

Doctrine of Baptisms

by Sam Bowman

Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

And God permitting, we will do so. Hebrews 6:1-3

In recent years there has been much misunderstanding about what the baptism with the Holy Spirit really means. My goal in the following teaching is to clearly define this work of God by using the Holy Scriptures.

To begin with, baptism is one of the elementary teachings of the New Testament (NT) mentioned in Hebrews 6:2. Baptism is simply another word for washing or immersion. There are five baptisms mentioned in the NT:

1. The baptism of repentance performed by John the Baptist (Mark 1:4; Acts 18:25; 19:3)
2. A baptism of suffering (Mark 10:38-39; I Corinthians 15:29-31)
3. Baptism into the body of Christ
4. Baptism with water
5. Baptism with the Holy Spirit

The first two baptisms in the list above are given less space in the NT. They are both important but not the focus of this teaching. I will focus this teaching on the last three baptisms in the list, but my emphasis will be on the Baptism with the Holy Spirit because of the confusion surrounding it.

1. Baptism into the Body of Christ (Regeneration)

This is the first baptism experienced by a believer and is, by far, the most important baptism for any person to experience. Without it the baptism with the Holy Spirit is impossible, and the baptism with water is meaningless. This baptism is mentioned by name in I Corinthians 12:13 and referred to in Ephesians 4:4-5. In these passages Paul is emphasizing that neither ethnicity nor race is a factor or prerequisite to entering into the body of Christ. Most of us call this baptism being "born again," or becoming a "new creature in Christ" or being "regenerated," three common descriptions which refer to the same experience of accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Romans 10:9). Most of us don't think of it as a baptism, but it is because it includes being immersed in the body of Christ.

When we welcome the Lord Jesus Christ, we are adopted into God's eternal blood-washed family. Our relationship with the Father is restored and fellowship with Him becomes possible without interference from unforgiven sin. The debt caused by sin is canceled and no longer has the right to keep us from attaching to the Father (Colossians 2:14).

This is the second birth that Christ refers to in John 3:5. We are born of the Spirit, birthed into God's family. From this point on, I'll refer to our experience of being born of the Spirit (our salvation experience) as our time of regeneration.

Regeneration is definitely a work of the Holy Spirit, and those who have experienced it know intuitively in their human spirits that God is in them through the presence of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11, 16). Jesus said, "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6b). This suggests that the act of salvation directly affects the human spirit.

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It appears that before salvation our human spirit was separated or out of touch with the Holy Spirit. Simply put, the light of our spirit was darkened by sin (Proverbs 20:27). When we make Jesus our Lord our spirit is regenerated, the light turned on as sin is removed. (See washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit in Titus 3:4-6).

Comparing an Old Testament (OT) picture with one in the NT gives us a way to visualize this. Genesis 2:7 says God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being. Living being is also translated soul. In other words God breathed his life or spirit into man. Another OT mention of this life-giving spirit is in Ecclesiastes 12:7. Later in Genesis 3, we read that man sinned and lost close fellowship with God. Man lost the spiritual intimacy he had with God when sin entered the world. We can gain an understanding of man's degenerate condition by reading Ephesians 2:1-10 where mankind's degeneration is described. How God restores our spiritual fellowship to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, is also explained in that scripture passage. Jesus died and rose again so that we might have new life. In fact the Bible states that His resurrection is what gives us new life (I Peter 1:3). The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead regenerates us (Romans 8:11). Remember God breathing his life into man in the beginning? We see it again in the NT. Jesus breathed on His disciples on the night of His resurrection and said "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). This was their regeneration. I believe regeneration takes place when we make Jesus Lord (Romans 10:9-10). At that point in time our human spirit is restored to intimacy with God by the Holy Spirit.

Volumes more can be written about the believer's intimacy with God and how it all begins with regeneration. Our new life in Christ is truly the focus of the NT. But for now I'll move on to believer's baptism, another essential baptism.

2. Water Baptism

For the believer in Jesus Christ, the decision to be water baptized is a very important one. My scriptural understanding of NT water baptism has led me to the conclusion that it is a personal act of sanctification. My public immersion in water is a visual statement that I want to die to my old way of living and be raised to newness of life in Christ.

Water baptism is given to a believer by another believer. Even though outwardly it may appear to be a mere physical and symbolic act, for the sincere believer the spiritual meaning of water baptism is sacred and awesome. The regenerated believer is publicly proclaiming that he has made the decision to follow Jesus at all costs. He is openly agreeing that his old way of life is dead and buried in Christ. He is separating himself from the life of sin and the ways of the world. Henceforth, the person is following Jesus in the resurrected life given so freely and graciously (Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 2:11-12; I Peter 3:21).

