



Appendix: On Spiritual Experiences, Tongues, Visions, and the Sufficiency of Scripture

A Personal and Pastoral Reflection By David Clarke

In what follows, I set out, in chronological order, a number of experiences which shaped my understanding of spiritual gifts and manifestations. I do not recount these matters to criticise individuals, many of whom were undoubtedly sincere, but to explain how, over time, I came to examine experience more carefully in the light of Scripture. My settled conviction, formed gradually and sometimes painfully, is this: the written Word of God is sufficient. Experiences may encourage, stir, or even alarm us—but they must always be

weighed by Scripture, never placed alongside it as equal authority. The prophet's warning remains wise: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

1. Conversion and Early Pentecostal Influence (1970)

On 16 January 1970, I was converted from a life of crime and immorality to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The change was real and unmistakable. I knew that something profound had taken place within me. I had turned from sin and desired to follow Christ. Soon afterwards I attended an Assemblies of God Pentecostal church in Aylesbury. In that setting, speaking in tongues was commonly regarded as the outward evidence of being baptised in the Holy Ghost. Though I was confident that I had experienced the new birth, I was encouraged to seek this further experience. Within a year, I had a vivid dream in which I spoke fluently in what seemed to be an unknown tongue. Shortly thereafter, in a church meeting, I spoke publicly in tongues, and an interpretation was given. The speech flowed easily. I could repeat the experience when I chose. At the time, I believed this confirmed that I had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Yet a later incident unsettled me. In a home meeting, after I spoke in tongues, another young person gave what was presented as an interpretation. As I listened, I felt uneasy. The interpretation did not correspond with anything I believed I would have said. I found myself disappointed, for I had hoped the interpretation would confirm the experience and remove all doubt. Instead, it quietly raised questions. I did not abandon everything at once. But I began to realise that powerful feelings, even when sincere, are not in themselves infallible guides.

2. Promised Miracles and the Gospel

At a later meeting, an evangelist instructed us to invite our friends,

assuring us that they would witness miracles of healing. I obeyed and invited several. They looked at me with understandable scepticism. In the event, none attended. At the meeting itself, no miracles occurred. This was not devastating, but it was sobering. The New Testament centres upon Christ crucified. While God is able to heal and intervene as He pleases, the apostolic preaching did not rest upon advertisement of spectacle. I began to wonder whether our emphasis was drifting from the substance of the gospel to the promise of signs.

3. Financial Prophecy and Fear

On another occasion, a visiting preacher declared that the Lord required each person to withdraw ten percent of their savings and give it to his fund. He warned that failure to comply would result in an accident. This troubled my conscience deeply. Scripture teaches that “God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Giving born of gratitude is one thing; giving compelled by fear is quite another. I do not doubt that the preacher believed himself directed. But I could not reconcile the tone of threat with the character of Christ. The Lord draws His people; He does not coerce them by terror.

4. Claims of Direct Revelation in Daily Matters

I later heard a minister state that the Lord had shown him a particular bungalow he was to purchase. When the offer was accepted, this was regarded as confirmation. When complications arose, it was then said that the Lord had changed His mind. I found myself quietly questioning whether ordinary providence was being interpreted as special revelation. Scripture assures us that God guides His people, but it also teaches wisdom, patience, and counsel. Not every favourable circumstance is a divine sign, nor every obstacle a withdrawal of blessing.

5. A Word-Centred Fellowship (1976)

In 1976 I joined the Strict and Particular Baptist church at Bieron. There the emphasis was on the preaching of the Word and the ordinary means of grace. My earlier charismatic practices ceased. In time, I came to appreciate the steadiness of that approach. What endured in my life was not a particular manifestation but repentance, faith, endurance, and reverence for Scripture. The Spirit's work, I began to see, is often quiet but profound.

6. The Toronto Influence (1999)

In 1999 I attended meetings where manifestations associated with what was called the Toronto Blessing were taking place. Individuals fell backwards, some barked like dogs, and atmospheric effects were introduced into the service. I do not question the sincerity of those present. Yet I struggled to see in these events the pattern described in the New Testament. When revival came in Acts, the result was conviction of sin, repentance, and devotion to apostolic teaching. The emphasis was upon Christ, not upon unusual behaviour. The disparity troubled me.

7. New Bilibid Prison — A Disturbing Episode (2002)

In 2002, while ministering in New Bilibid Prison in the Philippines, we gathered approximately twenty inmates, including men of considerable influence within the prison population. It was a precious opportunity for clear gospel proclamation. Instead, one speaker instructed the men to stand in a circle, hold hands, and imitate sounds he described as tongues. The inmates complied. No clear explanation of Christ's atoning work followed. No call to repentance was plainly made. The following day, the meeting was described as a "mini Pentecost," and it was stated that all present had been saved and baptized in the Holy Ghost. I could not honestly agree. I

saw no evidence that the men understood the gospel, nor that they had repented and believed. Pentecost in Acts involved intelligible proclamation and hearts “pricked” with conviction. What I witnessed appeared to be imitation without comprehension. I found this deeply frustrating—not out of cynicism, but out of concern that the gospel itself had been overshadowed.

8. Visions and Practical Decisions

During the same period, a reported vision was said to govern travel arrangements and financial expectations. Commitments were altered in light of subjective claims. Again I felt uneasy. Private impressions may occur, but they must never displace scriptural principles such as honesty, order, and faithfulness to commitments.

9. Years Without Fellowship and the Question Revisited (2019)

After returning from the Philippines, I remained without settled church fellowship for a number of years. When I sought to unite with Strict Baptist believers, I was declined because of my view that Hebrews 4 speaks of spiritual rest in Christ rather than the continuation of a seventh-day Sabbath. For approximately thirteen years I remained outside settled fellowship. Eventually, I humbled myself and attended Hill Park Baptist Church in Fareham. There I was asked again, “Have you been baptised in the Holy Ghost?” Around that time, I was encouraged to read about Smith Wigglesworth, a preacher reputed for miracles. I encountered a story that he had thrown a dead child against a wall and that the child was restored to life. I also learned that some visit his grave and lie upon it in the hope of receiving his anointing—a practice sometimes called grave hugging. This saddened and troubled me. Scripture nowhere

teaches that spiritual power is transferred through proximity to graves. The apostles directed attention to Christ, not to themselves. When Cornelius fell before Peter, Peter said, “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:26). It became clear to me that even sincere believers can drift into practices that resemble superstition more than biblical faith when experience is given undue prominence. Returning to Scripture, I reflected on Paul’s words: “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Spirit baptism is inseparable from union with Christ. Paul also asks, “Do all speak with tongues?” (1 Corinthians 12:30), implying that they do not. What had endured in my own life was not spectacle but repentance, faith, perseverance, and a desire to honour God’s Word.

Concluding Pastoral Reflections

From these experiences I have learned to proceed with caution and humility. Not every spiritual experience is necessarily of God. Sincerity does not guarantee accuracy. Powerful emotion is not proof of divine origin. The Spirit who inspired the Scriptures does not contradict them. The surest evidence of His work is not dramatic manifestation but repentance, faith in Christ, a growth in grace, and steadfast love for the truth. Experiences may encourage us. They may even, at times, confuse us. But Christ crucified remains the centre of the gospel, and the written Word of God remains our final authority. It is there—rather than in sensation, spectacle, or superstition—that the church must rest.