

The Pastor's Pen
Baptism of the Holy Spirit: What is it?
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There is a baptism in Scripture that we have not delved into in this book. It is often called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Opinions on what this is vary greatly. Rome teaches that the “sacrament” of Confirmation effects “the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost” (CCC2nd #1302). “From this fact, Confirmation brings an increase and deepening of baptismal grace” which “roots us more deeply in the divine filiation which makes us cry, ‘Abba! Father!’; unites us more firmly to Christ; increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit in us; renders our bond with the Church more perfect; and gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and never to be ashamed of the Cross.” (#1303).

The Catholic view - that there is an initial descent of the Spirit through water-baptism and a subsequent second confirmation (at Confirmation) - is strangely similar to the common view of Pentecostalism. Pentecostals generally teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a distinct Christian experience that occurs after salvation (which is itself a work of the Spirit). Usually, “speaking in tongues” or “prophesying” are evidences that a person has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. In this way, they presuppose that the experiences in the book of Acts, where Spirit baptism and tongues speaking occur together (Acts 2:3; 10:45-47; 19:6) are *normative* for today. The Assemblies of God USA’s official doctrinal statement is an example,

All believers are entitled to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and therefore should expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all believers in the early Christian church. With the experience comes the provision of power for victorious Christian living and productive service. It also provides believers with specific spiritual gifts for more effective ministry. The baptism of Christians in the Holy Spirit is accompanied by the initial physical sign of speaking in other tongues (unlearned languages) as the Spirit of God gives them audible expression.¹

In a related article they say, “With the baptism in the Holy Spirit comes such experiences as: an overflowing fullness of the Spirit (John 7:37-39; Acts 4:8); a deepened reverence for God (Acts 2:43; Heb 12:28); an intensified consecration to God and dedication to His work (Acts 2:42); and a more active love for Christ, for His Word and for the lost (Mark 16:20).”² This list looks very similar to the list provided in the Catholic Catechism.

A third view is the traditional non-Pentecostal Evangelical view which teaches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a synonym for salvation. Robert Reymond represents the tradition when he states, “The baptism of the Holy Spirit is . . . tantamount to the Spirit’s regenerating work. It precedes and is the precondition to faith in Christ, while the Spirit’s sealing follows upon faith in Christ.”³ In this view, the baptism of the Spirit is a once-for-all event that happens at Pentecost and is given to the whole church (as opposed to the Pentecostal view that a Christian may not receive it at conversion and therefore needs to

¹ <http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/index.cfm>

² http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Statement_of_Fundamental_Truths/sft_full.cfm#7

³ Reymond 1998: 764. He cites George Ladd who uses 1 Cor 12:13 as proof that the baptism of the Holy Spirit must mean regeneration saying, “There is only one statement in the entire New Testament that states its meaning.” Supposedly, in Paul’s usage it *clearly* refers to regeneration (however Hamilton sees the baptism here as water rather than Spirit baptism; Hamilton 2006: 187 n. 14). Therefore concludes Ladd, the baptism of the Spirit is “a once-and-for-all event occurring when one believes in Christ” (Ladd 1993: 384).

earnestly seek it). So F. F. Bruce writes, “The baptism in the Spirit which the believing community now experienced was an event which took place once for all” (Bruce 1988: 51).

If it is a one-time event, how then do they explain the *four* different occurrences of the baptism of the Spirit in Acts (Acts 2, 8, 10, 19)? George Ladd explains, “The Spirit came first to the Jewish believers, then to the Samaritan believers, then to Gentiles, and finally to a little group of disciples of John the Baptist. These four comings of the Spirit mark the four strategic steps in the extension of the *ekklēsia* and teach that there is but one *ekklēsia* into which all converts, whether Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, or followers of John, are baptized by the same Spirit” (Ladd 1993: 384).⁴ In other words, because of the disbelief that accompanied God’s inclusion of these various non-Jewish groups, the Spirit baptizes these groups in chronological succession and geographical extension⁵ in order to publicly demonstrate that he includes them into his one church. It seems to us that conversion and public demonstration of conversion leading to church inclusion are separate though related ideas in the Evangelical analysis. This view presupposes that Acts is *not* normative for today, but *descriptive* of events that occurred in history.

