

Chapter IV: Holy Spirit Baptism

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Chapter IV: Holy Spirit Baptism

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Mt 3:11)

There are not three "steps" to becoming a Christian, only one: repentance with faith. However, the Bible speaks of both water baptism and Spirit baptism as natural and necessary experiences after conversion. With Spirit baptism, therefore, a certain "process" of conversion is completed.

It will be difficult to understand and desire this event in our life if we do not first have some knowledge of who the Holy Spirit is and what He does. So, we need to begin by "introducing" the Holy Spirit.

A. Who Is The Holy Spirit?

A.1. His Person

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune Godhead, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. For many centuries He was the "forgotten" person of the Trinity; in our own He has been restored to His rightful place in Christian thought and experience.

The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force or merely the power of God operative in the world (this is a common misconception) but a person: the Bible speaks of "Him" and "His," not "it" and "its" and the Bible also shows Him possessing the characteristics of a person (intelligence and thought, speech and language as well as feelings and emotions) and performing the actions of a person (for example, leading, guiding, working, giving, fellowshiping, convicting, teaching, comforting, counselling and praying).

The Holy Spirit is also not somehow less than God (another common misconception) but fully God: He is explicitly and implicitly called God in Scripture; He possesses the attributes of God (for example, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience and immortality) and He performs or shares in the works of God (for example, creation, revelation, conviction, regeneration, sanctification and resurrection).

So the Holy Spirit is both a personal and a divine being. Because He is a person we either have the Holy Spirit or not (we cannot have half a person), and therefore we do not ask "How much of the Holy Spirit do I have?" but rather "How much does the Holy Spirit have of me?" Because He is divine the Holy Spirit works in and through us on His terms and not ours: He is sovereign and so He cannot be manipulated and He is a person to whom we cannot dictate; He is holy and so will not fill an unclean vessel.

Other insights into the person of the Holy Spirit may be gained from the many names by which He is called in Scripture and from the symbols used for Him (fire, wind, water, oil and the dove).

A.2. His Work

As part of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit is involved in all the works of God. He played a special role in creation, revelation, God's dealings with Israel and the incarnation of Christ. He is involved in the church: He indwells it, unifies it, gives gifts to its members for the edifying of the body, ordains and equips its leaders and stirs it to mission. He will be closely involved in the events of the end-time and in the age to come.

Perhaps the most notable work of the Holy Spirit in this age, however, is His involvement in the life of the individual believer. Even before conversion it is the Spirit that convicts a man and draws him to Christ (Jn 6:44, Jn 16:8-11). At the moment of conversion, it is the Spirit that regenerates a person's spirit and causes him to be born again (Jn 3:5-8, Tit 3:5). From that moment on, therefore, every believer is indwelt by the Spirit (Ro 8:9) and thereby also sealed by Him: the indwelling is like a deposit guaranteeing the full payment (of salvation) at Christ's return (Eph 1:13-14, Eph 4:30, 2Co 1:22).

After conversion, for the rest of the person's life, the Spirit walks with the believer, assuring, sanctifying, fellowshiping with, leading, guiding, teaching, inspiring and giving gifts to him. We could say that the Holy Spirit bears primary responsibility for the individual believer, carrying and transforming him from convicted sinner to presented saint.

This is precisely the introduction to the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave us (Jn 14:16-18). He is our comforter/ counsellor/ advocate (there is no precise English translation for the Greek "parakletos," one who walks alongside us, advising us of every step of the way). And He is not just similar to (in Greek, "heteros") Jesus but "another" exactly like (in Greek, "allos") Jesus. Thus, just as to know Jesus is to know the Father (Jn 14:7-9), so to know the Spirit is to know Jesus (and vice versa).

Now that we know who the Holy Spirit is and what He desires to do in and through us, we will be more able to understand, desire and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

B. What Is Baptism In The Holy Spirit?

We have already seen that every believer is necessarily indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of regeneration/rebirth. But the testimony of both Scripture and millions of believers is that there is an experience of receiving the Holy Spirit after conversion and beyond indwelling.

