

Historical Precedent and Evidence of Spirit-Baptism

Fee's treatment of historical precedent provides helpful guidelines for approaching Acts. Christians of all traditions appeal to Acts in order to garner biblical support for their distinct customs and traditions. As a claimant to authentic expression of primitive Christianity, the Charismatic movement is no exception. The classical assertion of "tongues as initial physical evidence" of Spirit-baptism is a prime example of using the data of Acts to make dogmatic assertions concerning Christian experience. The question is whether or not Luke intended Acts to be read and applied as a detailed manual on normative praxis for the Church.

Fee's point concerning historical narrative seems to be one of "seeing the forest through the trees." The incidental details of an historical account, while individually important, function together as a whole to convey the author's overarching message. Since Luke's authorial intent is the primary theological issue of his narrative, the particulars "do not have the same didactic value" (p. 108). In the case of Acts, I tend to agree with Fee that Luke was primarily attempting "to show how the church emerged as a chiefly Gentile, worldwide phenomenon from its origins as a Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented sect . . . , and how the Holy Spirit was directly responsible for this phenomenon . . ." (p. 107). Thus the Spirit's activity in empowering believers for the promulgation of the Gospel is undoubtedly a key theme of Acts. In fact, Fee posits that the frequent recurrence of this theme is an indication that Luke wants us to see it as a model for ongoing Christian experience—believers *ought* to be empowered by the Spirit in order to effectively engage in evangelism (p. 107).

The sticking point for Charismatics is concerned with the finer details that are related to Spirit-reception and -empowerment. I am speaking in particular of the phenomenon of tongues. Most notably, it occurs in connection with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2. The accounts of Cornelius' conversion (Ac 10) and Paul's encounter with the disciples at Ephesus (Ac 19) both mention tongues as an outward sign of the Spirit's "falling" or "coming upon" human

subjects. But in each of these cases, tongues is also accompanied by the exaltation of God (Ac 10:46) and prophesying (Ac 19:6). Then there is the curious account of the Samaritans' reception of the Spirit, which occurs only *after* (1) they believe the Gospel proclaimed by Philip and are baptized (Ac 8:12), and (2) Peter and John arrive to lay hands on them "that they might receive the Holy Spirit" (Ac 8:14-17). There is no direct mention of tongues here—Luke only states that the Spirit had come with the laying on of hands by the apostles. Similarly, tongues is not mentioned in Ac 4:31 despite the presence of the Lukan phrase, "they were filled with the Holy Spirit" (cf. Ac 2:4). Nor does Luke mention tongues in conjunction with Paul's apparent Spirit-reception in Ac 9:17-18; Ananias simply lays hands upon Paul, stating that Jesus sent him so that Paul might "be filled with the Holy Spirit."

What are we to make of this data? Given the *oughtness* of Spirit-fullness and -empowerment which Luke seems to convey in his historical narrative, how do we synthesize these accounts into an accurate understanding of Spirit-reception in the early Church and its implications for the ongoing Church? Fee's hypothesis of historical precedent indicates that we are wise to refrain from making absolute dogmatic assertions based upon the incidental details of an historical narrative. So while Christians should both desire and expect to be empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to bear witness to Christ (primary theological significance), the issue of what signs or evidence should attend the "inauguration" of such empowerment are open to both variation and, to some extent, debate. I am increasingly of the opinion that while it is perfectly reasonable (based upon Luke's writings) to *anticipate* that tongues will usually accompany initial Spirit-baptism, it is *unreasonable to demand* it in all cases. Combined with Luke's larger intent, the genre of Acts itself does not permit such a rigid doctrinal assertion concerning Christian experience.