The problem with the Catholic view is that it has no textual support. It is simply tradition.⁶ There are several problems with the Pentecostal view. It divides Christians into categories like “spiritual” and “carnal,” even though in the Bible there is only one group: Christian. Christians with the baptism of the Spirit are super-Christians and this is often used as a reason to look down on those who do not speak in tongues. It views things in Acts as being normative for today without any justification for this assumption. This includes the speculation without proof that this was the universal experience of the early church. But Acts is a *history* book, given to show us what happened. It is not a manual for living or a series of commands for today. This view completely misses the point of the genre.

The non-Pentecostal Evangelical view is also not without its problems. The most glaring is that many people who receive the baptism of the Spirit are already saved! The disciples were believers long before Pentecost (e.g. Matt 4:18-22; Luke 24:32; John 1:49; 6:68; 11:27; 20:28; Acts 1:6). Pentecost does not happen until after they have been saved (Acts 2:1-4). The Samaritans believed and were baptized in water (Acts 8:12). Only later did the Spirit fall on them (8:16-17). The Gentiles believed prior to the Spirit being given to them (11:17). And the Ephesian “disciples” must have believed prior receiving the Spirit (19:1-6), otherwise Luke would not refer to them as disciples.

This view has a tendency to collapse the work of the Spirit into only one thing: conversion. This can lead to confusion, especially of His role in the old covenant. For example, if the Spirit first came (baptized, filled etc.) at Pentecost, does that mean that OT saints were not regenerated or converted by the Holy

⁴ See also Raymond, *ibid*.

⁵ The idea here is that there is an extension of the geography of those received into the church (see Acts 1:8). It begins with the Jews in Jerusalem, extends to the Samaritans, and extends even farther out to the Gentiles world (perhaps being represented by John’s disciples ‘beyond the Jordan.’ This is part of the overall geographical chiasm of Luke-Acts (see Blomberg 1997: 139-144).

⁶ F. F. Bruce writes, “Many ancient and modern commentators have inferred that what Peter and John did [in Acts 8:15-16] was to perform the rite of confirmation; some have inferred further that confirmation can be administered only by an apostle of someone in the succession of the apostolic ministry. But it is straining the sense of the present narrative to extract this meaning from it” (Bruce 1988: 169). James Dunn similarly states, “The Catholic cannot cling on to Acts 2:38 and 9:17f. as proof texts [the only ones possible in Acts] for the belief that the Spirit is given through water-baptism, while as at same time arguing that the reception of the Spirit in 8 is a second [confirming] coming of the Spirit,” because there is an equivalence of phrases or words used by Luke which make such a view impossible (Dunn 1970: 72). James Hamilton lists these words as baptism (*baptizō* in Acts 1:5; 11:16), coming upon (*eperchomai*, *erchomai* + *epi* in 1:8; 19:6), outpouring (*ekcheō/ekchunnō* in 2:17-18; 10:45) and falling upon (*epiptō* in 8:16; 10:44). They occur in the broader context of giving (*didōmi*; e.g. 11:17) and receiving (*lambanō*; e.g. 8:17) the Holy Spirit (Hamilton 2006: 186, 190). All reflect the same general idea. However, Hamilton has a unique thesis which sees two other verbs (*plērēs/plēroō* vs. *pimplēmi*, both of which are usually translated as “filled”) as describing two other different kinds of activity of the Spirit. For anyone confused about the role of the Spirit in salvation I recommend his book as a good introduction to the multifaceted work of the Holy Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments.

Spirit? If He came in the OT, then what makes Pentecost special? But if we say that there is more than one kind of work of the Spirit, are we forced to conclude with Pentecostals that the Spirit's baptism is a work of "second-blessing?"

The answer to the last question is no. James Hamilton suggests the intriguing idea that "Spirit-baptisms are given to show God's approval, not to indicate what happens at conversion" (Hamilton 2006: 293). They were "emphatic demonstrations that the eschatological gift of the Spirit has come" (191). This means that the baptism of the Spirit is not a kind of "second blessing" or "confirmation" giving some Christians (but not others) a first-class ticket to sanctification. By giving the Spirit to specific groups in Acts it shows that God approves of the Samaritans, approves of the Gentiles, and approves of the people that the Jewish Christians might not think could be incorporated into the new Israel of God; that is the church (Gal 6:16).

We must be clear here, the Scripture is unequivocal: There is no such thing as a Christian without the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:9 says, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (cf. Acts 19:1-2⁷; Rom 2:29; 7:1; Gal 3:2, 5, 14; Eph 1:13). It is the Spirit who saves and it is the Spirit who has *always* saved, even prior to Pentecost.

