

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

24 What Is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Scripture: Acts 1:4-5; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; I Corinthians 12:13:

Our subject this morning is the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. People have asked if we believe in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit here at Hope Church. My response is to quickly assure them that we do believe in the Spirit's Baptism and our understanding is that the New Testament teaches and assumes all believer's will experience such a baptism. What is really being asked is what interpretation do we assign to this baptism. It is at this point that Christians of equal devotion and sincerity must clarify what they mean when they say they believe in the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit," recognizing that differences of opinion can exist without resentment. Let us note the distinctive areas of emphasis held by believers with the understanding that all shall be said and done in love because of our union with one another in the body of Christ. It is the purpose of this study to satisfy our minds as to what the Scriptures mean when they speak of the Spirit's unique baptism.

Theologian Schubert Ogden has well written, "Before you can say, 'I agree' or 'I disagree' with another position, you should be able to say, 'I understand'." This is what we want to do, we want to understand and on that basis be able to reach our own conclusions.

I. DIFFERENCES HAVE TO DO WITH THE TIMING AND PURPOSE OF THE SPIRIT'S BAPTISM:

1. Some Christians Believe this Baptism Occurs When You Become a Christian:

Many join with John Stott in his conviction that, "Baptism of the Spirit is a universal Christian experience because it is the initial Christian experience." (The Baptism And Fullness Of The Holy Spirit; Intervarsity Press; pp.12) Dr. Richard W. DeHaan writes, "Many teach that it is (baptism of the Spirit) something we obtain after salvation. But, and I say this with concern for anyone who may differ with me, those who hold this view are wrong. The Bible teaches that a person experiences the baptism of the Holy Spirit the very moment He is saved." (The Charismatic Controversy; Radio Bible

Class; pp.3)

Closely associated with the time of the baptism is its purpose. Those who believe this baptism takes place at conversion associate it with the believer being placed into the body of Christ. Dwight Pentecost draws four facts from I Corinthians 12:13. The verse reads, *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.”* He concludes that baptism is the unique experience for believers in this age, it is the universal experience of all believers in this age, the baptism of the Holy Spirit unites believers to the body of Christ, and the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ Himself. (**The Divine Comforter**; Moody Press; The Baptizing Ministry of the Spirit, pp.136) It is difficult for some to think of the average Christian today has having been baptized by the Holy Spirit. We have the historical Pentecost looming large in our minds with the supernatural signs which attended that happening.

Someone has counted no less than thirty-six things that happen the moment a person becomes a Christian. Some Christians believe one of these things is the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

2. Other Christians Believe the Baptism Belongs With Conversion but the Reality of that Baptism Comes With the Passing of Time:

It may be that they associate it with the end of a period of backsliding or coolness. It is said to be experienced during a time when faith is particularly strong or there is unique growth in one's Christian life. Some have felt it came with a kind of anointing for a particularly difficult task. The Roman Catholic writer, Simon Tugwell, in his book, **Did You Receive The Holy Spirit?** (Darton, Longman, and Todd) uses the expression, 'a delayed honeymoon,' in reference to the delayed realization of the Spirit's baptism.

3. Some Christians Believe the Spirit's Baptism Is Entirely Apart from Conversion in Terms of Time and Purpose:

This conviction sees the Baptism of the Holy Spirit as empowering the believer for holy living and service. All who become Christians should therefore seek this baptism. Associated with this baptism is the gift of tongues which is the true baptism's sign. The exercise of this particular gift opens the way for the proper exercise of the rest of the gifts. If believers are to experience the Holy Spirit's unique power for holy living and are to make use of their gifts, they must first seek and receive the baptism. Scriptural

evidence for this position is notable and impressive. We will examine the passages and their interpretation.

II. THE GOSPELS PROMISE A SPIRIT BAPTISM AND THE BOOK OF ACTS FULFILLS IT:

It is interesting to note that the phrase “baptism of the Holy Spirit” does not appear in Scripture. It is true that similar phrases do occur a limited number of times. Seven times do they appear. Once in the ministry of Christ, once in each of the Gospel records, once in the ministry of Peter, and once in Paul's writings. In Acts 1:5 we have the words of the risen Lord, *“For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”* This reminds us of the references in the Gospels where John the Baptist speaks of Jesus' ability to baptize with the Holy Spirit. These references are Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:33. Jesus words in Acts 1:4-5, *“Wait for the promise of the Father”* and *“not many days hence”* have to do with the crucial event of the Holy Spirit coming into the world at Pentecost. This happening is described in Acts 2:1-4. Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost is an indication that the time of fulfillment had arrived as he quotes from Joel 2:28-32. Peter mentions the baptism of the Spirit in Acts 11:16 as he recollects the words of Christ, and Paul relates the baptism with the Spirit to the unity of believers in I Corinthians 12:13.

III. THOSE WHO ADVOCATE A DELAYED BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT CITE THE BOOK OF ACTS:

1. The Believers in Acts 2:1-4:

These original one hundred twenty disciples included the apostles themselves. There is no question about their being Christians, about the fact that they were weak in their witness and needed desperately the power of the promised Spirit. Upon reception of the Spirit they spoke in tongues and witnessed boldly as the following chapters of Acts reveal. Being already regenerate, they were baptized or filled with the Spirit which was to them both exciting and meaningful.

2. The Samaritans of Acts 8:14-25:

Here we have a group of people who believed and were baptized, yet upon whom the Holy Spirit had not fallen. When Peter and John laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit. (8: 14-17) Here appears to be a plain

instance of the distinction some feel exists between conversion and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Apostle Paul in Acts 9:1-16:

Paul came to the faith on the Damascus Road, but it was not until three days later that he received the Holy Spirit. It was not until he was visited by Ananias who laid hands on him. The pattern with Paul was first conversion and then baptism in the Spirit.

