

There is much said today, particularly in Charismatic circles, regarding the need to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Many books have been written and many televangelists expound their experiences of having been baptized in the Spirit. What exactly does it mean to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit?”

Some believe that it is a second blessing of God that comes upon a person who has professed Christ. This is seen as an additional measure of grace bestowed which makes one even more spiritual than those who have yet to receive this special blessing. Often, speaking in tongues is said to be a sign of this manifestation of the Spirit’s work. If this is true, then there is a sort of division among Christians – a two-tiered level of spiritual haves and have-nots. We want to be biblical in our understanding of this doctrine. So, what does the Bible say?

The Old Testament prophets predicted that there would be a future outpouring of God’s Spirit at the time of the restoration of Israel (Isa. 44:3). We see this most prominently in the passages which predict a New Covenant of God with His people, Israel (Ezek. 36:26-27; 39:39), although the Gentiles will also receive this outpouring (Joel 2:28-29).

John the Baptist, the last Old Testament prophet, also predicted a coming of the Holy Spirit, calling it a “baptism” rather than a “pouring out” (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8). However, the meaning was the same – God’s Spirit was going to be dwelling in the individual Israelites at the time of the coming of the Messiah.

Jesus Himself predicted the coming of the Holy Spirit upon those who would follow Him.

The Bible indicates that this would occur after the Resurrection (John 7:37-39, 14:16-17).

The book of Acts helps answer some of the questions regarding the baptism of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the predictions of the prophets, John the Baptist and Jesus became a reality. Just as Joel had predicted, God poured out His Spirit upon the Jews gathered at Jerusalem, beginning with the disciples of Christ (2:4) and then continuing with those who would believe Peter’s message. Peter confirms that this was what God had spoken of through Joel (2:14-21). Apparently, though the Old Testament prophets predicted this phenomenon to occur at the time of the restoration of Israel – known as the kingdom (Matt. 3:2), God had determined to inaugurate the New Covenant prior to the establishment of His kingdom on earth. This is a partial fulfillment of the New Covenant, which is yet future in its total fulfillment.

The mystery of the church (Eph. 3:5) is that both Jew and Gentile would be united together in one body through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Both shared the experience of having the Holy Spirit dwell within them. In Acts, the confirmation of the non-Jews coming into the body of Christ on equal footing with the Jews was the manifestation of speaking in tongues (implied in 8:18, overt in 10:45-46). In addition, the same experience occurred to John the Baptist’s disciples when they heard the good news of the Messiah (19:6). The Jews were amazed when they heard that the Gentiles had the same experience at their conversion as they did at Pentecost (Acts 10:45-46; 11:17-18). Their amazement was not that Gentiles could be saved but that they had the same experience as they.

So the question must be answered, was there some kind of second blessing evident in the conversion and subsequent experience of these various disciples and is this experience normative for us today?

Some use chapter 8 to prove that there is a salvation experience, but then a second blessing is required to receive the Holy Spirit. This experience is made manifest through the gift of speaking in tongues. But what really happened here? Philip, the evangelist, went to Samaria and preached the gospel to the people there and many were saved (vv. 4-8, 12). It is apparent that they had a true salvation experience as Philip went ahead and baptized them. However, the Holy Spirit had not come upon them yet (v. 15). The Samaritans and the Jews hated each other and for the Samaritans to come into the church apart from the authority of the Apostles, who were designated by Christ as the foundational leaders of the church, there would have been immediate division. When Peter and John came to Samaria and prayed for them, they received the Holy Spirit and came into the church under the leadership and authority of the Apostles (vv. 14-17). This was affirmed by some outward sign, presumably tongues.

But is this normative for the church? A look at chapter 10:34-48 indicates that it was not even normative for the book of Acts. Cornelius’ household received the baptism of the Spirit at the time of their conversion. While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon them (v. 44). There was no delay in the receiving of the Spirit, no second blessing. That this was the same experience that the Jews had at Pentecost was confirmed by the Gentiles also speaking in tongues (v.47).

But what about the experience of John the Baptist’s disciples in chapter 19:1-7? They were

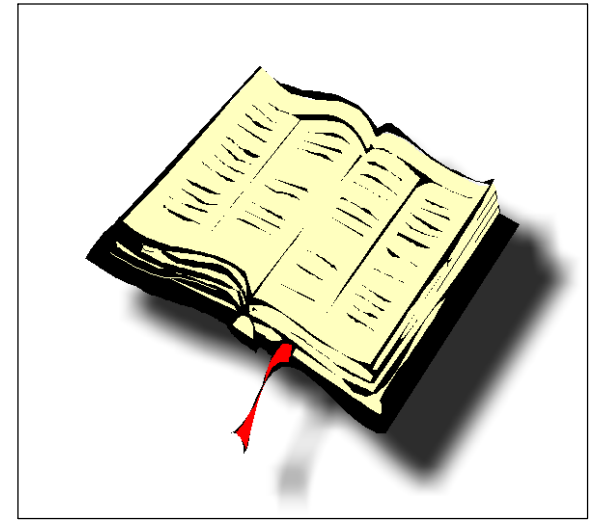
believers who had not received the Holy Spirit until the Apostles laid hands upon them, weren't they? After all, Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit *when* they had believed, didn't he (v.2)? Let's take a closer look at what occurred here. The disciples had believed, however, in what had they believed? Paul further questioned them and they responded that they had been baptized into John's baptism of repentance. He then said that they needed to believe in Jesus. It was then that they received Christian baptism, because until then, they had not been saved. That Paul baptized them is evidence that they had not been converted up to that time. Again, under the authority of an Apostle, they received the Holy Spirit and it was confirmed by their speaking in tongues.

From these experiences, we can see that there is not a normative pattern in Scripture of believers receiving a second blessing of the Holy Spirit making them more spiritual than others. Another help in understanding what occurred in these instances is knowing Luke's intent in writing Acts. He records for us what God was doing in the foundational stages of the church. Acts is not an instruction manual for the church but a record of what God did in establishing His church. The Epistles are the instruction manuals for the church today.

Understanding Paul's phraseology we can gain an understanding of the true meaning of Spirit baptism. He uses the phrase "in Christ" over 100x in his writings. This phrase signifies the believer's being placed into a personal relationship with Christ at the time of conversion. Galatians 3:27 indicates that we were "baptized into Christ." This refers to Spirit-baptism (see Rom. 6:1-4; Eph 4:4-5). In addition, this Spirit-baptism also places the

individual corporately into the "body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:13), which is the universal church (Col. 1:24). Notice in the Corinthians passage that Paul says "we were *all* baptized by one Spirit . . ." There is no room here for two levels of Christians. All come into the body the same way – through Spirit baptism at the time of conversion.

So, the baptism of the Spirit is the placing of a convert into Christ at the moment of salvation, enabling him to receive the benefits of the New Covenant and also places him in the universal church, making him a member of the body of Christ. There is no command in Scripture to be baptized by the Spirit and there is no evidence that this is a repeated experience. It is a once for all event that occurs at the moment of regeneration. There is also no evidence that speaking in tongues is a normative accompaniment with this event in the church age.



"Thy Word is Truth"
(John 17:17b)

What does the Bible Say About the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Do We Need a Second Blessing?

by

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