

SPIRIT BAPTISM: ENTRANCE INTO CHRIST'S BODY

Selected Scriptures - Dennis McBride

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INTRODUCTION:

1. The plight of "Crackers and Cheese Christians"

a. An illustration

"Years ago, a Scotchman arrived in Liverpool where he was to embark for his journey to America. He figured the few shillings that made up his total earthly capital, and decided that he would economize on food during the trip in order to have more money on hand when he reached New York.

He went to a small store and laid in a supply of crackers and cheese to get him through the days at sea. But as the voyage progressed the sea air made him very hungry. To make matters worse the dampness in the air made his crackers soft and his cheese hard. He was almost desperate with hunger.

"To cap the climax he caught the fragrant whiff of food on a tray a steward was carrying to another passenger. The hungry man made up his mind that he would have one good, square meal, even though it might take several of his shillings. He awaited the return of the steward and asked him how much it would cost to go to the dining room and get a dinner. The steward asked the Scotchman if he had a ticket for the steamship passage. The man showed his ticket, and the steward told him that all meals were included in the price of the ticket.

"The poor man could have saved the money he spent on crackers and cheese; he could have gone to the dining room and eaten as much as he liked every meal time" (Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Let Me Illustrate*, p. 185).

b. A common error

Like that Scotchman, when it comes to the "baptism with the Holy Spirit," many Christians are seeking what they already have because their understanding of God's provisions is lacking. Growing up in Pentecostal and Salvation Army circles, I was taught that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is an operation of the Spirit that is distinct from, and additional to, His work of regeneration. Often it is referred to as a second work of grace or higher plain of spirituality to which the most diligent Christians aspire.

Additionally, I was taught that this experience is to be sought and attained by every believer, and that only those who have received the

baptism are fully sanctified and enjoy full power for Christian living and service.

- c. An official Assemblies of God publication explains:

“It is the Spirit working within that brings salvation to the person who comes to God in faith. In addition, all Christians may also be filled with the Spirit in an experience different from and following salvation. Called the ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit,’ it is a special infusion of God’s power to better enable the believer to spread the gospel and to live the full, faithful life God has promised and expects.

“The Scriptures reveal this as the normal experience for Christians in the Bible and teach that every believer should earnestly seek and expect this baptism. The first physical evidence is speaking in an unknown language” (*Assemblies of God: Who We Are and What We Believe*, pp. 20-21).

- d. **R. M. Riggs**, a recognized contemporary Pentecostal writer, lists the conditions on which Spirit Baptism supposedly is received (*The Holy Spirit & His Gifts*, J. Oswald Sanders, p. 65):

- 1) We must first be saved.
- 2) We must obey--that is we must be perfectly surrendered to God.
- 3) We must ask.
- 4) We must believe. It is proper to wait or tarry before the Lord to receive this blessing.

- e. That is a common and popular teaching, but despite its popularity, it is not consistent with Scripture.

2. *The biblical teaching*

Scripture teaches that Spirit baptism is the operation of the Holy Spirit whereby He places each believer into Christ’s Body at the moment of his or her salvation. It is virtually synonymous with salvation. It is entrance into Christ’s Body --a once for all operation of the Holy Spirit that is never to be repeated and not to be sought by Christians.

3. *Baptism vs. filling*

Baptism with the Spirit is often confused with the *filling of the Spirit*, which falls into three main categories in Scripture (see John R. W. Stott’s *Baptism & Fullness* for a detailed explanation):

- a. The normal characteristic of every dedicated Christian (Ephesians 5:18). It means to be controlled by the Spirit. We are commanded to

be filled with the Spirit, but never commanded or instructed to be baptized by or with Him.

- b. An endowment for a particular ministry or office (e.g., John the Baptist, Luke 1:15-17).
- c. An endowment for a particular task or occasion (e.g., Zacharias and Elizabeth, Luke 1:5-8, 41, 67).

4. *Why this study is important*

- a. It is foundational to a proper understanding of the makeup and workings of Christ's Body--to which we've been called, and through which we serve Christ.
- b. "Well-meaning and otherwise sound Christian leaders have caused great confusion, frustration, and disappointment in the lives of many believers by holding out the prospect of a second working of grace--which is called by many names.

"Time and energy that could be used in simply obeying the Lord and relying on what He has already given is spent striving for that which is possessed completely and in abundance. A person cannot enjoy what he has if he is forever seeking a nonexistent second blessing.

