

# The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

By  
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## Introduction

I believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is one of the most important doctrines for believers to study and accurately understand in the church today. This is due to both its important place in the Scripture, which will be discussed below, and to the controversy surrounding the baptism of the Spirit within the church today. Thus, it is very important that our church has a biblical understanding of what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is and is not, and to understand the relationship between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. A proper understanding of these issues will not only impact our doctrine, but our ministry practice as well.

## What is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

The baptism of the Holy Spirit refers to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on humans. It means that someone is whelmed or immersed in the Holy Spirit. This is seen from two primary considerations.

First, the term baptize means “*dip, immerse.*”<sup>1</sup> Thus, to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be dipped or immersed in the Holy Spirit. This is undoubtedly what the early believers would have understood the phrase to mean, simply based on the common meanings of the words in the phrase.

Second, of the seven times the phrase “baptism of/with/in/by the Holy Spirit”<sup>2</sup> is used in the New Testament, six of these occur in parallel with the idea of being baptized in water.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there is a clear analogy between baptism in water and baptism in the Spirit. The difference is the element in which the person is baptized. In water baptism they are baptized (dipped or immersed) in water, and in Spirit baptism they are baptized (dipped or immersed) in the Holy Spirit. This is clearly how John the Baptist and Jesus would have expected the people around them to understand the phrase.

Thus, the baptism of the Holy Spirit refers to a person being whelmed, covered or immersed in the Holy Spirit. To use the language of Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:33, the Holy Spirit is poured out on people.

## What is the Purpose of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit? What Does It Accomplish?

What is the purpose of the baptism of the Spirit? When it was spoken of by the writers of Scripture, why did they indicate God would baptize someone in the Spirit? Or to put it another way, what does the baptism of the Spirit accomplish? When someone is baptized in the Holy

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<sup>1</sup> All word definitions, unless otherwise noted, will be from *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*, commonly referred to as BDAG. This is the standard lexicon for New Testament words.

<sup>2</sup> The English translations use various prepositions, but in all seven instances of the phrase “baptism in the Spirit,” the Greek text always uses the same preposition, ἐν (*en*), that can mean “in,” “by” or “with.” Thus, there is **no** difference between the baptism **of** the Spirit, the baptism **in** the Spirit, the baptism **with** the Spirit, and being baptized **by** the Spirit. The Greek phrase underlying these various English translations is the same, they mean the same thing, and they refer to the same experience. I will discuss this point in more depth in the discussion on 1 Corinthians 12:13 below.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; and Acts 11:16. The only other time the phrase is used is in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

Spirit, what happens to them? What change do they undergo as a result of being baptized in the Spirit?

In order to ascertain the purpose of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, I will look at the seven places where it occurs in the New Testament. I will not look at other phrases that might be parallel at this time; these will be discussed in a later section of the paper. Although these could be looked at now as well, I do not believe they add any significant data to the discussion of the purpose of the baptism in the Spirit, and thus, in the interest of keeping this discussion fairly short, I will forego a look at them until later in the paper.

The first purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is **to serve as the sign that Jesus is the promised Messiah**. This is seen in the four passages in the Gospels. In each of these, John notes that while he baptized with water for repentance, the coming Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit. This is the predominant note that John sounds regarding the work of the Messiah. Certainly He would be the Lamb of God and would die to save His people from their sins, but the mark of the Messiah is that He would baptize His people with the Holy Spirit. Although John the Baptist mentions other things about the Messiah (He is the Lamb of God, He is the Light of the world, He will be lifted up to draw men to Himself), this is the only statement of John's that occurs in all four Gospels. Furthermore, John says that God told Him that the One on Whom the Spirit descended and remained would be the one "who will baptize with the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33). Thus, this activity of baptizing the people in the Holy Spirit is central to the identification and ministry of the Messiah. Anyone claiming to be the Messiah who did not baptize the children of God in the Holy Spirit, even if they did miracles and claimed to die for the people, could not be the Messiah. According to John, the prophet who prepared the way before Messiah, this is a key sign of the Messiah.

It is important to note that this sign is actually the fulfillment of Moses' prayer and desire in Numbers 11:29: "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" The problem in the Old Covenant was that the Spirit was only given to a few important prophets, priests and kings. In the New Covenant, however, the Messiah pours the Spirit out, not on a few, but on **all** of His people. This is seen in God's promise through Joel: "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."<sup>4</sup> The Messianic Age brings with it the full blessings of the New Covenant, and central to these are the giving of the Spirit to all of God's people. Thus, *the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit is not restricted to some select few, but is given to all of God's people. This is the work of the true Messiah.*

The second purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is **to provide power for believers to be witnesses for Christ**. This is seen in Acts 1:8. In verse 5 Jesus has again told the disciples that in a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In verse 8 He gives the reason that this coming baptism is important: it will give them power to be His witnesses. Thus, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is imperative because without it no one could be a witness for Christ.

