

Q&A: Should we make more of Baptism in the Holy Spirit?

MK asks:

It's taken me an age to get to this point, but certainly for some, baptism is just the start. Simply recognising another broken person wants to be fixed. Sometimes, of course, a recognition that parents see their child needs to be fixed which the child confirms later. There is another baptism we need, that from the Spirit. This one must necessarily come later as our brokenness is being mended. Nonetheless it seems crucial. We don't seem to make too much of this in 'official' church, but should we?

[This is a Q&A question that has been submitted through this blog. You can submit a question (anonymously if you like) here: <http://briggs.id.au/jour/qanda/>]

This is an interesting question, and it goes where angels fear to tread... to some of the most precious parts of our Christian experience, and the words that we use to describe them. As a church we *should* be making more of these experiences, but we often struggle for the language, and the courage.



There is a pastoral dilemma, you see. In our insecurities, often the exuberant expression of one person's testimony can feel like an invalidation of our own. And "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" is fraught in this regard. I think what you have described is an excellent expression of the Christian journey, but we must be careful in how we talk about it... but sometimes we are too careful and we avoid the difficult conversation.

Here's the problem: the word "Baptism" is being used in

multiple senses – to speak about both the *beginning and promise* of the Christian journey, and also for the ongoing *experience* of the Christian journey.

Baptism rightly describes the beginning. Baptism with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a sacramental *beginning* of the Christian journey – it so symbolically embraces the promises of salvation and covenantal inclusion that we can look upon it as the foundation on which our faith experience is built. It incorporates a “fixing” as you say, either for ourselves or as an embrace of our children.

That “fixing” includes the understanding of being “born again” (Baptism symbolises a dying and resurrection), of having the Holy Spirit come and dwell within us (an important declaration in the act of *confirming* one’s Baptism), of being *regenerate* by the grace of God, and of taking our place within the Body of Christ.

Our Baptism with water is therefore much more than “John’s Baptism” of repentance only. Yes, it is a sacramental symbol of repentance, but it is also a baptism *into Christ*. John himself says “I baptised you with water; but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit” (*Mark 1:8*), and he is referring to the new *beginning* that Jesus will bring about.

Similarly, in Acts we see a couple of occasions when new Christians had only received John’s Baptism. Paul’s experience in Ephesus in *Acts 19:1-6* describes this:

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’

They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’

So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’

'John's baptism,' they replied.

Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Paul baptises them "in the name of Lord Jesus", as the foundation and beginning of their faith, and the Holy Spirit coming upon them is part and parcel of that. Amongst the baptised people of God there are no gradations, and no one is a second class Christian needing another dose of God's grace, if you know what I mean.

It's in this sense of beginnings that I prefer the use of the word "Baptism." The "official church" does talk about this lot, and usually reasonably well.

Nevertheless, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" describes a genuine experience, which I share and affirm, even if I might use slightly different language. And, yes, it's usually something we don't talk about well at all. Indeed, often we prefer stability and order, and so we inhibit new experiences, misconstrue and misunderstand them, or seek to restrict them to controllable structures and programs. In so doing, even when well-intentioned, we discourage growth and maturity.

The genuine experience that we're talking about here takes many forms. It invariably involves a sense of God being closer than he has before, of being filled, touched, moved, even overcome by the Spirit of God. It often comes with a sense of freedom, restoration, healing, and sometimes an increase in boldness and courage. I think this is the sense of "being mended" that you are talking about.

It's an experience that for some can be almost spontaneous and unexpected, for some it comes as an answer to prayer in the

midst of trauma or darkness, for some it's because someone has laid hands on them, others have experienced it in ecstatic worship, others have found an encounter in times of deep contemplation. It is an experience that is often accompanied by the manifestations of the Spirit that we see in Acts and read about in places like *1 Corinthians 12* – tongues, interpretations, prophesying and all the other sorts of gifts of the Spirit.

For some it is a unique one-off phenomenon, for others it's like a new chapter in their "deeper walk with thee." It is not wrong to call it a "baptism" with the Holy Spirit, in the broad sense of an "immersion" in the Holy Spirit, a filling up, an overflowing etc. But I try to avoid the "baptism" language so as not to confuse with Baptism as the sacrament that speaks of being included in Christ.