4. Cornelius in Acts 10:44-48:

This passage is not a base for the later work of the Spirit because it appears that the Spirit came simultaneous to belief. However, it was when Peter and the believers with him heard Cornelius and those with him speaking in tongues, that they realized that the Holy Spirit had been given.

5. The Twelve Ephesian Disciples of Acts 19:1-7:

A favorite passage of those who believe in a delayed baptism of the Holy Spirit is found in Acts 19. Here are a group of men who are called disciples, yet who profess not to know about the Holy Spirit. Many believe that this is a clear example of the post-conversion nature of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Other verses which are joined with the Acts passages are taken from I Corinthians 12-14. The delayed work of the Holy Spirit is assumed by virtue of the fact that Paul in 12:1 writes, *"Now concerning those who are spiritual..."* and in 14:5, 39, he instructs not to forbid speaking in tongues. Those who speak in tongues have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. One last passage which seems to give support is Mark 16:17-18 where Jesus, it is said, makes it clear that speaking in tongues would be the normal activity for those who believe in Him.

IV. DIFFERENCES ARISE BECAUSE OF SCRIPTURAL INTPRETATION:

The issue of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit brings to the surface the whole approach one has to Scripture. Doctrine is to be drafted only after one has considered all that the New Testament has to say about the matter. If we are to understand this particular doctrine, much attention must be given to the didactic passages or sections. They are the explanatory portions of Scripture. We bring the experiences of groups or individuals to this teaching to be judged and evaluated rather than to impose experience upon the rest of the New Testament.

It has been and will always be a doubtful and dangerous practice to formulate doctrine according to what someone has experienced regardless of how lofty that experience may appear to be.

For example, certain aspects of Pentecost were clearly incidental. They were never meant to be permanent. There were certain external elements which are not meant to be necessary to the ongoing of the life and ministry of the church. These observable occurrences belong to a particular historic scene and we do not seek for a repetition of the historic Pentecost. The Pentecost which will not be repeated are the physical presence of the church in one place, the sound of a mighty rushing wind from heaven, the divided tongues of flame which rested on the foreheads of believers, and the speaking of languages from all nations without an interpreter so that the message was understood by all who heard. It would be unthinkable to maintain that we must today receive the Holy Spirit in every detail as did those on Pentecost Day.

If doctrine were to be drawn from Pentecostal experience consistently we would find ourselves having all things common (Acts 2:44, 45) and we would be meeting in homes for worship or in the nearest Jewish place of worship (Acts 2:46, 3:1). On the experience of Paul in Acts 9 it could be asserted that two of the basic aspects of true Christian conversion are a physically overpowering encounter with Christ and blindness. But we do not base doctrine on someone's experience. We seek out the teaching passages of Scripture which separate the fundamental truth from the incidental detail.

The Book of Acts is a transitional book. It describes a critical period in the history of the church. It describes the inclusion of Gentiles into the family of God, into the Body of Christ. Just as the appearance of God in this world in human form was surrounded with miracles and signs, so the coming of the Holy Spirit was a momentous event also associated with signs. Peter appeals to the uniqueness of these signs in Acts 2:22. It remains for the Epistles to interpret the Gospels and the Acts. Clarification, explanation, and normative conduct are to be taken from the Epistles, not from the Gospels and Acts alone. To say that there is to be a baptism of the Holy Spirit, in terms of a delayed work of the Spirit as in the Book of Acts, is to find identical teaching in the instructional letters of the New Testament. I believe the following truth to be the Biblical perspective.

V. THE EPISTLES TEACH WE ARE JOINED TO THE BODY OF CHRIST BY THE BAPTISM:

There are six passages in the epistles which contain important truths concerning the Spirit's Baptism. There is no instance where the baptism is spoken of apart from the Holy Spirit's work in conversion.

1. There Is One Baptism:

In Ephesians 4:5 Paul writes, *"One Lord; one faith, one baptism."* The context here has to do with one body. Paul speaks of a work of the Holy Spirit called a "baptism" which gives a basic unity to all believers. It is what all believers have in common who are part of the body.

2. The Experience of Spirit Baptism Is Universal Among Believers:

This truth is taught in Galatians 3:26-27 & I Corinthians 12:13. Believers are not here exhorted to be baptized, he simply states that all have been baptized. If it had been otherwise Paul would have urged the carnal Corinthians to qualify. The idea of seeking the Spirit's baptism is alien to Scripture.

3. By the Spirit's Baptism We Are Joined to the Body of Christ:

The original Greek word had a metaphorical usage. It means a change of identity or relationship. A Greek historian describes a beautiful field full of grain as being baptized into a field of death. Believers have a change of identity according to Romans 6:3-5 and I Corinthians 12:13. The *"baptism of the Holy Spirit"* is that work of the Spirit whereby we become Christians.

4. The Believers Responsibility Is to Be Filled With the Spirit:

The Book of Acts records many examples of the Spirit's filling. (2:4, 4:8, 4:31, 9:17, 13:19, 52) Some fillings were accompanied with outward manifestations, some were not. The one time in the Epistles filling is mentioned is in Ephesians 5:18, *"Keep on being filled."* The Baptism of the Spirit is a unique initiating experience of every true believer, the fullness of the Spirit is intended to be the continuing norm and result of submission to Christ. We ought to seek a true and continuous filling of the Spirit. I believe we will then be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19), the fruits of righteousness (Philippians 1:11 and with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT, 7-30-78