"An inadequate doctrine of salvation will always lead to an erroneous doctrine of sanctification. It is an ironic tragedy that those who seek a second blessing of grace cannot enjoy either. They do not enjoy the first blessing, although it is complete, because they are continually seeking the second, which does not exist" (Dr. John MacArthur, *1 Cor.*, pp. 313-14).

- 5. *I realize that excellent and responsible Bible teachers differ on this issue, so it is with humility, yet strong conviction, that I present this study.*

I. THE SOURCE OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

A. THE REFERENCES

- 1. ***Matt. 3:11*** - John the Baptist said, "As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."
- 2. ***Mark 1:8*** - "I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

3. ***Luke 3:16*** - “John answered and said to them all, ‘As for me, I baptize you in water; but He who is mightier than I is coming, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He Himself will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire.’”
4. ***John 1:33*** - “I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’”

B. THE CONCLUSIONS

1. ***Jesus is the Baptizer!***
2. ***Christ is the source of Spirit baptism; the Holy Spirit is its agent.***
3. ***Therefore, it is not “The baptism OF the Holy Spirit.”***
4. ***It can be translated “by,” “in,” or “with,” but never “of.”***

1 Cor. 12:13 - “By [*or, ‘with’*] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.”
5. ***Implication: Our primary focus is to be on Christ, not the Holy Spirit.; we must seek the Giver, not the gift!***

II. THE DEFINITION OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

A. THE KEY VERSE

1 Cor. 12:13 - “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

B. THE EXPLANATION

“[With] one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (*1 Cor. 12:13*).

1. ***Baptizo = “To baptize” = “To dip or immerse”***
2. ***Ancient usage:***

“*Baptizo* was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another.” (*Vine*, p. 97).

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3. *Biblical usage:*

- a. It is used in a literal sense (e.g., John the Baptist literally dipped people into the river).
- b. It is used in a figurative sense (e.g., Referring to His own persecution and death, Jesus asked James and John, “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” [*Matt. 20:22-23* KJV]).
- c. *1 Cor. 12:13* is another example of its figurative usage, referring to Spirit baptism, not water baptism.
- d. In *1 Cor. 12:13*, baptism is virtually synonymous with salvation.

C. **THE CONTRAST**

1. *In Ephesians 4 Paul speaks of one baptism.*

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (*Eph. 4:4-6*).

That passage is used by the Salvation Army and others to support their view that water baptism isn’t necessary for Christians. However, Paul isn’t denying water baptism any more than he is denying that other bodies, spirits, lords, and so-called gods exist. He is emphasizing the uniqueness of the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true God, and Spiritual baptism.

2.. *John the Baptist spoke of Christ bringing two baptisms: Spirit baptism for believers and fire baptism for unbelievers.*

Matt. 3:11 - John the Baptist said, “As for me, I baptize you in water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not even fit to remove His sandals; He Himself will baptize you **WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FIRE.**”

Luke 3:16 - “John answered and said to them all, ‘As for me, I baptize you in water; but He who is mightier than I is coming, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He Himself will baptize you in **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FIRE.**’”

3. ***What did John mean by fire baptism?***

- a. Some holiness preachers teach that John was referring to the Holy Spirit purging and refining sin from within the believer's fallen human nature.

Some familiar hymns and poems reflect that view:

- 1) Martin Luther wrote:

*And each believing soul inspire
With Thine own pure and holy fire.*

- 2) Lawley wrote:

*Send the fire, send the fire,
For this, Lord, we call;
Send the sanctifying fire,
Now baptize us all.*

- 3) William Booth of the Salvation Army wrote:

*Thou Christ of burning, cleansing flame,
Send the Fire!
Thy Blood-bought gift today we claim,
Send the Fire!
Look down and see this waiting host,
Give us the promised Holy Ghost,
We want another Pentecost, Send the fire!*

- b. Others teach that "fire" refers to trials that believers experience.
- c. Still others teach that "fire" refers to judgment upon unbelievers.
- d. Some feel that the passages aren't clear, and could refer to either H. S. fire or judgment.