This idea also has its root in the Old Testament. Under the Old Covenant the people of Israel were called to be a kingdom of priests, being God's witnesses to the other nations. They failed miserably at this task however, so God promised a new covenant, one in which the people would be given the Holy Spirit so that they could finally fulfill their call to be kings and priests for God. This promise is given in Ezekiel 36:26-27: "I will give you a new heart and put a new

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<sup>4</sup> Note that on the day of Pentecost Peter uses this very passage to explain the baptism of the Spirit, so Joel 2 is clearly referring to the baptism of the Spirit, not some other experience with the Holy Spirit.

spirit in you...And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” If anyone is to live for God and serve as His priest, they must be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is why the disciples could not begin their ministry until they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. *It is impossible for someone to live for Christ or be His witness without the baptism of the Holy Spirit.*

The third purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is **to serve as a sign that someone is a Christian**. This is seen in Acts 11:16, where Peter is recounting the story of how Cornelius and his household were baptized in the Spirit. Many in the Church were scandalized that Peter had baptized these Gentiles. Yet, he tells them that he had no choice because it was clear that they were Christians. How did Peter know this? Because they had been baptized in the Holy Spirit! This is the sign that someone is a believer. He recognized that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was the sign that Jesus was the Messiah. Therefore, when someone came to Christ, the Messiah would do His work and baptize him or her in the Holy Spirit. When this happened to Cornelius, how could Peter reject those whom God had clearly accepted?

This is really the flip side of the first purpose. *If the true Messiah baptizes His people with the Spirit, then His people are those who have been baptized in the Spirit. If His people are not baptized in the Spirit, then He is **not** the Messiah. Therefore, the baptism of the Spirit is the sign and seal that someone is a Christian.*<sup>5</sup>

The fourth purpose of the baptism of the Spirit is **to place Christians into the body of Christ, the Church**. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 12:13 where Paul says, “we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free.” Notice here that what the baptism of the Spirit is said to accomplish is placing one into the body of Christ. When someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit they become part of the Church, the body of believers. This cannot happen apart from the baptism of the Holy Spirit and thus *if someone is not baptized in the Holy Spirit, they are not part of the Church*. They may join a local church organization, but they are not part of the Universal Church, the body of Christ, unless they have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Some have tried to blunt the force of this by saying that this verse does not refer to the baptism of/in the Spirit, but to something different, baptism *by* the Spirit. However, this is **impossible** because the basic elements of the Greek phrase are the same as every other time the phrase occurs in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup> All seven verses speaking of the baptism in/with/by the Spirit use the Greek word **en**, which is usually translated “in” or “with”, but which in this case is translated as “by.”<sup>7</sup> The reason the translators did this is because the phrase “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body” sounds awkward. As a result, they changed the word to “by”. However, the phrase is identical.

There is another reason why we can be certain that this phrase is not speaking of a baptism done by the Holy Spirit (as opposed to being baptized in the Holy Spirit.) This is because throughout the New Testament different terms are used to refer to the element in which one is baptized (such as water or the Spirit), and the person doing the baptizing (such as John or

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<sup>5</sup> In a sense, water baptism is the outward sign and seal that the inward sign and seal of the baptism in the Spirit have taken place. Of course, water baptism has other purposes, but this is one key purpose: to make the sign and seal of the baptism of the Holy Spirit visible to others.

<sup>6</sup> In every instance, the key words are some form of the verb βαπτίζω (baptize) connected to some form of the noun πνεῦμα (Spirit) by the preposition ἐν (in/with/by).

<sup>7</sup> The Greek word **en** can certainly mean in, with or by. The point is not that the term could not mean “by”, but that whatever it means, it means in every instance, because the same phrase is used. Paul is clearly referring to the same experience as is spoken of in the other 6 verses, so the same word should be used here.

Jesus). Throughout the New Testament the element in which one is baptized always follows the preposition **en** (which is used here), and throughout the New Testament the person doing the baptizing always follows the Greek preposition **hupo** (which also means “by”).

Numerous scholars note this fact. For example, C. Samuel Storms, a charismatic, writes: “We should note the same terminology in 1 Corinthians 10:2, where Paul says that “all were baptized *into* Moses *in* the cloud and *in* the sea. Here ‘the cloud’ and ‘the sea’ are the ‘elements’ that surrounded or overwhelmed the people and ‘Moses’ points to the new life of participation in the Mosaic covenant and the fellowship of God’s people of which he was the leader. In the other texts referring to Spirit-baptism... the preposition *en* means ‘in,’ describing the element in which one is, as it were immersed. In no text is the Holy Spirit ever said to be the agent by which one is baptized.”<sup>8</sup> Storms also notes that, “In the New Testament to be baptized ‘by’ someone is expressed by the preposition ‘hypo’ plus the genitive. People were baptized ‘by’ John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matt 3:6, Mark 1:5, Luke 3:7). Jesus was baptized ‘by’ John (Matt 3:13; Mark 1:9). The Pharisees had not been baptized ‘by’ John (Luke 7:30), etc. Most likely, then, if Paul had wanted to say that the Corinthians had all been baptized ‘by’ the Holy Spirit, he would have used *hypo* with the genitive, not *en* with the dative.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, Wayne Grudem, another charismatic scholar, notes, “If Paul had wanted to say that we were baptized by the Holy Spirit, he would have used a different expression. To be baptized *by* someone in the New Testament is always expressed by the preposition *hypo* followed by a genitive noun.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is clear: *we become part of the Church by being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and anyone who is not baptized in the Spirit is not part of the Church. No amount of special pleading or hermeneutical gymnastics can alter this meaning.*