3. Baptism with the Holy Spirit

Even though I believe that regeneration (the baptism into the body of Christ) is the most important baptism, vital because it is our salvation experience, my emphasis in this teaching is on the baptism with the Holy Spirit. This is because I believe that it is the least understood of these three baptisms.

A. Types and Shadows

The term "Type and Shadow" is found in Colossians 2:17 and in Hebrews 8:5. A type and shadow is an OT person, object or event that foreshadows a person, object or event in the NT. The person, object or event in the NT is the fulfillment of the OT picture. For example, Moses delivering Israel from Egypt foreshadows Jesus delivering us from bondage to this world system. The serpent lifted up on the standard foreshadows Jesus being lifted

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up on the cross (Numbers 21:8 with John 3:14).

Two of the three primary Jewish feasts, Passover and Pentecost, function as types and shadows for the regeneration baptism and for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Although they are both important, even a quick study of the OT shows that there is more volume of scripture devoted to Passover than to Pentecost.

1. Passover is a commemorative feast in remembrance of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt. The Passover lamb is sacrificed at that time. The lamb is a good example of a simple type and shadow. It represents (foreshadows) the sacrifice of Christ. The blood applied to the door caused the angel of death to "pass over" that household. This foreshadows the blood of Jesus which saves us from death.

2. Pentecost is the feast of the first fruits, also called the feast of weeks (Exodus 23:16). It is a feast associated with the wheat harvest.

Considering what these two feasts foreshadow in the NT — Passover, symbolically acting out Jesus' sacrificial death and purchase of our eternal salvation, and Pentecost, representing a season of Christian harvest and fruitfulness — it becomes clear that the Passover feast is the greater feast. Nevertheless, God ordained both of them, two distinctly different feasts that foreshadow two separate experiences: Jesus as Savior first, then Jesus as Baptizer with the Holy Spirit.

So what does regeneration (salvation) include? At the very least our salvation experience includes the following:

- 1) Believing in my heart Jesus is risen and confessing with my mouth His Lordship (Romans 10:9-10),
- 2) Receiving the gift of eternal life (John 3:16, 5:24; Romans 6:23; I John 5:12),
- 3) Being born of the Spirit, also described as being born from above (Romans 8:9,11,16; John 1:12-13).

According to the scriptures, Jesus' disciples fulfilled all these requirements *before* the day of Pentecost. A curious note is that Jesus told His disciples as far back as Luke 10:20 that their names were written in heaven, so I do not believe that they were waiting for salvation on the day of Pentecost. As a matter of fact, *fifty* days before Pentecost they received the Holy Spirit when Jesus, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit," breathed on them (John 20:22). He gave them the Holy Spirit on the night of His resurrection. At that same time, Jesus gave them the ministry of reconciliation (John 20:23 with II Corinthians 5:18-20).

Fifty days later (Pentecost), these regenerated people were waiting, as instructed by the Lord Jesus, to receive the power to minister reconciliation to the world (Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:4, 8). They were waiting for the **promise** of the Father which would come **upon** them. Note that the word **promise** is in each of these verses and note the word **upon**. These are key words when studying this subject as is the word **gift**, which I will get back to. When Jesus gave His disciples the ministry of reconciliation He promised that His disciples would be witnesses, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins, but first they were to be clothed (equipped for the task) with power from on high. That power would be the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus was born the Holy Spirit would come upon people. When that happened, they would be filled and prophesy or do other marvelous things. An example in the NT is when Elizabeth and Zachariah, the parents of John the Baptist, prophesied (Luke 1:41, 67). In the OT we have numerous examples of the Holy Spirit coming upon people for a time and for a certain purpose. Samson, Elijah and even King Saul experienced this manifestation of

the Holy Spirit's presence upon them. But the promise Jesus spoke of is different from what had been manifested previously. This experience would be a unique outpouring. Those who received this baptism would speak with new tongues.

Jesus instructed His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for an outpouring of power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). Remember that He had already given His disciples the Holy Spirit in John 20:22. So the promise of fulfillment spoken of in Acts 2:16 is not the same experience with the Holy Spirit. The word "filled" found in Acts 2:4 may be translated from the Greek as equipped or supplied. The Promise of the Father was fulfilled on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the believers for the purpose of supplying and equipping them with supernatural power to finish Christ's ministry.

As a Bible-believing Christian, I feel it is important to examine how the believers of that day experienced this baptism with the Holy Spirit. What did their experience look like?

First, they heard a mighty rushing wind.

Second, tongues of fire rested on them

Third, they spoke in languages they had never learned.