4. ***I believe that the passages are clear and that John is referring to judgment.***

- a. Note the context of ***Matthew 3:5-12***

"Then Jerusalem was going out to [John the Baptist], and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they

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were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father”; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. And the ax is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

“As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

“And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

- b. The context is judgment (John was speaking to Pharisees who might be insincere in their repentance).
- c. “Fire” is used as judgment in this context (note v. 10).
- d. Fire is used elsewhere in New Testament to speak of Christ’s judgment:

2 Pet. 3:7 - “The present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.”

- e. The picture in **Matt. 3:12** is as follows:

“[At] harvest, grain was cut with the sickle or by pulling it up by the roots. . . . it was then gathered on the arms, bound in sheaves, and laid in heaps to be threshed.

“Threshing floors were placed in the open air, leveled and trampled hard, generally on elevated ground, so that in winnowing the wind might carry away the chaff.

“Threshing was done by oxen driven over the grain to thread out the kernels with their hoofs, by machines made either of planks with stones or bits of iron fastened to the lower surface to make it rough, and rendered heavy by some weight upon it, or small wagons with low cylindrical wheels like saws.

“Winnowing was done with a broad shovel or wooden fork with bent prongs. The mass of chaff, straw, and grain was thrown against the wind so that the chaff might be blown away. This was usually done in the evening, when there was generally a breeze. The chaff and stubble were burned. Finally the grain was sifted and stored” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 29).

5. *Summary:*

- a. Christ comes with *two baptisms*: Spirit & Fire
- b. The wheat = *believers*; the chaff = *non-believers*
- c. Wheat (all wheat) is *saved* from judgment fire; All chaff is *consumed*.
- d. Individuals are either Spirit-baptized wheat or fire-baptized chaff.
- e. All believers are wheat and are therefore Spirit-baptized.

III. THE EXTENT OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

A. EVERY BELIEVER POSSESSES THE HOLY SPIRIT

“You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. . . . For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (*Rom. 8:9, 14*).

B. EVERY BELIEVER IS BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Some teach that while every believer *has* the Spirit, they are not necessarily *baptized or empowered* by the Spirit. But that violates 1 Cor. 12:13, which says that we are all baptized with the Holy Spirit.

IV. THE PREREQUISITE OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

A. SALVATION, NOT SANCTIFICATION

Spirit baptism occurs at the moment of one's salvation, as the Holy Spirit places him into Christ's Body. It is the Spirit's initiatory work, not a subsequent second blessing or second work of grace, as is commonly taught.

B. SALVATION, NOT SEEKING

Scripture doesn't command a believer to wait for, pray for, or in any way seek Spirit Baptism. Those awaiting the Spirit in the Upper Room were tarrying, but that was a unique historical transition. Nowhere are believers today commanded or instructed to do the same.

V. THE PURPOSE OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

A. UNITY WITH CHRIST'S BODY

Spirit Baptism unites believers into Christ's Body.

"[with] one Spirit we were all baptized into [lit., so as to form] one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13).

B. NOTE ALSO EPHESIANS 4:1-6

"Preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . one baptism."

C. JOHN MAC ARTHUR COMMENTS

"Paul's central point in 1 Cor. 12:13 is that baptism with the one Spirit makes the church one Body. If there were more than one Spirit baptism, there would be more than one church, and Paul's whole point here would be destroyed. He is using the doctrine of baptism with the Spirit to show the unity of all believers in the Body. Many erring teachers today have used a wrong interpretation of the baptism with the Spirit to divide off from the Body an imagined spiritual elite who have what the rest do not. That idea violates the whole teaching here" (*MacArthur, 1 Corinthians*, p. 312).

VI. THE ADVENT OF SPIRIT BAPTISM

A. THE PROMISE

Acts 1:5 - Speaking to His disciples, Jesus said, “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Here Jesus tells His disciples that a significant transition awaits them: from His presence to the presence of the Holy Spirit (see also John 14-16).

B. THE PERSPECTIVE

1. *The transitional nature of the Book of Acts and of Spirit baptism in Acts are important to understand.*

- a. Transitional times are important to recognize because God often works within them in unusual ways. In that sense they are abnormal.
- b. For example
 - 1) When you must cross a large body of water, you usually look for a bridge, a ferry, a plane, or some other normal means of travel. You don't wait for the water to part so you can go across on dry land. Yet that's how the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea during a unique transitional time in their history.
 - 2) Hebrews 1:1-2 says that at one time God spoke through the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, but the time came when He spoke directly through Jesus. That was a major transition.

