

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

“God is not a God of confusion but of peace.”¹ After studying the relevant passages from both the old and new testaments on the subject of the baptism in the Holy Spirit,² I believe knowledge³ of the matter is available. Christians who carefully and diligently employ the analogy of faith as a hermeneutical rule can arrive at a coherent, scripturally faithful position on this subject that, sadly, has divided Jesus Christ’s church for many years. My view of the baptism in the Holy Spirit corresponds to that of Reformed scholars such as Walter Kaiser, Gregg Allison, Wayne Grudem, and Sinclair Ferguson. Succinctly stated, it is “the activity of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the Christian life when he [the Holy Spirit] gives us new spiritual life (in regeneration) and cleanses us and gives a clear break with the power and love of sin (the initial stage of sanctification).”⁴

The Lord Jesus Christ’s sending of the Holy Spirit during the Pentecost festival immediately following His ascension to the right hand of God is for Christians today a lot like

¹1 Corinthians 14:33, ESV. It is understandable that this verse is in the midst of a pericope on spiritual gifts!

²I draw no semantic distinctions between “baptism with the Holy Spirit” and “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

³“Knowledge” here defined as justified, true, belief. I reject the notion that Scripture is simply unclear on the topic, therefore, no one can *know* the truth about it.

⁴Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 768.

the Greek perfect tense verb. Pentecost⁵ occurred in the past, but its effects are ongoing and experienced in the present. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ Himself prophesied the event.⁶ As expected by those who trust in the infallibility of God's prophets, the prophecy was fulfilled. The historic event in God's predetermined plan of redemption has taken place. "By its [Pentecost's] very nature it shares in the decisive once-for-all character of the entire Christ-event (Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension)."⁷ Scripture, as a whole, views Pentecost as an "epochal, programmatic rather than paradigmatic"⁸ work of the Father and the Son, not a continuing, normative, existential experience. Pentecost, like Jesus' death, is a unique, non-repeatable occurrence which perfectly accomplished that for which it was intended. Specifically, the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31) was inaugurated and the Christian church was born. The indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit now defines (rather than occasionally describes in the case of the Old Testament saints) a person who savingly knows Yahweh. "Anyone who does not have [or possess—*έχει*] the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."⁹

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "For *in one Spirit* [emphasis mine] we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."¹⁰

⁵Pentecost, though an annual Jewish festival, for the purposes of this paper is a metonymy for the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples of Jesus Christ, occurring approximately fifty days after His resurrection and a few days after His ascension.

⁶Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Joel 2:28-32; Luke 3:15-17; John 14:16-18, 16:5-15, Acts 1:4-8

⁷Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 82.

⁸Ibid., 81.

⁹Romans 8:9b, ESV

¹⁰1 Corinthians 12:13, ESV

The previous verse defines “body” here to be Christ’s body—the church.¹¹ Baptism in the Spirit is the means¹² by which a person is made (passive voice) a member of Christ’s body. Thus, it seems that baptism in the Spirit must be coincident with becoming a Christian since no person can be a Christian unless he or she is a member of Christ’s body. Pentecostal and charismatic scholars such as J. Rodman Williams disagree with this interpretation. They must do so in order to maintain their belief that baptism in the Holy Spirit is an activity in the life of post-Pentecost Christians that is *subsequent* to regeneration. Though every other passage¹³ in the New Testament which contains someone being baptized in or with the Holy Spirit renders the Holy Spirit as the element (not the agent) of the baptism, Williams and others of his theological persuasion choose to translate the phrase of interest in 1 Corinthians 12:13—ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες . . . ἐβαπτίσθημεν—as “*by* one Spirit we were all baptized.” Translating the preposition “ἐν” as “*by*” and thereby making the Spirit the one who is baptizing has no textual attestation anywhere in the Bible. Grudem writes, “If we translate this same Greek expression “baptize *in* the Holy Spirit” (or “baptize *with* the Holy Spirit”) in the other six New Testament occurrences where we find it, then it seems only proper that we translate it in the same way in this seventh occurrence.”¹⁴

¹¹ See also Colossians 1:24.

¹² Noted Greek grammarian Daniel Wallace believes the preposition “in” of 1 Corinthians 12:13a “is an illustration of *ἐν* used for *means*. . . . the Holy Spirit is the instrument that Christ uses to baptize. . . . Furthermore, if the Holy Spirit is the agent [baptizer] in this text, there is a theological problem: When is the prophecy of Mark 1:8 fulfilled? When would *Christ* baptize with the Holy Spirit?” Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 168.

¹³ Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5, 11:16

¹⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 767.

Heretofore, I have only examined so-called didactic texts concerning baptism in the Holy Spirit. The dichotomy between historical-narrative based doctrine and exposition based doctrine, however, is not really necessary or helpful to raise in the matter at hand. Would God superintend the writing of a potentially-confusing historical record (Acts), especially one that includes an event which heavily impinges on the history of redemption, and then fail to interpret it for us?

How then do I “harmonize” my view of baptism in the Holy Spirit with Luke’s record of the Spirit-baptism in Acts? At first glance the Pentecostal and charismatic understanding of Spirit baptism seems to accord more naturally with the accounts in Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, and 19. Therein lies the problem—*prima facie* theology! Full, sound explanations are available when one reads these passages from a salvation-historical vantage point while also critically considering key textual indicators.

