reports **water baptisms** dipped 13 percent in 2012 to under 300,000. Al Gilbert of the NAMB told One News Now that's the biggest drop in 62 years—62 years!

“Maybe we're not identifying the need to help our teenagers and even our older children understand how to publicly profess their **faith**,” Gilbert says. “Are we even making sure that they've understood the claims of Christ and then they have declared that they're publicly a follower of Christ?”

OK, so what's going on here and what does it mean for Pentecostals, Baptists, and Christianity at large? It doesn't take a prophet to see that secularism is attacking the foundations of Christianity and we're seeing the manifestations in two of the largest, oldest branches in the body of Christ.

Think about it for a minute. When **Pentecostals** don't speak in tongues and **Baptists** aren't getting baptized, it signals a deeper issue of **faith**. In an age of interfaith marriages, some may be abandoning their **religious roots** to avoid offending their spouses.

In a recent article entitled “Interfaith Unions: A Mixed Blessing,” Naomi Shaeffer Riley points out that before the 1960s, about 20 percent of married couples were in interfaith unions; of couples married in this century's first decade, 45 percent were. She also notes that **secular** Americans welcome the rise of interfaith unions as a sign of societal progress. But it's not progress when you abandon the tenets of your faith in the name of compromise.

Secularism is even creeping into churches. What does that look like? Some of the signs are blatantly obvious, such as teaching that **Jesus** is not the only way to God. But the **Bible** clearly states that Jesus is the way, the truth and

the life and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Approval of **homosexual** lifestyles is another obvious fruit of **secularism** in the church, just as is a refusal to confront other sins.

But secularism isn't always so blatant. There are subtle secularistic messages invading the church. Messages that focus more on moralism than Christ and the cross sound fine and good but morality without Christ is not **Christianity**. Likewise, pop psychology-centered sermons can take our focus off Christ's and distract us from our faith in His healing power and place it in steps or formulas that may actually contradict the Word.

When we're scared our **faith** will offend, we're bowing to **secularism**. When we stop publicly baptizing in water, we may also be bowing to the influence of secularism. And when we stop **praying in tongues** because we don't want to scare off seekers, we've definitely given in to secularism.

This Scripture keeps coming to mind: "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3). Make no mistake, **secularism** is among the forces working to destroy our Christian foundation. It's time for the righteous to rise up, bold as lions, and declare the cross of Christ, get baptized publicly, and **speak in tongues** to build ourselves up in our most holy faith. And ultimately, secularism must bow a knee to the name of Jesus.

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