The two senses come close together sometimes though. I have observed that an experience with the Holy Spirit can feel like a fundamental new beginning. I observe this in three ways:

1) Sometimes, in people's experience, their actual Baptism was not a matter of faith. It had meaning, but it was the meaningfulness of ritual, social expectation and so on. In experiential terms, their Baptism was akin to "the Baptism of John." The subsequent encounter and "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" coincides with a coming to faith. They have an experience of regeneration and renewal and the presence of God. Theologically, I would affirm this as a "coming to life" in faith of what was previously done in ceremony. In experience, it would feel like a new beginning, an initiation in itself.

2) Sometimes, it is an experience that precedes receiving Baptism in water. People come to faith, and encounter the Holy Spirit in a real and tangible way. In this experience the encounter is a new beginning, and the sacrament is a means of catching up to what God is doing, just like in *Acts 10:47*.

3) For others the experience so marks a significant step in their walk with God, that it feels like a new beginning, a refreshing, revitalisation of faith. This is especially so if there had previously been resisting of the work of God in their lives, or if they had received a fundamental shift in their understanding of God through the reading and hearing of Scripture, prayer, or prophetic word. This sense of a new beginning can also come with the “laying on of hands” in a commissioning into a ministry (e.g. Acts 13:3) or to impart a spiritual gift (e.g. 2 Timothy 1:6). In all these cases, the encounter with the Spirit is a *significant moment*, and precious, but it’s a part of the journey, a fresh chapter in something already begun. Something broken has become significantly, experientially mended.

In all of these experiences I don’t *mind* if people call it a “baptism in (or of/with/by) the Holy Spirit” but often I find other language to be more helpful.

But your question is a necessary provocation. Whatever language we use, we *must* make more of these experiences. We must talk about what’s it like to journey with Jesus through the realities of life. This *experience of God*, as opposed to the mere theory, must be part of our preaching and teaching, our praying, our sharing, our testimony, our pastoral care, our intercession etc. We must be willing to pray for and help people encounter the Holy Spirit in their lives in real and substantial ways, and help provide the language to describe it.

Instead, it seems to me, that our tendency as the church at large is to practise a form of ongoing abandonment as we act more like a boarding school than the family of God: We’ll give you some rites of passage, teach you some theory, and expect you to act your part – but for everything else you’re on you’re own. “Discipleship” in this caricature is a classroom, and “vocation” is about appointment to house captain or something.

Rather the Holy Spirit calls us to an intimacy with God and a vulnerability, a depth that can we come to share with one another. As we receive him, are “overcome” by him, and yes, in that sense “baptised” in the Holy Spirit, we come to see God, and see one another. We walk with each other, share those experiences of brokenness and restoration (this is discipleship), and we call out to one another what we can see the Holy Spirit is doing and gifting in us and through us (this is vocation).

So yes, we should make much more of these experiences, providing the context, the space, the protection, the understanding, the language, and the simple *care* for people to grow and encounter God. Sometimes I think we would rather be organised, but at what cost?!

Thanks for the question!

Review: 5Q – Reactivating the Original Intelligence and Capacity of the Body of Christ

Just as in family life, when it comes to church life it's sometimes necessary to call a family meeting and have an open and honest conversation around the dinner table. *Who are we? What are we about? And what do we need to adjust in our family dynamic?*



In church life that dynamic is about ministry. And whether we call our leaders “ministers,” “priests,” “bishops,” “deacons,” “pastors,” “teachers,” “preachers,” “elders,” “vicars,” “rectors,” “curates,” “reverends,” “servers,” “carers,” or simply “workers,” the impetus remains the same: At our best, we want a dynamic which grows the church towards maturity. The “family table” conversation means grasping for more than tired old formulae or the latest managerial gizmo.

We commonly recognise that, whatever the nomenclature, we desire for God to be in us, with us, and through us, by the power and presence of his Holy Spirit. We might adhere to the traditional threefold order of deacons, priests, and bishops, and understood them as a variety of *charisms* – anointings of the Spirit through the laying on of hands. Or we might emphasise the more universally “lay” *charismata* (spiritual gifts) through which the people of faith operate as one body as “*to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good*”.