Jesus, the perfect God-man, was surely indwelt by the Holy Spirit from birth, yet He needed to be anointed by the Spirit (to receive Him in a fuller and different way) before He began His public ministry (Mt 3:16). The disciples seemed to receive the Holy Spirit before Jesus ascended (Jn 20:22) and yet had to wait in Jerusalem for a subsequent powerful infilling of the Holy Spirit before embarking on their public ministry (Lk 24:49, Ac 1:4-5, Ac 1:8, Ac 2:1-4).

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The Samaritans believed (that is, were converted) when Philip preached to them and were therefore, from that moment, indwelt by the Spirit (Ac 8:12). Yet Peter and John still found it necessary to pray for them to "receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them" with this subsequent infilling and empowering (Ac 8:14-17).

Paul (Ac 9:17) and possibly Apollos (Ac 18:24-26) and the Ephesian disciples (Ac 19:1-6) also experienced a filling after conversion.

There is then, beyond the indwelling of the Spirit in every believer consequent to being regenerated, a definite and tangible occasion in which the Holy Spirit comes upon us and fills us, anointing, empowering and equipping us both for life (to be able to live the life God wants us to live) and ministry (to be able to do the things he wants us to do). John predicted that Jesus would baptise with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11, Jn 1:33) and Jesus dearly identified this subsequent powerful anointing as the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:5). "Baptism" (which means "immersion") is here used figuratively: in water baptism we are literally immersed in water while in Spirit baptism the experience is often so overwhelming and transforming that it is as if we are being immersed in the Holy Spirit.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit brings a totally new dimension of God's presence, person, and power into our lives. We cannot fulfil the life or ministry God intends for us without it. It is nonsensical therefore, not to desire it (quite apart from the instruction to us from Jesus and Scripture to seek it). We can receive this baptism as soon after conversion as possible (see Ac 10:44): we do not first have to "graduate" as Christians.

C. How Do I Receive This Baptism?

While being baptised in the Holy Spirit is a profoundly supernatural experience, we should not make it something mystical or spooky. Here are some simple requirements (steps) to help us receive.

C.1. Convert

We must be born again believers. The Holy Spirit will obviously not empower and fill someone in this way whose life is not already given over to God.

C.2. Believe

We must honour and seek the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. We must believe in the baptism in the Holy Spirit and also in our need of it.

C.3. Cleanse

The Spirit, who is holy, cannot and will not fill an unclean vessel. We must repent of all sin in our lives (truly intending to turn from it) and renounce any evil activity (for example, occult involvement) that might hinder or quench His coming.

C.4. Surrender

To be full of the Spirit is really to be controlled by the Spirit. If we want to be completely filled we must surrender every part of our lives to God.

C.5. Thirst

See Jn 7:37-39.

C6. Ask

See Mt 7:7 and Lk 11:11-13.

C7. Relax And Receive

Apart from these general helps, there is no prescribed way in which to seek/receive this baptism.

D. Who Baptises, When, And What Happens?

People can be baptised when they are on their own, or when they are in a small group receiving ministry, or when they are simply part of a congregation in which the Spirit is moving. It can be helpful to have people encouraging, guiding, and praying for us but this is by no means obligatory. Ministers may exercise the laying on of hands (this is a scriptural pattern for imparting the Spirit) but again this is not a prerequisite. Any Christians can minister the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Ac 9:10, Ac 9:17) if they are sincere (Ac 8:21). They need not be leaders. But those ministering are always merely a channel: Jesus is the One who baptises, He asks the Father for the Holy Spirit and pours Him out on us.

There is a similar infinite variety in the way the Spirit comes on people and in the way, people respond/ manifest (Acts 3:8). He comes as a mighty wind but also as a gentle breeze, as a powerful wave but also as gentle dew. That there is often a marked spiritual, emotional, mental, or even physical impact when the Spirit comes upon us should not surprise us: our finite being is being encountered and filled by the infinite God! But the response differs from person to person: some laugh, others cry; some are quiet, others are boisterous; some testify particularly to joy, others to peace, love, or freedom. But in some way, we will know that we have been touched by God. Thus, while we can believe in faith that God has heard and answered our request to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and should not get into a crisis when "nothing happens" immediately, we always encourage people to persevere in their thirsting and asking till there is a definite breakthrough. When the Holy Spirit fills us it's unmistakable!