In Acts however, as Don Jackson exposes, "The Holy Spirit can come apart from baptism (Acts 2:1-4), precede baptism (10:34-38), or come after baptism (8:4-24; 19:1-7). Moreover one can be baptized with no mention of the Spirit (8:36-39; 16:33)" (Jackson 1989: 337-38). If both of these things are true, then the logical conclusion is that the Spirit's "coming" work in Acts is different from His "saving" work in Paul's letters (see especially 1 Cor 12:13 and Tit 3:5) and throughout the whole Bible.

When we assume that there is only one reception of the Holy Spirit in the early church (for example, because we don't want to be associated with Rome or Pentecostalism) it leads to confusion. Hamilton suggests that there are three ministries of the Spirit that are traceable in Acts. "First, Luke describes the ongoing Christian experience of being indwelt by the Spirit... Second, Luke shows Christians who are indwelt being empowered by the Spirit to declare divine truth with authority... Third, in Acts 2, 8, 10, 19, Luke shows believers being 'baptized in the Holy Spirit.' This baptism in the Spirit is not the same as or simultaneous with initial conversion or indwelling" (Hamilton 2006: 183).

Normally (in the early church), the Christians were indwelt by the Spirit apart from the extraordinary acts that accompanied the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 6:7; 16:5; 17:11-12; 2:41; 4:4; 8:12-13, 36-37; 9:35, 42; 13:48; 16:14, 31-34; 18:8). Compare these 15 conversions with the three instances (2:4; 10:46; 29:6⁸) where people speak in tongues or the when mighty works are performed (8:12-17⁹). At best it is 4:1 in favor of a non-miraculous experience at conversion, *even in the book of Acts!* This blows the lid off the Pentecostal thesis that "the normal experience of all believers in the early Christian church" was the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is simply not a defensible position from Scripture.

The normal work of the Spirit in the life of a believer is not referred to as baptism as much as it is "fruit." The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23). He gives us fruit in order to demonstrate that we are in the vine (John 15:5; cf. Ezek 17:8; Hos 10:1; Joel 2:22).

⁷ Here Paul by his question that all Christians have the Holy Spirit at conversion.

⁸ Two other instances of tongues (referenced in the Pentecostal statement of faith) might be deduced from 8:12 and 15:7-8. But both are simply instances of bold preaching in the known tongue of everyone involved. This was the standard practice after Pentecost (cf. 14:11; 21:37).

⁹ Here the signs seem to be done by Philip only, and not the crowds that are saved (cf. 8:6). These wonders were so different from those of Simon the Sorcerer that even he is amazed and wants to the Holy Spirit.

Then what purpose do these baptisms of the Spirit fill? They serve as special, remarkable, visible (Acts 2:3), and audible (2:6, 8) demonstrations of God's approval - that he has indeed sent his Spirit to his church, and this "church" includes Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and the disciples of John. Ladd reasons, "Some special evidence may have been necessary to assure these Samaritans, so accustomed to being despised as outsiders by the people of Jerusalem, that they were fully incorporated into the new community of the people of God' [citing Bruce]. And even more than this, Peter and John as leaders of the Jewish church needed the experience that God was moving toward the Gentile world, for they clearly did not yet have this vision" (Ladd 1993: 384). Dennis Johnson adds,

How was the church to know that the inclusion of the Gentiles was God's idea and not Peter's? When the Samaritans received the Spirit, two apostolic witnesses were present and could confirm what God had done. In Cornelius's house there was but one apostle. While Peter's integrity is reliable, the biblical principle stands that matters of moment must be confirmed by a plurality of witnesses (Deut 19:15; Matt 18:15). This was the role of the Jewish Christian 'brothers' who had accompanied Peter from Joppa to Caesarea (Acts 10:23). 'The believers from the circumcision who had come with Peter were astonished, because even on the Gentiles the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out' [10:45].

(Johnson 1997: 134-135)

In this way, the four examples of baptism and the Spirit do not explain that God is saving people only once they are baptized in the Holy Spirit, but that he outwardly manifests His power in a remarkable way in people that ordinary Jews, including the disciples, would be slow to accept as Christians.

This makes the baptism in the Spirit a unique experience to the time of the early church. John the Baptist had predicted, "I have baptized you with water, but [Christ] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8; cf. Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16). Jesus reasserted this prediction in Acts 1:5, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." The comparison with John shows a parallel between the two baptisms. It seems to indicate that the prediction is about a new experience that would be unique to that time just as John's baptism was unique to his time. It is therefore descriptive of what happened in the early church in order that non-Jewish Christians would be accepted by those in Jerusalem.