Alan Hirsch, in his latest book *5Q*, (I think it's meant to rhyme with “IQ”), picks up on another emphasis – the so-called “fivefold” or “ascension gifts” outlined in Ephesians 4:11-13:

*It was he (Jesus at his ascension) who gave some to be **apostles**, some to be **prophets**, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be **pastors** and **teachers**, to prepare God's people for*

works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

This dynamic involves the fivefold “offices” or “functions” of **Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors** and **Teachers**, often abbreviated as **APEST** with Pastor renamed as Shepherd so as not to have two P’s. Unlike other biblical charismatic gift-lists (e.g. 1 Cor 12, Romans 12) these ascension gifts seem intended to form a more complete and coherent shape about our family dynamic.

A simple first glance shows that there is room to explore this in practice. We know what it means for the church itself, and for members of the church to be *pastoral*. We can also grasp when the church and its members act in a *teaching* capacity, or exercise *evangelism*. But we are less able to grasp the *prophetic* and *apostolic* shape of church life. Or, to put it another way, as I have observed, the church loves and embraces Shepherding and Teaching, appreciates and values Evangelism, generally tolerates the Prophetic (especially if prophets hold back and keep to themselves), and unknowingly yearns for the exercise of the Apostolic.

Emphasis on the fivefold has increased in recent times. Hirsch’s book is a worthy contribution, emphasising a holistic and systemic approach rather than a highly individualised pop-psychology. His motivation for a “great recalibration” (xxix) I share, and his yearning “for a new sense of wholeness that only an imaginative vision born... can provide” (xxi) definitely taps into the longings of the wider Western church. His recognition of how “the more dynamic APEST system has never suited the more static, hierarchical, fundamentally non-movemental form of the church that has dominated in the West” (xxxviii) is a frustration grounded in reality.

The whole understanding, of course, rests upon Ephesians 4:1-16. Hirsch's exegesis in the first chapter is more than adequate. In particular, his drawing out of the imagery of the triumph in the ascension makes a powerful point about Jesus gifting the church with (ideally) a regenerated and regenerative human community.

In his ascension, Jesus has "given" APEST to the church as its lasting possession. In other words, the fivefold is part of the church's inheritance in Jesus. (Page 6)

Similarly his *systemic* approach to the fivefold is founded on the point and purpose of "attaining maturity and fullness in Christ" (p8). The corollary, of course, is that if there is an imbalance (or absence) in the operation of the fivefold gifts in the church, *immaturity* is the result (pp11-13). He integrates this into his robust missiology (p80ff), unveiling it's place in how we the (*Body of Christ*) now share in the *Ministry of Christ*, this participation being the essence of the *Fullness of Christ* (p80ff).

New Testament ministry in the Body of Christ cannot be done with anything less than all the dimensions of inherent in Christ's own ministry. Without full APEST expression, a church cannot logically extend Jesus' ministry in the world; neither can it attain to the fullness of Christ or achieve its purposes/mission – it will inevitably have dangerous gaps in its culture. And herein, folks, lies a huge amount of the church's dysfunction! (Page 88)

These are firm foundations.

Hirsch does well to resist our individualising tendencies. It's not until page 44 that he explicitly states that "it is quite conceivable that the fivefold could be used as a means to profiling personality and helping people live into their unique sense of identity as a follower of Christ." The system

and the symphony come first.

What we have then, is a properly exhaustive, internally consistent, framework which naturally applies to personality and leadership, and which has strong threads that connect it with the range of human experience and our understanding of God.

Grounded in God, laced into creation, redeemed by Jesus, granted to the church, lived out in the lives of its saints, to the glory of God – here we have a “system” that goes as deep as it does wide. (Page 61)

This is very useful.

As he gets into the five APEST aspects themselves, Hirsch brings in a very useful distinction between what he calls “functions” and “callings” (p94). The distinction allows us to consider the fivefold, firstly, in terms of the church’s “innate purpose and functionality” and, secondly, in terms of individual calling or vocation. That is, we can speak of how the church, exercising the Ministry of Christ as the Body of Christ, to avoid dysfunction, needs to be, in a corporate sense, apostolic (A), prophetic (P), evangelistic (E), pastoral (S), and didactic (T). Any sense of individual calling is best seen as an *expression* of that, an outworking of the Ministry of Christ in one member of the Body of Christ.

And so, having foreshadowed them, Hirsch arrives at his definitions of the APEST functions and callings (p99ff):

Apostolic-Apostle (p99): Is rightly identified as correlating to the missionary “sentness” of the church. “The driving logic of the apostolicity is the extension of the Jesus movement in and through the lives of the adherents, as well as establishing the church onto new ground.”