Virtually every exegete believes the disciples of Jesus Christ were believers before the Spirit fell on them at Pentecost. Jesus’ first disciples did indeed experience baptism in the Spirit some time *after* they were born again. Williams though maintains “that in *all the Acts accounts* [emphasis mine] of the gift of the Spirit being received there is the prior activity of the Holy Spirit in repentance and faith.”¹⁵ This is mere conjecture for it is based on an unfounded supposition which he has not proved and cannot prove. The “disciples” of Acts 19:1-7 were not disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. They only knew the baptism of John (the Baptist). Thus we may conclude they only knew of that which John spoke—a *coming* Messiah—not that He came,

¹⁵J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Christian Living*, vol. 2 of *Renewal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 206.

ascended, or had given the Holy Spirit to the church.¹⁶ The disciples of John became disciples of Jesus when Paul preached to them (v. 5). Moreover, no time gap is given between their baptism (v. 5) and the Holy Spirit coming on them (v. 6).

Likewise, we do not read of a time interval between the apostle Peter's gospel preaching in Acts 10:34-43, the Gentiles' exercise of faith for the forgiveness of sins (vv. 43b-44), their reception of the Holy Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues (vv. 45-46), and their water baptism (vv. 47-48). Regarding the eschatological nature of the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in Acts 1:8, the effective witness of the apostles in Caesarea should be noted.¹⁷ They were effective because Jesus was pouring out the Spirit on all flesh.

When Scripture is interpreted by Scripture, even the apostle Paul's conversion and baptism in the Holy Spirit are seen as concurrent. Jesus' blinding of Paul as he traveled to Damascus can hardly be considered a conversion experience. Jesus told him very little on the road,¹⁸ certainly less than the gospel necessities. Ananias even had to explain to Paul what happened and why. Together, Acts 9:17-18 and Acts 20:16 teach the simultaneity of Saul's conversion, baptism and outward profession of faith, and filling with the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostals always appeal to Acts 8:14-17 as a prooftext for their second-blessing theology. They believe the delayed reception of the Holy Spirit by the Samaritans is typical for all Christians after Pentecost. Two alternative interpretations, which may both be true, have

¹⁶This interpretation is strengthened by the presence of the preceding verses—Acts 18:24-26—where we learn of Apollos' errors concerning the Truth.

¹⁷“The coverage given to this event in Acts (sixty-six verses) indicates its decisive programmatic importance for Luke. It is more than merely a ‘narrative of surprising conversions’, a paradigm for every age. Rather, it is a specific and strategic development in the entire mission programme of Acts 1:8.” Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 83.

¹⁸Acts 9:4-6 and 20:7-10

been offered. Firstly, Don Carson believes “the gift of the Holy Spirit is withheld to draw the connection between the Samaritans and the Jerusalem church through the apostles, Peter and John.”¹⁹ The Jews despised the Samaritans. Due to this animosity, “the Samaritans may well have wished to preserve an autonomy that would have divided the church from its inception.”²⁰ This, however, “became principally impossible once their reception of the Holy Spirit was so publicly dependent on the Jerusalem apostles.”²¹ Secondly, Gregg Allison asks the incisive question, “If this verse [v. 15] describes the ‘normal’ reality of experiencing the Holy Spirit, there would be no need for an explanation [see v. 16]; but Luke—writing for those whose experience was that of receiving the Holy Spirit at conversion—needed to explain why prayer for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit was necessary.”²²

Williams also fails to realize the disciples’ “experience of the Spirit was progressive in character. . . . they, uniquely, span the period of transition from old to new covenant faith. Their experience is epoch-crossing, and consequently atypical and non-paradigmatic in nature.”²³ Allison is correct in saying “the experience of the disciples was something other than New Covenant salvation.”²⁴

¹⁹Don Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 145.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Gregg Allison, “Discussion of the Baptism With/In the Holy Spirit: Interaction with Stott, Grudem and Williams” (classroom lecture notes, 27080—*Systematic Theology 3*, Fall 2005), 6.

²³Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 80.

²⁴Allison, “Discussion of the Baptism With/In the Holy Spirit: Interaction with Stott, Grudem and Williams,” 6.

My walk with the Lord has included at least one “large step of growth.” While living in a small town in Oklahoma in 1998, I learned from God’s word about the true nature of saving grace. This new knowledge revolutionized much of my life.

I know Christians who claim to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit after conversion. The diachronic results of their supposed baptism look no different, however, than those of Christians whom I know who believe they received the baptism in the Spirit at conversion. Regardless, Paul commands all Christians to “be filled [ongoing aspect, imperative mood] with the Spirit.”²⁵ Christians may obey this injunction by cultivating the God-given means of grace: sincere prayer, regular Bible study and meditation, corporate worship, fasting, abstinence from sin, evangelism, fellowship with other Christians.²⁶

I need to ask God for more growth in the area of evangelism and service to my brothers and sisters of the church that I recently began attending. To facilitate this growth, I plan to pray more earnestly and frequently for the filling of His Spirit. I hope to abstain from sins that have periodically plagued me since I became a Christian. By not quenching the “Spirit of holiness”²⁷ through sin, He should be pleased to manifest Himself more abundantly in my life.

²⁵Ephesians 5:18c, NASV

²⁶This is not a complete list.

²⁷Romans 1:4b, NASV