The Baptism with the Holy Spirit

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Acts 1:4, 5

The Old Testament prophets looked forward to a day when God's Spirit would dwell within His people (Jer 31:31-34; Ezk 36:22-27), and they would become prophets (Joel 2:28-32). When the Messiah arrived, God would enter into a "new covenant" with His people (Jer 31:31). On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus lifted the cup and said, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood" (Lk 22:20). By this statement He was revealing that His death on the cross would bring this great promise to His followers. After His resurrection He commanded His disciples to wait for this promise to arrive. He said they would be "baptized in the Holy Spirit..." (Ac 1:4, 5), and by that baptism He said they would receive the power they would need to be His witnesses (Ac 1:8). This promise arrived on the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2:1-4; 14-21), and continues to be given by God to every person who repents and believes in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Ac 2:38, 39).

Though it is clearly stated in Scripture that God gives this promise to everyone who believes in His Son, as the Book of Acts progresses, and the history of the church proves, it is possible for this gift to go unreceived (Ac 8:12, 14-17; 19:1-7), what is given in potential is not received in practice. With the desire to receive all that God has given us, let's seek to understand the baptism with the Holy Spirit as accurately as possible.

What is this baptism?

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is a definite experience, subsequent to regeneration, whereby the Third Person of the Godhead comes to dwell within the believer. By it, God causes ordinary people to become extraordinarily effective as witnesses for Jesus Christ (Ac 1:5, 8). Since the Day of Pentecost (Ac 2), God's plan has been to equip every believer so that the ministry of Jesus Christ may continue from generation to generation, until He comes again (Ac 15:8).

Scripture affirms that Christ's finished work makes provision for a fullness of the Spirit, beyond regeneration, of which believers may or may not avail themselves. The greatest promise to the world is, "that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16); but the greatest promise Christ makes to His church is, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." (Ac 1:8). This gift is vital for the life and service of every believer.

An important distinction

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is subsequent to, and distinct from, His regenerative work. A full Christian experience should certainly contain both, but this distinction must be made because there are many who are genuinely saved, yet have never been genuinely filled with the Spirit in this way. The difference between regeneration and the baptism with the Holy Spirit can be seen in Scripture:

- 1) The apostles were converted under Jesus' ministry (Jn 1:35-50; Lk 10:20; Jn 13:10, 11; 15:3), yet they were commanded to wait for a special filling of the Spirit which took place after Jesus' ascension (Lk 24:49; Ac 1:13, 14; 2:1-4).
- 2) The Samaritans were saved under the ministry of Philip (Ac 8:5-8, 12), yet they were baptized with the Holy Spirit under the ministry of Peter and John (Ac 8:14-17).
- 3) Paul was converted on the road to Damascus by a personal vision of the resurrected Christ (Ac 9:3-9), yet he was baptized with the Holy Spirit under the ministry of Ananias three days later (Ac 9:17-19).
- 4) Paul "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" twelve men at Ephesus, yet they received the baptism with the Holy Spirit after he laid hands on them (Ac 19:5, 6).

We can see from these examples that a person can believe in Jesus Christ and yet not have received the baptism with the Holy Spirit. There need not be a long period of time between salvation and this fullness of the Spirit, but the baptism with the Spirit is an additional experience to the new birth.

Clarifying three terms

To understand what the baptism with the Holy Spirit is, and what it is not, it is helpful to clarify, as well as we are able, these three terms:

1) Righteousness: To be righteous means a person is in right-standing before God. He or she is accepted by Him and not under judgment for sin. Such righteousness was available prior to the coming of Jesus Christ. Without knowing the name of the Savior who would come, men and women who repented, appealed to God

for mercy, and trusted in His kindness were given the righteousness of faith (He 11:2, 4, 5, 7, 39, 40). Jesus and the apostles confidently pointed to the existence of righteous men and women in the Old Covenant.