The fifth purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is **to be a source of unity within the Church**. This is seen in the context of the passage in 1 Corinthians 12:13. The entire point of 1 Corinthians 12 is to build unity within the church. Paul is exhorting the believers that they are all part of the same body of Christ, that all of the gifts come from the one Spirit, that all gifts serve the same purpose of building up the church. In this context he also tells the Corinthians “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” Notice that the baptism of the Spirit is spoken of in the context of everyone being one body. In fact, the very thing that assures the essential unity of the Church is not some doctrinal belief, but the experience of the baptism of the Spirit. We are all one, not because we believe the same thing on every point, but because every one of us has been baptized in the same Spirit. It is our common experience, not just of the Holy Spirit, but specifically of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that brings unity to the body of Christ. *Thus, any idea regarding the baptism of the Spirit that makes distinctions between believers rather than stressing the common experience of the Spirit that all believers possess is a false understanding of the baptism of the Spirit.* To believe that the baptism of the Spirit makes distinctions between Spirit-filled and non Spirit-filled Christians would completely undermine the very point Paul is making in 1 Corinthians 12.

The final purpose of the baptism of the Spirit is **to impart the gifts of the Spirit to Christians**. This is seen in the context of 1 Corinthians 12 as well. Though the context of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, page 178.

<sup>9</sup> *Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, page 178.

<sup>10</sup> *Systematic Theology*, page 768. Gordon Fee, a Pentecostal scholar, in *God’s Empowering Presence*, page 181, also makes the same point.

passage is about unity, the issue that occasioned this part of the epistle was a false understanding of spiritual gifts. Thus, when Paul refers to the baptism of the Spirit, it is likely that the baptism of the Spirit is linked with spiritual gifts as well. This idea receives further confirmation from Paul's use of "Spirit-language" in discussing the gifts. They are not just gifts – they are manifestations of the Spirit. Therefore, it seems likely that gifts are initially imparted with the baptism of the Spirit.

This idea also fits well with the narratives concerning the baptism of the Spirit in the book of Acts. When the Spirit is poured out the recipients often display spiritual gifts, especially tongues and prophecy, but also other miraculous gifts as well. Since we have no record that anyone displayed these gifts prior to the pouring out of the Spirit, it is likely that Luke intends for us to understand that gifts of the Spirit are given in conjunction with the baptism of the Spirit. If this is the case, it is likely that those who have gifts of the Holy Spirit must be baptized in the Holy Spirit, for the gifts are given, at least initially, as part of the baptism of the Spirit. *Therefore, everyone who has been baptized in the Spirit has spiritual gifts, and anyone who has not been baptized in the Spirit cannot possess any spiritual gifts.*

### **Other Phrases Which Refer to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit**

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is also referred to by other names in the Scripture. I will take a brief look at these other phrases, since they also will shed light on a full-orbed understanding of the baptism of the Spirit.

The first alternative phrase is "the promise of the Father" or "the Spirit of Promise." In Luke 24:49 Jesus tells the disciples "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." This is clearly referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit since in Acts 1:4-5 Jesus picks up on this theme and tells the disciples "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."<sup>11</sup> This is further seen in Peter's statement that Jesus has received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father and then poured out the Pentecost experience (see Acts 2:33). Thus, the baptism of the Spirit is the promise of the Father.

Furthermore, note the extent to which Peter applies this promise in Acts 2:39 – "The Promise is for you and your children and for all who are far all – for all whom the Lord our God will call." The Promise is for ALL whom the Lord our God will call. Nor can we even say "It is promised to all, but not all will receive" for Peter says in verse 38 "Repent and be baptized ... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." He does not say those who turn to Christ are now in a position to receive, or that they might receive, but that they WILL receive the gift of the Spirit.

This idea also probably lies behind Paul's terminology in Ephesians 1:13-14 when he says "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." He is not just the Holy Spirit; He is the *Promised* Spirit. The Ephesians received this Promise of the Father when they became believers and were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, this is probably what is in view in Galatians 3:14 when Paul tells the Galatians "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit." Here, the giving of the

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<sup>11</sup> It is likely that these two sections refer to the exact same instance, since Luke ends his gospel with one and opens up Acts with the other. The verse in Acts is probably serving as a reminder to Theophilus of how the Gospel ended.

Spirit is again seen as a promise, but this time it is linked with the Abrahamic covenant. One of the great blessings that God promises to His people is to give them His Holy Spirit. As with the rest of the Abrahamic covenant, the only stipulation is faith. Those who have faith in Christ receive the promise of the Spirit.

The reason for this phrase is obvious. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was one of the great promises of the Scripture. It was one of the key provisions of the new covenant. This was what Moses had longed for and what Joel had foreseen in His prophecy. The baptism of the Spirit is the Promise of the Father.

Another phrase that is used to refer to the baptism of the Spirit is the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. This is seen in the prophecy of Joel and in the record of its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost. In Joel 2:28 we read “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” The same language is used in Acts 2:17 (which quotes Joel 2:28) and also in Acts 2:33 where Peter says that Christ poured out what was seen and heard.

As noted above, this phrase probably ties in with the imagery of baptism. The Spirit is not given in small measure; we are immersed and whelmed in the Spirit. He is poured out on us.

From these additional terms we see that the baptism of the Spirit is the promise of the Father for His children, and that it is integral to the coming of the new covenant. No longer would only some of the people of God have the Spirit; He would be given in fullness to all of God’s children.