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”
 - 3) Another major transition occurred after the Old Testament closed and there was a period of 400 years in which God gave no new revelation (the 400 “silent years”). Then John the Baptist broke

the silence by announcing the arrival of the Messiah.

- c. Each step of God's unfolding plan of redemption involved transitions of various kinds.
- d. We must not build a doctrine on a transitional event unless the rest of Scripture indicates that the event is normal for the church or for individual believers. Acts is a transitional book and Spirit baptism in the Book of Acts is an event unique to that period of time.

3. *The coming of the Holy Spirit*

- a. Jesus had been with His disciples for about three years, but now He was going to ascend to the Father and would send the Holy Spirit to comfort and empower them. Jesus had never left them before, and the Holy Spirit had never come in that way before.
- b. The Holy Spirit was *with* the disciples throughout their ministry with Christ, but He was not yet *in* them:

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you” (**John 14:16-17**).

Note: Some believe that John 20:22 teaches that Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to His disciples when “He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

However, that is an isolated text that is unclear in its meaning. Other clearly stated passages indicate that the criteria for the coming of the Spirit had not yet been met:

- Jesus had to leave physically - John 16:7
- Jesus had to be glorified - John 7:39
- Jesus was glorified in His ascension, at which time He sent the Spirit and gave gifts to His church - Eph. 4:7-12; Phil. 2:9-11.

I believe that John 20:22 is best understood as a promise from Jesus to His disciples of the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

- c. Jesus leaving and the Spirit coming were aspects of a transition that was utterly unique--both historically and theologically. Therefore, to insist (as Pentecostals and others do) that every believer must experience a “personal Pentecost” as did the disciples in Acts 2:2-4, is to insist that the Holy Spirit must return to earth (from which He hasn’t left) each time someone receives “the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.”

C. THE PROGRESSION

The book of Acts chronicles the historical application of 1 Cor. 12:13 as the Holy Spirit baptizes into the Body of Christ representative people from each of the believing groups in existence at that time.

1. *The disciples and the family of Jesus - Acts 2:1-4*

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”

2. *The devout Jews - Acts 2:5*

“Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men, from every nation under heaven.”

3. *Jewish proselytes (Gentile converts to Judaism) - Acts 2:10*

“Both Jews and proselytes.”

4. *The Samaritans - Acts 8:4-17*

Perhaps apostolic representatives had to be present to verify that the Samaritans had indeed received the Spirit, and to demonstrate to the Samaritans that the Apostles were God’s authoritative representatives.

5. *The Gentiles - Acts Chapter 10*

Note Peter’s report of this incident in Acts 15.

6. *The disciples of John the Baptist - Acts Chapter 19*

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D. THE PROBLEM

1. *Misunderstanding the transitional nature of Acts has led to serious confusion and error over the years.*
2. *Those who maintain that every believer must speak in tongues seem to overlook the fact that even in the Book of Acts there is no record of the 3,000 converts on the Day of Pentecost speaking in tongues, or the Samaritan converts.*
3. *Those who maintain that “the Baptism of the Holy Spirit” comes as a result of the laying on of the Apostle’s hands seem to overlook the fact that even in the Book of Acts there is no record of the 3,000 converts receiving it that way, or the Gentiles in Acts 10.*
4. *Those who maintain that every believer must be water-baptized before receiving the Holy Spirit seem to overlook the fact that such was not the case with Cornelius and his household (Acts 10), who received the Spirit before being water baptized.*
5. *Those who maintain that every believer must “tarry” for the Spirit seem to overlook the fact that such was the case only with the disciples and their Upper Room companions in Acts 1 & 2.*
6. *Those who maintain that believers are to seek after “the Baptism of the Holy Spirit” seem to overlook the fact that even in the Book of Acts there is no record of anyone seeking it (other than Simon in Acts 8, who was strongly rebuked by Peter for his sinful and greedy motives).*
7. *There is no consistent pattern in Acts for receiving “the Baptism of the Holy Spirit”, so we appeal to the Epistles, where we see that all believers are baptized into Christ’s Body at the time of their salvation, and are to be filled continually with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).*
8. *Therefore, Spirit baptism is not an experience for the Christian to seek; it is a fact to be understood and appreciated.*

To trace the historical development of this doctrine through the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, please see the section at the end of this study entitled *A Survey of the History & Distinctives of Pentecostalism*.