From my own discernment, I feel that Hirsch overemphasises the

functional and entrepreneurial aspects of the apostolic (entrepreneurship attaches more to the Evangelistic in my experience) and he also overlaps with the Prophetic when it comes to the guarding of values. This is a common mis-step in fivefold literature, and can be avoided by looking just a little deeper.

The apostolic is at the heart of *movement* but doesn't usually generate it by being out in front, but primarily through *covering* and *parenting*. Come close to the apostolic and you find yourself connected in worship to the fathering heart of God, you find something kenotic, poured out for the sake of the body. Paul is a definitive example (e.g. *1 Cor 4:9*, *2 Tim 4:6*). The confusion comes, because, in providing the covering, the apostolic will often lead with the shape of the other functions, so as to guide and bring movement in that area.

Prophetic-Prophet (p102): Is rightly associated with the call to holistic worship, so that "as his people, we are to be the one place where God, and everything he stands for, is revered, cherished, and obeyed." Hirsch usefully observes a "vertically" orientated prophetic that feels what God feels and brings about an encounter with him, and a "horizontally" orientated prophetic that calls people to covenant obligations of justice, holiness, right worship, and right living. It risks a false demarcation, but this properly recognises both the "mystical-charismatic" and "social justice" (p105) aspect of the prophetic.

Unlike some commentators, Hirsch doesn't avoid the *hard* aspects of the prophetic function and calling. "Prophets are often agitators for change" (p105), he says understatedly.

The prophetic vocation is likely the most difficult of all the APEST callings, partly because of the personal vulnerability involved (God is "dangerous"... he is a consuming fire) but also because the prophetic word, like the Word of God that the prophet seeks to represent, is often rejected by

people who prefer their own ways. The prophet is likely the loneliest of all the vocations and the one most open to misunderstanding. I think this is why Jesus calls us to especially respect the prophets in our midst (Matthew 10:4-42) (Pages 105-106)

In my experience, the most common dysfunction of otherwise healthy churches, even those who have a sense of apostolic mission and evangelistic zeal is that they ignore or reject the prophetic. They end up forgetting even the elementary teachings about Christ (Hebrews 6:1) and become a self-referential self-absorbed shadow of who they are called to be.

Evangelistic-Evangelist (p106): Hirsch does well to move the understanding of evangelist beyond the Billy Graham caricature. Yes, evangelism is about communication and “getting the message out” but it’s also about “the infectious sharing of the movement’s core message” and “the *demonstration* of good news in word, sign, and deed” (p107).

An interesting thought that Hirsch mentions – one that I will need to dwell on more – is to consider a *priestliness* in the evangelistic calling. “They have a capacity to make connections with people in a way that demonstrates social as well as emotional intelligence... their function is genuinely priestly in that they mediate between God and people as well as between people and people.” (p108).

Shepherding-Shepherd (p108): The pastoral shepherding image is common in Scripture and Hirsch draws upon it to demonstrate a function and calling that emphasises “social connectivity”, healing and protection. They “champion inclusion and embrace” and desire *formation* in disciples-making that “lives locally and communally” (p110).

The use of “shepherd” instead of “pastor” is not just about having a better acrostic at this point. “Pastor” has become an honorific, the stuff of name plaques on office doors.

“Shepherd” re-engages with the necessary *empathy* and *sharing of life* that “knows the personal details of the particular people in one’s orbit” (p111). All of the functions bring pain when they are done distantly and dispassionately, but shepherding that is merely theoretical and formulaic, or done without any self-giving, is the harshest dysfunction.

Teaching-Teacher (p111): This function is also commonly understood. Hirsch draws us to the rabbinical tradition and the Wisdom Literature of the Scriptures to describe it. The emphasis here is not just on the heady and intellectual love of the abstract truth (the development of a “biblical mind” that means “seeing the world as God sees it, as described in the Scriptures”) but also on the application in real life.

In many ways, teachers are similar to prophets and apostles in that they deal with ideas that shape life... From a biblical perspective, teaching is not about speculation in and of itself (idealism); rather, it is about the ministry of ideas in action (ethos), that is discipleship or formation. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know, and they cannot lead where they will not themselves go. Therefore, biblical teachers must have real participation in the ideas they propose.” (page 112)

All this is substantial... But what to do with it?