E. What About Speaking In Tongues?

Various spiritual gifts may be given to the believer when he is baptised in the Holy Spirit and normally these are only discovered later. However, people often begin to speak in tongues (one of the many gifts of the Spirit) at the time of being baptised (Ac 2:4, Ac 10:44-46, Ac 19:6).

Something thus needs to be said about this gift in any study of Spirit baptism.

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All spiritual gifts, while exercised by the individual, are given for the strengthening of the body. Tongues are a part- exception: while it has public use and benefit, there is also a private use and benefit. It is impossible to exaggerate the blessing of this "private" speaking in tongues. It edifies the believer (I Co 14:2, 1 Co 14:4) and greatly heightens both his worship (Jn 4:24) and his intercession (Ro 8:26).

Scripture does not record (as some have alleged) that people spoke in tongues on every occasion that they were baptised in the Spirit. We thus cannot insist (as some have done) that people must speak in tongues to be baptised in the Spirit or, conversely, that they have not been baptised in the Spirit unless they speak in tongues. Scripture clearly states that not every Christian must or will speak in tongues. But we believe that every Christian can speak in tongues (in this way tongues is another exception amongst the gifts) and for the following reasons:

- Other gifts edify the Church and so not every believer has to have them to benefit from them. The private use of tongues edifies the individual and so every individual needs to have it to benefit from it. (We don't think God would want this benefit for some believers and not others.)
- Paul wished that all would speak in tongues (1Co 14:5): he would not have said this if it were not possible.
- We have never known anyone who sought this gift and did not receive it.

If it is true that every Christian can speak in tongues, and if the blessing to be gained from this gift is as we have described, then, as with the baptism itself, it would just be nonsensical not to seek and receive this gift. Our attitude should not be "Do I really have to speak in tongues?" but "If God's got something for me, I want it!"

So, ask God for this gift as you ask him to baptise you in the Holy Spirit. God won't force this speech through your closed and immobile mouth! Speaking in tongues is a partnership of co-operation between the Spirit and the believer: you speak in tongues as the Spirit enables you (Ac 2:4). So, yield your speech abilities to God. Begin to pray to Him in your home language and a decision of faith to stop speaking your language at a certain point and to launch out with the new words that the Spirit gives you. Some are released into fluent tongues quickly while others stumble at first and must persevere. In all cases we must work at it, and we grow in the gift as time goes on. But we have started a lifetime of blessing.

E.1. How Do I Remain Full Of The Spirit?

Being baptised in the Holy Spirit is only the beginning of the Spirit-filled life. The Greek tense of Paul's instruction to "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Eph 5:18) is "keep on being filled." This shows that being filled with the Spirit is an ongoing, indeed lifelong, pursuit.

We need constantly to be "refilled" because, as one wise- guy cracked, "We leak!" This happens "positively" when we minister we impart (give out) some of the Spirit (Lk 8:46) and "negatively"

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when we sin because we grieve the Spirit and deny him control (remember: to be full of the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit), and also "neutrally" because simply by living in this world with all its pressures and demands we exhaust our "fuel supply." Also, new situations may demand a new anointing/ filling. This ongoing filling takes place in two main ways:

- Gradual and imperceptible daily refilling that takes place through spending time with God (privately and corporately) and by walking in step with the Spirit and giving him control at each point (Paul may have had this kind of filling in mind in Eph 5).
- Tangible filling at a particular moment like what was experienced when you were first baptised with the Spirit. To insist that this can only happen once is both to contradict Scripture (Ac 2:4, Ac 4:31) and to unnecessarily deny yourself further blessing and equipping. Through both gradual, imperceptible filling and further immersion experiences we need to seek for the rest of our lives to "keep on being filled with the Spirit" so that we can be and can do all that God desires for us. The Spirit-filled (Spirit-controlled) life is the essence of and the key to the entire Christian life.