### **When is Someone Baptized in the Holy Spirit?**

One key difference that has distinguished Pentecostals and charismatics from much of the rest of Christianity regards when someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit. Does the baptism of the Holy Spirit occur when someone becomes a Christian, or is it an experience subsequent to conversion, which must be sought separately from conversion? If it is part of the experience of conversion, then all Christians have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. However, if it is an experience that must be sought after someone has been saved, then naturally there will be believers who have not been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Which is correct? Which does the Scripture teach?

Although for many years I believed that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was an experience that must be sought separate from conversion, in recent years I have changed my mind regarding this important question. There are several reasons for this. In this section of the paper I will attempt to outline these, answering possible objections, most of which I myself believed at one time.

First, I believe that the purposes of the baptism of the Spirit, which I have outlined above, do not allow for the possibility of Christians who have not been baptized in the Spirit. To show why this is so, I will briefly outline the points made above.

1. If Jesus is the Messiah, He must baptize His people in the Holy Spirit. This is the sign that John gave for the Messiah, and Jesus must fulfill it if He is truly the Messiah. Note that this does not say that He will baptize *some* of His people in the Spirit, but that He will baptize His people in the Spirit. Yet, if the current understanding of many charismatics is correct, only a very small percentage of Christians throughout history have been baptized in the Spirit, because almost no

one began seeking the baptism of the Spirit as a subsequent experience until very recent times. Additionally, if speaking in tongues is the sign that someone has been baptized in the Spirit, virtually no one was baptized in the Spirit from the early days of the church until 1906. If this is true, then Jesus CANNOT be the Messiah, because He has not fulfilled the key sign of Messiah.

2. The baptism of the Spirit is what enables a believer to be a witness for Christ. Therefore, if any believers are not baptized in the Spirit, they not only are missing some portion of power to be a witness, they have absolutely no power to be a witness for Christ. Once again, however, if the current understanding of many charismatics is correct, only a very small percentage of Christians throughout history have been baptized in the Spirit, because almost no one began seeking the baptism of the Spirit as a subsequent experience until very recent times. Yet this would mean that it was impossible for the church to have been an effective witness for Christ until this century, which is simply patently false. Despite her many failings, the church has been an effective witness for Christ throughout the ages, and this is only possible if her members have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, most of the great men of God throughout the history of the church were not baptized in the Holy Spirit according to the current charismatic understanding. Yet, how do we account for the great power and effect of men like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Billy Graham if they were not baptized in the Holy Spirit?
3. The baptism of the Spirit is what marks someone as a believer. This is how the apostles knew someone was a believer (not a special type of believer, but simply a believer). Therefore, if someone is not baptized in the Spirit they are not a Christian. I do not think the apostles could conceive of a non-Spirit baptized Christian any more than they could conceive of a non-born again Christian. Such creatures simply do not exist.
4. The baptism of the Spirit is what unites a Christian with the Church. As I showed above, it is not possible to read 1 Corinthians 12:13 as referring to something different from the baptism of the Spirit. Yet, if 1 Corinthians 12:13 is speaking of the baptism of the Spirit, then anyone who has not been baptized in the Spirit is not part of the Church. If this is true, then according to the typical charismatic understanding of the baptism of the Spirit, most Christians throughout history, including men like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, and Billy Graham were not even part of the Church.
5. The baptism of the Spirit is meant to be a source of unity for all Christians. This is the key focus of 1 Corinthians 12:13. There is unity in the Church because ALL Christians have been baptized in the same Spirit. Yet, the popular charismatic understanding of the baptism of the Spirit does not promote unity; it divides the church into the Spirit filled and the non-Spirit filled. Thus, if this understanding is true the baptism of the Spirit does exactly the opposite of what Paul claimed it did! I simply do not believe Paul could be wrong, and therefore I do not believe that the typical charismatic understanding is correct.
6. The baptism of the Spirit is what brings the gifts of the Spirit. Notice that it does not just bring tongues or the other “miraculous” gifts; it brings *all* of the gifts. Thus, if someone is not baptized in the Spirit, they do not have ANY of the gifts



of the Spirit. Once again, however, if this is true then this means that Calvin and Edwards did not have the gift of teaching, and Billy Graham does not have the gift of evangelism. Can one really hold this position? Generally people try to make a distinction between tongues and other gifts, but what biblical basis do we have for this? I cannot find one.

7. The baptism of the Spirit is the promise of the Father for His children, and it is integral to the coming of the new covenant. No longer would only some of the people of God have the Spirit; He would be given in fullness to all of God's children. However, if the typical charismatic understanding is true, then most of God's children have not received the promise of the Father, and are missing the key blessing of the new covenant. This means that most of the church is in fact living under the old covenant provisions rather than God's new covenant blessings. This is simply inconceivable.

Second, I can find no commands for believers to seek the baptism of the Spirit. If the baptism of the Spirit is really subsequent to conversion, then we should surely expect that there would be at least a few occurrences of commands in the epistles to ask for the baptism in the Spirit. While we find many commands to walk in the Spirit, to let the Word of Christ dwell in us, and to put to death the misdeeds of the old man, we find no commands to seek to be baptized in the Spirit. Yet if this were critical to the Christian life (and it is), then why would the apostles not command believers who had not been baptized in the Spirit to seek it so they could have the power they need? The reason they did not do this is because all Christians have already been baptized in the Spirit, and thus there is no need for them to seek the baptism of the Spirit.