The point of typologies and inventories is to consider and address imbalances, strengthen weaknesses, and avoid the “precociousness” of over-reliance on strengths (p118). It takes maturity to do this, and sometimes maturation is not popular; “asymmetrical churches always end up attracting people who are like-minded and therefore asymmetrical... witness the many one-dimensional charismatic/vertical prophetic movements of the last century... or the asymmetrical mega-church that markets religion and ends up producing consumptive, dependent, underdeveloped, cultural Christians with an

exaggerated sense of entitlement.” (p119).

Hirsch’s bold response is to suggest a re-evaluation, almost a reconstitution, of our ecclesiology that is based on the fivefold as the “marks of the church.” (p132). This is bold.

Not only does this counter the ST imbalance of the “protestant marks” of “word and sacrament” (p130), but even challenges the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” marks of the Nicene Creed!

I’m not sure I’d go that far, and I think Hirsch’s is over-universalising the fivefold at this point. What is needed is not a reconstitution, but a reinvigoration, a substantiation of what we say and pretend we are into who we actually *are*. For instance, I am currently working on some thoughts about how we have placed *professionalism* at odds with our *vocationalism*. If we could be a church that actually *values* and *practises* vocation (an inherently apostolic function that the church is literally crying out for) rather than just stealing the word for our own mechanics, then we will have reinvigorated something and addressed an imbalance. But more of that another time.

Nevertheless, the point is well made. Organisations as much as individuals need discipling (p147), and the fivefold framework is a useful world of challenge and comfort in which to do that. It can even be a framework in which to make use of and respond to various tools for ecclesial self-reflection (NCD springs to mind) as well as the various tools and techniques that Hirsch hints at in the latter part of the book.

But it takes more than a brand, even a 5Q brand, it takes a brokenness, a contrition, a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit through hard places. The Western church has a perverse resistance to such things. My hope is that contributions such as Hirsch’s will not be quickly swallowed up as yet another branded technique to exploit for our own ecclesial self-gratification. It has enough substance, enough comfort and

challenge, to avoid the pitfalls. Wise leaders will read, mark, inwardly digest, and *apply*.

Hirsch's contribution is therefore significant, and I recommend this book, but only as one dish at the fivefold restaurant. Hirsch is a Michelin-star missiologist, but the discerning leader will also sit at the table of other similar chefs. My recommendation comes with some caveats, you see:

1) I don't often comment on the *tone* of a book, and it may play well in America, but there are times when Hirsch comes across with an air of arrogance that brought me to the brink of putting the book down. It *has* stopped me from pushing the book forwards in some contexts where I would like to promote fivefold thinking, because, frankly, the tone would *undermine* the case. Alan, you are not my Yoda, I am not your padawan (xxiiff, p7, p23, p80, etc. etc.), and you are not bringing forth some hidden ancient "world-renewing energy" (p31) that you have been personally bequeathed (p89) or have discovered (xxiii, p27 etc. etc.) like some great white Luther-like Indiana Jones who "blows his own mind" (p29). You are making a worthy contribution amongst many worthy contributions. Get over yourself, son.

2) The book is *theological* in the sense that it interacts with the fivefold as more than just a personality typology. But Hirsch's theology, in terms of the discipline, is not great. I agree with many of the conclusions, but the arguments are not convincing.

Particularly this: Hirsch wants to show that the fivefold demarcations are not some arbitrary overlay but are inherent not only within the created order but within the character and operation of God. It's a worthy hypothesis, however, condensed down, his argument proceeds as follows: 1) State what the fivefold demarcations look like in practice; 2) Observe these practices in creation (archetypes, p35, p63ff) and divinity (p55ff especially); 3) Conclude that the fivefold is therefore

a derivation of something essential.

This is fallacious, I could also argue: 1) My fruit lollies have different colours and related flavours; 2) I observe these colours in the physical world, and symbolically throughout history; 3) My fruit lollies are therefore full of inherent meaning.