John the Baptist said that the Lord Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). Because tongues of fire rested on the believers, I believe this event in Acts 2:4 is the fulfillment of what John the Baptist spoke of. This example along with those found in Acts 10:45-46 and Acts 19:6 are prototypes of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came **upon** the believers and, as a result, they spoke in tongues. If you and I as believers have this same experience then we can know for certain that we have experienced a true baptism with the Holy Spirit just as did our brothers and sisters in the early church.

All three baptisms: regeneration, water baptism, and baptism with the Holy Spirit are mentioned together in Acts 2:38. In this verse, Peter calls the baptism with the Holy Spirit the **gift** of the Holy Spirit. Verse 39 promises this **gift** to all future generations of Christians. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers is described as a **gift** in Acts 10:45 and in Acts 11:17. Mark 16:17 and Luke 11:13 foretell the giving of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Tongues

Now let's look at tongues. According to Acts 2:4, all 120 believers, men and women, spoke in tongues. Again when the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured upon the believers in Acts 10:44-46 and in Acts 19:6, they all spoke in tongues. There is often a question about the believers in Samaria not speaking in tongues when they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-19). Please consider this: if Simon the sorcerer was so impressed by what happened as Peter and John prayed for people that he wished to buy this ability, what was he seeing? A man renowned for his magic must have seen something never seen before.

Speaking in tongues is a powerful supernatural gift. But before I explain the purpose of speaking in tongues for the individual believer, allow me to give a short explanation about tongues. I have concluded from my studies, and from my Christian experience, that there are private tongues and there are public tongues.

... There are private tongues and public tongues ...

1. Private Tongues

Up to this point I have been talking about private tongues. Private tongues is a prayer language that a believer is given when he is baptized with the Holy Spirit. The believer chooses to speak his prayer language. He is praying to edify (strengthen) his own

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personal spirit.

2. Public Tongues

Public tongues is one of the nine supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit mentioned in I Corinthians 12:7-10. Notice that the tongues in verse 10 are labeled "various kinds" or "diverse tongues." When a believer speaks in this tongue she is not praying but prophesying and this tongue deserves an interpretation. How to use public tongues correctly is the main focus of Paul's writing in I Corinthians 14. Please understand that public tongues and the other eight manifestations of the Holy Spirit listed in the chapter 12 are all found in the OT. Even tongues and interpretation are embodied in the incident of the handwriting on the wall found in Daniel 5. All of these manifestations, including various kinds of tongues, are given by the Spirit's volition to the believer He chooses to use at the time.

So what's the difference? Public tongues is prophecy inspired by the Holy Spirit for the edification, exhortation and consolation of the believer(s), and requires interpretation by the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:3). The Holy Spirit chooses the believer(s) he will use to deliver the message. Any believer who is willing to cooperate with the Holy Spirit is eligible to be used in this way.

Private tongues is not prophecy; it is prayer. The believer makes the decision to speak his prayer language to God.

The Advantages of Private Tongues

Because the purpose of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is power: the power to be Christ's witness, using the tongue given to me as a prayer language helps me get that power and keep that power.

1. A God Connection

Accepting the supernatural syllables and words by faith and speaking them out puts me in direct contact with God (I Corinthians 14:2).

2. Strengthens my Spirit

Praying in the Spirit builds up my spirit. (I Corinthians 14:4b; Jude 20)

3. Helps Me Pray Effectively for Others

According to Romans 8:26-27 and Ephesians 6:18-19, I need help praying. I can pray the will of God for myself and others when I pray using my private prayer language. In I Corinthians 14:18, Paul informs us how much he values his private prayer language. In fact he encourages the Ephesians to pray at all times in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Jude the apostle also spoke in tongues. So I believe this is what they meant when they wrote the phrase "praying in the Spirit."

Praying in the Spirit has been a great blessing in my life. I never wish to minimize its importance to me. If anyone admires my walk with the Lord, I would have to say that much of my growth is because I pray regularly in the Spirit. The Spirit often "clues me in" when I'm unsure and afraid. Romans 8:26-27 doesn't mention the use of tongues. But I think Paul, who did pray in tongues, assumed the Christian reader of his time would know what he was referring to. Verse 28 which follows is the result of praying in the Spirit. I am a witness to this. Praying in the Spirit has enabled me to walk and live in the Spirit.

As a final word I pray that you will not allow the evil one with his tricks and lies to rob you of the "gift" of the Holy Spirit. Please ask the Lord and be persistent as you seek (Luke

11:8-10). I pray that you will enter this experience and benefit from it by praying often in the Spirit.

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