In this connection it is important to discuss Ephesians 5:18. This is the only location in the epistles where believers are told to seek a further experience with the Spirit. Paul commands "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." Some see in this a command to seek a "second blessing" of the baptism in the Spirit. However, this is not the point of the verse for two reasons. First, the command "be filled with the Spirit" is a present tense participle. It refers, not to a one-time experience, but rather to a continuous experience. In fact, "be continuously being filled with the Spirit" would be a good translation. It simply does not refer to a one-time experience. Second, the idea here is not a discrete experience but rather being controlled by the Spirit. Just as the wine controls a drunkard, so Christians are called to be controlled by the Spirit. Just as being controlled by wine is not a one-time experience, being controlled by the Spirit is not a one-time experience. Just as there are levels of being controlled by wine, so there are levels of being controlled by the Spirit.

Thus, Ephesians 5:18 does not refer to a second experience of the baptism of the Spirit, which a believer can pray for and receive one time for the rest of their life. Rather, it refers to a continual experience that all believers must seek so that the Spirit may control them.

### **What About the Book of Acts?**

Finally, despite the frequent use of Acts to support the idea of the baptism of the Spirit as a post conversion experience, this is an illegitimate practice. This is true for several reasons.

First, and most importantly, establishing doctrine from historical narratives (such as many sections within Acts) is an extremely risky maneuver. The primary place from which we draw doctrine is the didactic teaching portions of Scripture such as the epistles and the teaching

sections of the Gospels and Acts. This does not mean doctrine cannot be drawn from the historical narratives, but it must be done with great care. This is primarily because we do not know if a particular action was the correct one, and even if it was for that individual, we do not know if it was meant to be a paradigm for all other believers. Thus, simply because something occurs in Acts does not mean that the same thing must be repeated for others.<sup>12</sup>

For example, in Acts 1 the apostles draw lots to determine who would take Judas' place of leadership. Does this mean church leaders are selected by drawing lots? Must all church leaders be selected this way? Is it even acceptable to select any church leaders this way, or were the apostles relying on an old technique that God no longer wants the church to use? All of these questions must be answered before we can even begin to think about using the example from Acts as a paradigm for what should happen today.

We could also look at a brief example from the life of Paul. In Acts 21:26 Paul has his head shaved and gives offerings at the temple. Should all believers do this? Luke neither praises nor condemns this action, so should we assume that it is binding on later believers to do the same? Most do not do this, but many are then quick to take other narratives and say that these SHOULD be normative. On what basis is this done? We must apply the same principles of interpretation throughout the book of Acts. We cannot choose which examples to follow rigorously and which ones to ignore simply because we do not like them or because they do not fit preconceptions and experiences we bring to the text. If we will not follow Paul's example here without further commands to do so, we cannot then choose to take other actions and require them (unless we have explicit commands to do so.)

To take an example closer to the issue, in Acts 2 the coming of the Holy Spirit occurred when the believers were praying. He came in with the sound of a rushing wind and tongues of fire settled on each person receiving the baptism of the Spirit. Additionally, it appears that everyone there began to speak in tongues, and when they did this in public the people hearing them could understand the languages being spoken. Which of these things are normative for all Christians? Do we always have to pray to receive the baptism of the Spirit? Must there always be a mighty rushing wind and tongues of fire? Do we always have to speak in tongues? Will people hearing us always understand the language? How do we determine which of these is normative for all Christians and which was only meant to be a one time experience? Traditionally praying for the baptism and speaking in tongues is all that is considered normative, but what biblical justification is there for picking out these two items as being different from the rest? Thus, to say that we should seek the baptism of the Spirit and that we must speak in tongues because the apostles prayed for the baptism of the Spirit (and we do not even know what they were praying for on that morning) and that they spoke in tongues is not valid exegesis. One might as well say that we must seek tongues of fire to land on our heads because this is what happened to the apostles.

Nor should we think that a valid reason for separating prayer to receive the baptism of the Spirit and the manifestation of the gift of tongues from the phenomena of fire and rushing wind is because prayer, the laying on of hands and tongues always accompany the baptism of the Spirit in the book of Acts. This is simply not the case. In Acts 8 there is no mention of tongues, but there is mention of prayer and the laying on of hands. In Acts 10 there is no mention of

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<sup>12</sup> For a much lengthier discussion of this topic, see Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. Of special note in this regard is their chapter on the book of Acts. Again, it is worth noting that Fee is a Pentecostal scholar, so he has no axe to grind against the gifts or their prevalence today. However, he is interested in finding a proper biblical basis and for using proper terminology to describe our experience.

prayer or the laying on of hands, but there is a mention of tongues, and it is possible that the languages spoken were understood by some of the others present since they somehow knew that they were praising God. In Acts 19 there is mention of the laying on of hands and speaking in tongues (along with prophesying), but there is no mention of prayer. The point is that the great variety evident in Acts does not give us a justification for picking out one or two elements (such as specifically asking for the baptism and speaking in tongues as a sign that it has been received) as being normative for all Christians. The reason this has been done is not because the Scripture teaches this but because this seems to be what we have experienced. However, interpreting the Bible in light of my experience (or lack of experience) is to put the cart before the horse.