Don't get me wrong, I *do* think the fivefold typology coheres with the wider sense of how personality, community, and divinity operate. I was hoping for some robust theology to help me out. Hirsch's *observation* is useful, but some *derivation* is needed, e.g. demonstrate how fivefold functions are a necessary outworking of God as Trinity. At the very least, begin with Biblical examples of the fivefold offices, and derive the typology from that.

e.g. Hirsch wants to show that Jesus is the perfect embodiment of the fivefold gifts But he describes it this way: "The fivefold typology is therefore not incidental to Christology but indelibly shapes it and gives it content" (p21, see also p78). No! To be meaningful, it should be that Christology is not incidental to the fivefold typology, but indelibly shapes *it*. Derive *from* Jesus, not *to* him! "Jesus cannot be understood apart from all fivefold identities" (p79) is simply an incorrect statement. I can also understand him as Son of God, as Prophet, Priest and King, as Advocate, as Lamb of God, as the Word/Logos etc. etc.

3) I am always wary of books that attach to products. 5Q is a brand name with a business model. This is not a unique problem – PMC is the same – and I understand why it happens. But the higher road is this: if you want to push along a movement, or have something profound and biblical to say, then put out the base theological material generically, and then you and any other person can use it to help and assist, consult and guide, and so build the body of Christ (towards Ephesians 4 maturity even!). Otherwise it looks like you are monetising truth, and

God's truth at that.

Around the family table, though, as we wrestle with our church family dynamic, the fivefold discussion needs to happen. 5Q gives us something to talk about, and, if we have the courage, to do.

Q&A: What do you think about charismatic visions [like Unity's Vision]

waffleater asks: *what do you think about charsmatic visions like this one <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVyMPqvnw5k> do you believe in these gifts or not*

Thanks for the question Waffleater:

I'll embed the video you link for ease of access:

It's interesting. I haven't heard of Unity before. Your question is a general one – what do I think about charismatic visions *like this one* and do I believe in these gifts or not.

Let me answer generally, therefore. I do believe that God gifts his church with visions and revelations at times. Some examples in Scripture of such “extra-biblical revelation” include Agabus' foreknowledge of a famine (Acts 11) as well as through a prophetic symbolic act regarding Paul's likely imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 21). Paul himself had dreams that directed his movements (the famous “Man from Macedonia” in Acts 16). None of this is surprising in that the fulfillment of Joel (“Your young men will see visions, your

old men will dream dreams”) is applied to the church in and through the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

I know a number of people who have had similar experiences in their own ministry and mission work. I myself have had times of overwhelming conviction in certain circumstances. Surely this form of revelation/understanding/awareness/knowledge, whatever you would like to call it, can be a genuine and credible part of the Christian walk.

A key characteristic, however, is that revelations of this type are always SERVANTS of God’s clear and authoritative Revelation of himself through the Scriptures and its revelation of Jesus. If you like, the benefit of these forms of (little-r) revelation is that they help apply the (big-R) Revelation to a particular time and place. So the people of God can respond to the famine, Paul can be directed to Macedonia, and so forth.

I am ready to accept the revelations people experience from their walk with God – but they will always be tested by Scripture, and should always be a means of applying or grasping further the authoritative Truth of God.

Having said all that – let me consider Unity’s vision. It is interesting in that it is a broad statement with very little specifics. It draws on biblical imagery from Revelation 13 and Matthew 25. It does very little, however, to help us apply those Scriptures. In many ways my conclusion would be “Why do we need this vision at all? Reading Revelation 13 and Matthew 25 directly would be a lot more powerful.”

But, bring on revival in Australia. I can admire that sentiment.

Q&A: On Tongues and Languages

Dave0 asks:

Will,

I've been aware for as long as I can remember the, quite stark really, difference between the "tongues" at Pentecost and what I would call the common contemporary understanding/experience. At Pentecost the apostles speak and are simultaneously heard by a multilingual audience "each one hearing them speak in his own language" (Acts 2) which is so different from someone speaking an unknown language and another translating.

What has prompted the question was idly listening to a radio sermon where the speaker (who knows who he was) suggested that 1 Cor situation was a multilingual congregation where Paul is requiring conventional translation of human languages, in a multilingual service. i.e. a VERY different understanding than what I have called the common contemporary of "tongues".

He was convicted by the difference in Greek word usage for "language" between the various passages. I haven't been overly convinced by my unknown radio voice, but I also deeply unsatisfied by the un-Pentecost-ian nature of what is usually claimed as the gift of tongues. As an aside I am also deeply unsatisfied (and usual quite vocal in that unsatisfisfaction) in the un-Pentecost-ian nature of "improved liver function", and "my back is soo much better" being claimed as the gift of healing.

Can you give me an unpacking to ponder.

David

Hi David,

From the top of my head to begin with.

