

What George O. Wood Really Thinks About Pentecostals Speaking in Tongues

Several decades ago, I visited the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Looking up to Michelangelo's great fresco of The Last Judgment, I thought to myself, Why is everyone raving about this work of art? It's very occluded and dark.

What had happened is that over the last four centuries, there have been so many candles burning in the Sistine Chapel that the smoke had gradually put a layer of gray over the painting. So when I saw how dark it was, I wasn't impressed at all. Now, many years later, it has been restored. All the smudge is gone and the colors are radiant and alive, and it's as though the painting had just been done yesterday.

That's what Pentecostalism, in its purist form, tries to do. It tries to erase the smudges on the church for the last 20 centuries and get back to what the early Christians believed and practiced. That is our goal—to get back to biblical, original Christianity.

I have been asked a number of times by national reporters about speaking in tongues. I was talking with a reporter from the *New York Times* and told him there's nothing unusual about what Pentecostals are doing today. If you look at the first-century church, all the writers of the New Testament spoke in tongues and the Early Church spoke in tongues. So Pentecostalism, at its roots, is basically a restorationist movement. We believe that we can cut through 20 centuries of church tradition and get back to the original church. It doesn't mean that we do everything like the original church, but we're trying to have the same doctrine and experience of the Early Church.

In so many of our American churches today, little emphasis is placed on the **Holy Spirit**. Those of us in leadership, out of concern over this neglect, urge our pastors and churches to pray and provide opportunities for people to receive Spirit baptism with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues. But, we must not stop there.

Pentecostals have always believed and taught that speaking in other tongues is the initial physical evidence.

But it is initial. We must have the initial evidence, but we must also go past the initial to the enduring work of the Spirit. The seventh doctrine of our Statement of Fundamental Truths declares that with the baptism in the Spirit “comes the enduement of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry.”

This tenet also states: “With the *baptism in the Holy Ghost* come such experiences as an overflowing fullness of the Spirit, a deepened reverence for God, an intensified consecration to God and dedication to His work, and a more active love for Christ, for His Word, and for the lost.”

We believe the baptism in the Spirit brings the delight of initially speaking with other tongues, but if we stop there, this Pentecostal experience will have no ongoing fruitfulness. I grew up in the Assemblies of God when it was preached that the baptism of the Spirit is for the empowerment of believers for life and service.

In short, the enduring evidence of the baptism in the Spirit results in our fulfilling Acts 1:8. Evangelism and outreach is enduring evidence of the Spirit’s work. If we are not seeing this evidence—fruitfulness—we’re in trouble.