The second reason that Acts does not lend support for the traditional charismatic view of the baptism of the Spirit as an experience subsequent to conversion is seen in the purpose of the book of Acts. Luke's intent was not to give a manual on how to experience the deeper life but to show how the church expanded from a small band of Jewish disciples to an international church composed mainly of Gentiles. The basic outline of the book is given in Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Notice the progression from Jerusalem (Jews), to the rest of Judea and Samaria (those with partial Jewish and partial Gentile heritage), to the ends of the earth (Gentiles). This plan is followed throughout the book, which begins in Jerusalem, moves to Judea and Samaria and then throughout the entire world, ending with Rome, the leading city of the known world. In *How to Read the Bible for all its Worth*, written by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, the following note on the structure of the book of Acts is given:

"As you read, notice the brief summary statements in Acts 6:7, 9:31, 12:34, 16:4, 19:20. In each case the narrative seems to pause for a moment before it takes off in a new direction of some kind. On the basis of this clue, Acts can be seen to be composed of six sections, or panels, which give the narrative a continually forward movement from its Jewish setting based in Jerusalem with Peter as its leading figure toward a predominantly Gentile church, with Paul as the leading figure, and with Rome, the capital of the Gentile world, as the goal. Once Paul reaches Rome, where he once again turns to the Gentiles because they will listen (28:28), the narrative comes to an end. You will notice, then, as you read how each section contributes to this 'movement'."<sup>13</sup>

Seen against this background it is easy to see why Luke picks the groups he does to demonstrate the baptism of the Spirit. In Acts 2 the Spirit is given to Jews, in Acts 8 to Samaritans, in Acts 10 to Gentiles living in the vicinity of Judea and in Acts 19 to Gentiles living far from Israel. These are not the only times the Holy Spirit was poured out in a visible way, but each of these marks a further expansion of the Church in a significant way, and so the giving of the Spirit is described to show that this new group was brought into the Church by the same way as the apostles: through the baptism of the Spirit.

Third, the book of Acts does not exhibit a pattern of the baptism of the Spirit occurring after conversion. To show this I will briefly look at all four passages which discuss the baptism of the Spirit, showing why each does not teach that the baptism of the Spirit should be expected to be an experience distinct from conversion.

In Acts 2 the apostles receive the baptism of the Spirit. Many have argued that this teaches the experience as being subsequent to salvation since Jesus gave the Spirit to the apostles in John 20:22. This is faulty reasoning, however, because it does not take into account the

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<sup>13</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, page 90.

transitional time in which Pentecost occurred. The church was moving from the Old Testament time of promises to the New Testament time of fulfillment. The apostles therefore lived in a hinge or transitional period. Of course they were not baptized in the Spirit prior to the day of Pentecost – it was not possible. This could not happen until Jesus had ascended. Therefore, even if they received the Spirit via a two-stage process this does not apply to those who live after the day of Pentecost. Commenting on Pentecost charismatic scholar Wayne Grudem writes:

The day of Pentecost was certainly a remarkable time of transition in the whole history of redemption as recorded in scripture. It was a remarkable day in the history of the world, because on that day the Holy Spirit began to function among God's people with new covenant power. But this fact helps us understand what happened to the disciples at Pentecost. They received this remarkable new empowering from the Holy Spirit *because they were living at the time of the transition between the Old covenant work of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant work of the Holy Spirit*. Though it was a "second experience" of the Holy Spirit, coming as it did long after their conversion, it is not to be taken as a pattern for us, for we are not living at a time of transition in the work of the Holy Spirit. In their case, believers with an old covenant empowering from the Holy Spirit became believers with a new covenant empowering from the Holy Spirit. But we today do not first become believers with a weaker, old covenant work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and wait until some later time to receive a new covenant work of the Holy Spirit. Rather we are in the same position as those who became Christians in the church at Corinth: when we become Christians we are all "baptized in one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13) - just as the Corinthians were, and just as were the new believers in many churches who were converted when Paul traveled on his missionary journeys.

In conclusion, the disciples certainly did experience "a baptism in the Holy Spirit" after conversion on the Day of Pentecost, but this happened because they were living at a unique point in history, and this event in their lives is therefore not a pattern that we are to seek to imitate.

What shall we say about the phrase "baptism in the Holy Spirit"? It is a phrase that New Testament authors use to speak of coming into the new covenant power of the Holy Spirit. It happened at Pentecost for the disciples, but it happened at conversion for the Corinthians and for us. It is not a phrase the New Testament authors would use to speak of any post-conversion experience of empowering by the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

In Acts 8 the Samaritans also receive the Holy Spirit after their conversion. This seems to be evident from the text, where we read that they had believed and been baptized, and yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them. Does this not show that the baptism of the Spirit is not part of conversion but is distinct from and sometimes subsequent to conversion? No. Once again, we must remember that they were living in a transitional period. For the first time the kingdom was being opened to those who were not practicing Jews. Historically there was a massive split between the Jews, who had remained faithful to God's Law (at least externally) and the Samaritans, who had split from Judaism. Therefore, to ensure that the split would not be brought into the church, God made the Samaritans wait to receive the baptism of the Spirit

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<sup>14</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 772.

through the apostles. He wanted no mistake about who His authorized leaders were, and so the Samaritans had to await the arrival of the Jewish apostles to receive the Spirit.