As a friend of mine has said, imagine 2,000 years of Jewish-only inclusion in the church. Suddenly, within a few chapters you have Samaritans (half-breeds), Gentiles (dogs!), and followers of John (the one they murdered for upsetting the status quo) all being allowed into the Christian community. This would be incredible and difficult to swallow, as it was even for the "amazed" Jewish Christians who along with Peter said during one of these baptisms of the Spirit, "The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out *even on the Gentiles!*" (Acts 10:45). We do not have this kind of amazement anymore in the church. It is accepted as fact that God includes anyone who trusts in Christ by faith alone. This was not the way it was in those early days. The baptism of the Spirit was needed at that time on rare but special occasions. It is doubtful that it is needed today. It is therefore not normative for what should happen today. This helps explain why it is not talked about outside of John the Baptist and Luke-Acts.

Hamilton's thesis is excellent, but it fails to address the question of why this work of the Spirit should be called a *baptism*. Here I want to dovetail off some of Bruce's wording in light of my own thesis that baptism initiates a person into the priesthood. Bruce writes,

When the Holy Spirit came upon them, Jesus assured them, they would be vested with heavenly power – that power by which, in the event, their mighty works were accomplished and their preaching made effective. As Jesus had been anointed at his baptism with the Holy Spirit and power, so his followers were now to be similarly anointed and enabled to carry on his work. This work would be a work of witness-bearing – a theme which is prominent in the apostolic preaching throughout Acts. And Old Testament prophet had called the people of Israel to be God's witnesses in the world (Is 43:10; 44:8); the task which

Israel had not fulfilled was taken on by Jesus, the perfect Servant of the Lord, and shared by him with his disciples.

(Bruce 1988: 36)

The choice of words is intriguing. “Vestment” is the language of clothing. The priest was clothed at his baptism with unique garments that made him fit to serve (Ex 28:4). He was then immediately baptized (Ex 29:4). Likewise we are vested in the clothing *of Christ* when we are baptized in water (Gal 3:27). It is as if we are made fit to serve a Holy God. The baptism of the Spirit was a special clothing *with power* to assure the church that God accepts *all* who come to Christ by faith.

Further, Paul explains that the proclamation of the gospel is priestly work saying, “On some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:15-16). The NIV paraphrases it as “the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God.”

We have seen that the first work of Christ after his own baptism was to “proclaim liberty to the captives” as he fulfills the Servant’s priestly activity (Isa 61) by calling the nations to himself (e.g. Matt 4:11-25). Now the disciples are enabled by the baptism of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to the dispersed Jews assembled at Jerusalem.

Speaking in tongues, which in Acts is *only associated with the baptism of the Spirit*, is always used in the book of Acts for the purpose of proclaiming the gospel.¹⁰ It is never disassociated from this like we find today when people practice some mysterious “angelic” heavenly prayer-tongues language in their private lives. In Acts 2 the people corporately hear the gospel preached in their own language (Acts 2:1-4, 14ff). In Acts 8 Philip preaches a mighty sermon to the crowds who repent and then receive baptism of the Spirit (Acts 8:12-17). In Acts 10 the masses hear Peter’s sermon in their own language and they too are baptized by the Spirit (Acts 10:44-46). In Acts 19 Paul explained to the people the difference between John and Christ. Then they are baptized by the Holy Spirit in order to confirm to them that Christ is greater than John (Acts 19:6).

Bruce writes,

Since John the Baptist distinguished his own baptism in water – a ‘baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mark 1:4; par. Luke 3:3) – from the baptism in the Spirit to be administered by the Coming One, it might have been expected that, when the disciples experienced the outpouring of the Spirit from the day of Pentecost onward, they would discontinue water baptism as having been superseded by something better. In fact they did not: they continued to baptize converts in water ‘for the forgiveness of sins,’ but this baptism was now part of a more comprehensive initiation which took its character especially from the receiving of the Spirit.

(Bruce, 69)

This “comprehensive initiation” was part of the overall baptism and clothing of the Spirit as the believer became part of the new covenant Levitical priesthood (cf. Isa 66:19-21). It appears that the baptism of the Spirit was a unique affirmation to those in the early church that God does indeed accept all kinds of people into his church. Today, the Spirit continues to regenerate (as He has always done) and to give *fruit* to those that find themselves in the vine of Christ.

¹⁰ One could easily argue the same thing is true in 1 Corinthians 14 where tongues is practiced during worship service where preaching would occur.

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