I've always taken the words that describe spiritual gifts to be accurate but not necessarily precise – particularly when it comes to how supernaturally something is etc. So, for instance, is it right to speak of a doctor as someone with the gift of healing just as much as it is to speak of the latest revivalist? Assuming genuineness, and good fruit, I can't see why not. Similarly with those who are wise – where does the natural human wisdom flip to a divine “message of wisdom” (see 1 Cor 12:8) – does it, should it, does it matter?

And so when it comes to tongues I would be content if we find that it refers to all manner of utterances from something not much more different than being good at linguistics, to utterances that don't need an interpretation, to utterances that do, to utterances that are in private and somewhat echoing of the groanings of the Spirit in Romans 8. Without working through citations I suspect that examples of this spectrum could be found in Scripture.

To get to the passages you reference. The focus of the Pentecost experience of tongues in Acts 2 is less about some supernatural gift to the apostles individually but about their ability to speak with a common language. I drew out the connection with the reverse experience at Babel as God judges human empire. The tongues here act as an eschatological and ecclesiological sign that God's kingdom is here, in and above human empire, and he has formed an eternal people by the Spirit of the resurrected Christ. Whether this experience is *precisely* the same as the tongues that Paul speaks uses (more than any of us apparently) is not really here nor there – but I wager it is *enough* the same that it forms part of the basis such that Paul can speak of the Holy Spirit being a guarantee of an eschatological reality.

Your anonymous homiletician of the airwaves references the Greek. Acts 2:4 has καὶ ἤρξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις

καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς – “...began to speak in other **tongues** as the Spirit enabled them” (NIV84) The γλῶσ root (glos – from which we get glossary, glossalalia etc.) is evident and yes, it can be rendered as “languages”, but then that’s within the semantic range of the the English “tongues” anyway.

1 Cor 12, in the list of gifts, has (verse 10) ἐτέρῳ γένη γλωσσῶν – “..to another speaking in different kinds of tongues” (NIV84). The root is the same.

There is a slight difference in that Acts 2 has “*other* tongues” and 1 Cor 12 has “*kinds* of tongues” (the word “different” is an NIV “clarification”). Is this enough to draw a distinction between Acts 2 and 1 Cor 12. Apart from asking “Does it really matter?” (see my first point above), I would conclude that there certainly isn’t any reason to place a semantical chasm between the two uses.

Furthermore, if we were to highlight the distinctives in the usage I would suggest that Paul is actually taking it further *towards* the supernatural/personal/pentecostalist than away from it towards normal human linguistic endeavours. I get this from the context. 1 Cor 13 alludes to speaking in the “tongues of men and of angels”, and 1 Cor 14 – “anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God.”

That’s my two cents worth of unpacking.

Q&A: On faith-healing schools

Anonymous asks: *Thoughts on this?* <http://bit.ly/lScR5M>

The link goes to a news.com.au article about courses run by

Bethel Church in California that “claim to teach people how to heal the sick and even raise the dead.” Apparently these courses are coming to Australia via Holyfire Ministry Training school and others.

Two points in one direction:

1. Given my experience of news.com.au, there is likely a little, um, exaggeration in the article. Perhaps you could make a headline about any ministry training college that “Faithful pay thousands to be able to make new Christians.” A cursory glance at Holyfire’s Prospectus shows a myriad of courses that are certainly not beyond the pale. Even a quick glance at Bethel Church’s website says of its Healing School Intensive that “Pastors and ministry leaders will learn ways to cultivate and maintain an atmosphere conducive to healing in their churches and ministries” which is different to “we’ll teach you how to heal.” Please note, these were quick, cursory scans of web pages. Let me know if I missed something.
2. I am not against training people for Christian ministry. We do spend a lot of money, for instance, training our gifted preachers to be better preachers. I see no problem with also training those that are gifted in other ways from receiving relevant training, particularly training towards maturity and wisdom.

One point in the opposite direction:

1. Yes, you can take it too far. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says of spiritual gifts, including healing, that “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” And while there does seem to be some precedent for the receiving of gifts through laying on of hands and praying for someone to receive that gift for the church, it is dangerous to think that impartation belongs to

anyone but God the Spirit directly. Which is all to say that just because you take a course at a college (and pay its associated costs, perhaps making the same mistake as Simon in Acts 8:18) doesn't mean that you're going to be able to do miracles.