Conversely, this was important so that the apostles would recognize the genuineness of the Samaritans experience. To ensure that the leaders of the church did not think the experience of these new believers was spurious, the Lord had it come through the hands of the apostles themselves. Anyone who was tempted to reject the Samaritans would then be clearly wrong, for God had given them the Spirit through the apostles.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, since we are not living in the unique transitional time in which the Samaritans lived, the unusual secondary nature of their baptism in the Spirit should not serve as an example for what we should expect. Since all Christians today recognize the authority of the apostles Christ appointed, no one today receives the baptism of the Spirit as a secondary experience; it is part of our initial conversion experience. Additionally, since it is widely recognized today that all races are part of the church, we do not need a special reception of the Spirit through the hands of the apostles to indicate that God has accepted us. To use the experience of the Samaritans in Acts 8 to teach otherwise is to do great violence to the intention of the Spirit in the writing of the book of Acts.

In Acts 10 we read of the conversion of Cornelius and his household. Here there is clear evidence that the Spirit fell upon the Gentiles at the moment of their conversion. In fact, the only reason the Jews recognized that God had accepted these Gentiles was because of the clear evidence that they had been baptized in the Spirit. Notice that there was no instruction regarding the baptism of the Spirit, nor was there any fasting, praying or laying on of hands; the Spirit simply came upon the Gentiles as part of their conversion experience. Thus, this text certainly does not teach that the baptism of the Spirit is a secondary experience, since it happened at the moment of their conversion.

As a side note it should be pointed out that the authority of the apostles is again upheld in this sequence, since the angel does not proclaim the Gospel to Cornelius, but instead instructs him to send for Peter. As in Acts 8, there can be no confusion: the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles” (Ephesians 2:20), and therefore the apostles must come before the Gospel can be preached and the baptism of the Spirit given.

It is also important to note that even though in this instance the baptism of the Spirit clearly coincided with the moment of conversion, Peter stresses that this was the same experience as the apostles had on the day of Pentecost. Notice how Peter stresses the commonality of the experience when he recounts the story in Acts 11:15-17: “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” Peter says that the Spirit came on them “as he had come on us at the beginning...God gave them the same gift as He gave us.” This experience, which marked the beginning of the full realization of God’s promises under the new covenant, is what ushers one into the kingdom of God. This is how the New Testament church was birthed, and it is how Cornelius and his household entered the church.

In Acts 19 we read of a group of “disciples” that Paul finds in Ephesus. Paul prays for these men and they receive the Holy Spirit, along with the manifestations of tongues and prophecy. Some have argued that these men were Christians and that we have here another

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<sup>15</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 774, makes this point. It is also the key idea behind the experience in Acts 10, as will be discussed next.

example of the baptism being a secondary experience. However, it is clear that these men were *not* believers in Christ. Instead, they were disciples of John the Baptist, and they had apparently not even heard about Christ or the Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul baptizes them and they receive the Spirit *at their conversion*. It is impossible to believe that Paul would be “re-baptizing” true believers. He is baptizing them because they are just becoming believers after he tells them about Christ. As they come into the kingdom, they are baptized and receive the gift of the Spirit. Thus, this text cannot be used to teach the baptism of the Spirit as a second experience after conversion.

Some, however, have continued to argue that these men were truly believers and that this represents a true second experience after their original conversion. They usually do this for two reasons. First, some say that the word translated “when” in the NIV in Paul’s question “Did you receive the Holy Spirit *when* you believed,” should really be translated as “after.” They base this upon the use of the aorist participle in the Greek, which can at times denote a past event. However, this is invalid. Although the aorist can refer to a past event, often it does not. This argument simply extracts too much information from the aorist participle.

Second, the question itself causes some to think that Paul expects that believers receive the Spirit in an experience distinct from conversion. According to this line of reasoning, why ask if they received the Spirit if all believers receive the Spirit at conversion? However, this is false because the whole reason Paul was asking the question was because he suspected they were *not* believers. Paul is not saying that believers receive the Spirit after conversion; he is questioning these people who thought they were believers as to the reality of their experience. When they reply that they have not even heard of the Spirit (which no true Christian could say), his suspicions are confirmed: these are not believers at all. Therefore, they are baptized and receive the Spirit as all true believers do when they are converted.

Thus, the book of Acts cannot be used to support the idea of the baptism of the Spirit as an experience that occurs after conversion. To attempt to do this is to use improper hermeneutics, to miss the purpose of the book of Acts and to misinterpret the individual passages in Acts.

### **What About Being Filled With the Spirit?**

Does this mean that I no longer believe that we should seek to be filled with the Spirit? Absolutely not! As I stated above in my discussion on Ephesians 5:18, I believe that this is a continual need for believers, and that we should seek to be filled on a daily basis. Additionally, I believe that there will be times when the fillings of the Spirit will be quite dramatic, and may make a lasting impact on the individual believer. This was certainly true when the apostles and other members of the church in Jerusalem were filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:31. Luke records that, “the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” This was certainly a memorable experience for these people, and it had clear manifestations in their life (and even in the room where they were meeting!) The same thing could certainly happen today.

However, it is important to note that the believers who were filled with the Spirit in Acts 4:31 had already been filled with the Spirit in Acts 2. Thus, this filling is NOT a one time experience. Each believer can and should be filled with the Spirit many times throughout their

life. Therefore, any teaching which speaks of being filled with the Spirit as a one time experience is not in accord with the teaching of Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

It is also important to note that Luke does not refer to this experience as the baptism of the Spirit. This is because, by its very nature, baptism in the Spirit is a one time experience. Each believer is baptized in the Spirit at their conversion, but they can (and should!) receive many fillings with the Spirit throughout their lives.