- 2) Regeneration: Following the cross and resurrection, powerful new realities became possible to those who repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ. By calling upon His name (Ac 2:21) we receive a "once for all" sacrifice for our sins (Heb 7:27) which grants us a continuing righteousness which is not diminished by our sins or the weakness of our flesh (Ro 8:1). We have a "high priest" who constantly intercedes for us before the Father (Heb 8:25). Our human spirit, which was "dead" because of its alienation from God, becomes "alive" because the barrier of sin is removed and our spirit is joined to the Holy Spirit. In this way God "writes His laws on our heart" (Heb 8:10) so that the rebellious nature we inherited from Adam is gone (1Co 15:22; 2Co 5:17). Now, in our spirit which is our true, eternal self, we love God and long to please Him. By being joined to Christ we pass from death to life and inherit with Him all the spiritual riches He won by His cross and resurrection. We "possess all things" with Him (Ro 8:17; 1Co 3:21-23), and there is, of course, no treasure more precious than the Holy Spirit Himself. He is given to us "without measure" (Jn 3:34). This means that upon repentance and faith in Christ, every believer is given the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Yet, as we observed earlier, a person may be given this gift, but not receive it, it can remain "unopened."
- 3). The Baptism with the Holy Spirit: The baptism with the Holy Spirit is the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within the believer. In regeneration the human spirit is joined to God's Spirit, but by this gift of the Spirit, which Christ pours out (Lk 24:49), a believer becomes a "living temple." The Holy Spirit literally takes up residence within the physical body of the believer, which has been cleansed and made "holy" by the cross of Christ (Ro 8:3). He who has been "with" us now comes to dwell "in" us (Jn 14:17). When speaking prophetically of this future blessing, Jesus used terms that specifically located the Spirit within a person's body (Jn 4:14; 7:37-39; 14:16-20). Paul spoke of the Spirit the same way. He said, "...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you..." (1 Co 6:19; Also, 1Co 3:16, 17; 2Co 6:16; Col 1:27).

Receiving this baptism

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is not necessarily received automatically. It can remain an unopened gift through lack of understanding or the absence of someone who is able to minister it to others (Ac 8:14-17). Nor is it received imperceptibly, though it can, and should, be claimed by faith without regard to whether or not there has yet been an experience of God's power (1Jn 5:14, 15). In every example provided by the New Testament, when a person was baptized with the Holy Spirit there was an evident, recognizable infusion of the Spirit marked by the manifestation of a spiritual gift, in particular, speaking to God in an unknown language, and prophecy. Apparently, an important mark of the Spirit's coming to dwell in us is Spirit-inspired speech. When He comes, He touches our lips and wants to speak through us, and that shouldn't surprise us (Iss 6:5-8; Jas 3:1-12), because learning to yield to God I must let the Spirit have control of my tongue. That's where He went first on the Day of Pentecost, because when the tongue surrenders, all of us surrenders (Jas 3:1-4).

Conclusion

It is important to understand what the baptism with the Holy Spirit is, and what it is not:

- 1) It is not the gift of righteousness. Right standing before God has always been based on repentance and faith. It has never come any other way, whether in the Old Covenant or the New.
- 2) It is not regeneration, the promised new birth. Our faith in Jesus Christ provides us with a new, enduring righteousness which removes the barrier of sin, which separates our spirit from the Spirit of God. At that moment, we cease to be spiritually dead and become spiritually alive, joined to Christ inheriting with Him all the blessings of God.
- 3) It is the moment when "the promise of the Father" (Ac 1:4) is received. It is the coming of the Spirit, in power, to dwell within the body of the believer. We become His "living temple," what was given in regeneration, is received.
- So, the baptism with the Holy Spirit should not be thought of as an optional gift which one may or may not wish to receive. Since it is God's way of equipping believers to continue Christ's ministry, refusing it or neglecting it limits His ability to use us. Every child of God should consider it a privilege to receive this gift.

Questions

- 1) When did you first hear about the baptism with the Holy Spirit? How did you respond? Did you desire more of God's power, or did it frighten you? (the answer may be "both."
- 2) Describe someone who was changed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit. What was different?