This can help us understand why so many people have been transformed by a secondary experience with the Holy Spirit which they have erroneously called the baptism with the Spirit. What they actually received was not the baptism of the Spirit but a fresh filling with the Spirit, which can be a life transforming experience. Additionally, due to a better understanding of the gifts which often accompanies the seeking of the “baptism,” the person often begins to experience spiritual gifts for the first time. However, this is not because they never had gifts, but because they did not know that they had gifts, or did not know that some gifts, such as tongues and prophecy, were still available today. Thus, armed with a more biblical understanding of the gifts and a desire to draw closer to God, they receive a fresh experience with the Spirit and begin to walk in a new level of the gifts. However, to term this the baptism of the Spirit is biblically inaccurate.

### **What About the Gifts?**

Does this mean that we should not seek the gifts, or that some gifts are not available today? Absolutely not! We are to follow Paul’s command to earnestly desire and seek the gifts, especially prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1). I think that each believer receives gifts with the baptism of the Spirit at conversion (see my notes above.) I also believe that gifts can be given at later times as well. For example, it appears that Timothy received some gifts when the body of elders laid their hands on him to commission him to work with Paul (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). However, when someone asks for a gift, they do not need the baptism of the Spirit; they already have that. What they need is further instruction on the gifts and to simply ask God to impart gifts to them and to show them which gifts He has given them. Often this reception of the gifts will be accompanied by a powerful filling of the Spirit, but this does not have to happen. In any case, what they receive is not the baptism of the Spirit, but a new filling with the Spirit.

### **What About Tongues and Prophecy?**

Does this mean that tongues and prophecy are not important? No! I believe that they are valid gifts for today (as are every other gift mentioned in the Scripture), and that they should be sought eagerly. I also believe that the gift of tongues for private prayer is available to all believers. This seems to be part of the promised outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 2. Although Joel uses the term prophesy, this was fulfilled through the gift of tongues in Acts 2. Thus, I believe that tongues, and also prophecy, are an integral part of the baptism in the Spirit, and are therefore given to all believers. Many do not personally experience either one of these gifts, but this is not due to a lack of being baptized or filled with the Spirit. Rather, it is due to an improper understanding of the gifts. They simply do not know that they have the gift, or they are struggling with doubt regarding this gift. In either case, what is needed is not to experience the

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<sup>16</sup> This is also evident in Ephesians 5:18. See my comments on this verse earlier in the paper.

baptism with the Spirit (which they already have), but to get a better understanding of the Word of God and to actively seek to experience what God has already provided them in Christ.

This does mean that tongues or prophecy (or any other gift or manifestation) are not *the* sign, or even *a* sign, of the baptism of the Spirit or of being Spirit-filled. Indeed, the only sign of the baptism of the Spirit is conversion, and the sign of being Spirit-filled is godly character, not a particular gift. While many people who speak in tongues are obviously Spirit-filled, I have known many who spoke in tongues but whose lifestyle showed they were clearly not filled with the Spirit. Conversely, there are many people who have been baptized with the Spirit and are filled with Spirit who do not speak in tongues. We can encourage them that the gift of tongues is available to them and is a wonderful gift from the Father to us, but we can not make a judgement of their status as being Spirit filled based on whether or not they speak in tongues.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I believe it is important to note that this is not just an issue of semantics. What we believe about this issue will make a big difference in how we minister to others. If in fact the baptism of the Spirit is not given to all believers, then those who have not received this experience are substandard Christians. They can not be properly called Spirit filled, and they will be deficient in some, if not all, of the gifts. It is impossible to hold to a “second blessing” theology and not divide Christians into two groups: the “haves” and the “have nots.” I must add that I myself have been guilty for much of my Christian life of making such a distinction, and of making many Christians feel like second class citizens because “they did not have the baptism.” I believe this has brought great disunity to the body of Christ and thus weakened the church.

On the other hand, if every Christian receives the baptism of the Spirit as part of their conversion, then the key to walking in the fullness of the Spirit is not receiving a second experience, but understanding and appropriating what we have already been given. This removes the distinction between the “haves” and the “have nots.” I am not different than those who do not speak in tongues or prophesy. In fact, they might be more Spirit filled than I am, for the evidence of being Spirit filled is not a particular experience of gift, but being under the control of the Spirit. Thus, my pride in being part of a superior class of Christians is removed.

This also serves to maximize the benefits we receive in Christ under the new covenant. The giving of the fullness of the Spirit is central to the new covenant (see Joel 2:28-32; Ezekiel 36:25-27). In fact, this is one of the key differences between us and the saints who lived under the old covenant. However, if the baptism of the Spirit is really a secondary experience which many, if not most, Christians are lacking, then the difference between the benefits received under the covenants is greatly reduced. This robs Christ of His rightful glory, and diminishes the glory of the new covenant.

Thus, this is more than simple semantics. It requires a new mindset that fully appreciates all that we have been given in Christ. If anyone is in Christ they have been given every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3), including the baptism and gifts of the Spirit. If a believer is not experiencing them, what they need is not another experience which will *really* open up the blessings of Christ to them, but to understand and appropriate all that God has given them in Christ. This is the privilege of every child of God, and I think it is what we should believe and practice as a church.