

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

It is hard to find a subject which is more subject to discussion, debate, ambiguity and confusion than the subject of being baptised with the Holy Spirit. We know that God is not the author of confusion, and thus He has given us His inerrant Word so that we might discern the truth. However, even the writers of the Bible admitted that the Bible contains “mysteries” and “hard sayings.” Therefore, we are required to study the Word of God that we might have a right understanding.

In this study, I shall consider the main passages of Scripture that refer and allude to the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and I will give the basic meaning of the term, and all that it implies. I shall also explain some simple errors made concerning this subject by our Charismatic friends.

1. Definitions.

What does the word “baptise” mean? Simply, to baptise means to dip, plunge or immerse. We see two phrases in the New Testament concerning the Holy Ghost and baptism:

1. Baptised **with** the Holy Ghost.
2. Baptised **by** the Holy Ghost.

You do not see the phrase, "Baptism **of** the Holy Ghost" anywhere in Scripture. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to be baptised in or with the Holy Spirit.

The phrase, “baptised **with** the Holy Ghost” refers to the previously unknown (in the old covenant) doctrine of being indwelt and sealed with the Holy Spirit. This phrase is found only in reference to the events of the Book of Acts. It was predicted by John the Baptist, and was primarily fulfilled in Acts 2, and also in Acts 10.

Matthew 3:11 “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:”

Luke 24:49 “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”

Acts 1:5, 8 “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence... But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Acts 2:1-4 “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Acts 10:44-47 “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

Acts 11:15-17 “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?”

The phrase “baptised **by** the Holy Ghost” has a different meaning altogether. Every Christian has been placed in the church by the Holy Spirit. We have been baptised into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit - He has plunged us and dipped us into the church, and made us an integral part of a local congregation. He has also equipped us with unique gifts for the purpose of edifying the church.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 18, 27 “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to

drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many...But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him...Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.”

Galatians 3:27 “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

2. Filled with the Spirit or Baptised with the Spirit?

Some Christians use the term “baptism of the Holy Spirit” as being synonymous with being filled with the Holy Spirit. However, these are two entirely different terms, as a simple study of the Greek words demonstrates:

“Baptised” = *baptizo* = to make fully wet; to plunge; to immerse.

“Filled” = *pleroo* = to cram full; to fill.

In Ephesians 5:18, "be filled" is the “*plerousthe*” in the Greek language. It's tense indicates a **continuous** command to keep being filled with the Holy Spirit. Filling of the Holy Spirit is a moment by moment relationship that may be hindered by sin. We are filled with the Spirit as we yield ourselves to God and obey His Word. However, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in I Corinthians 12:13, is in the aorist tense, meaning an action which takes place **once and for all**. Regeneration, indwelling, sealing, and baptism of the Holy Spirit are accomplished once and for all at the time of salvation.

Ephesians 1:13, 14 “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

What is our relationship to the Spirit of God? We are **not** commanded to be baptised by or with the Holy Ghost; only the apostles and those in the Upper Room were told to wait for that special baptism. As New Testament Christians, we **are** commanded to:

- Be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)
- Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16)
- Be led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14)
- Grieve not the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30)
- Quench not the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

3. Misunderstandings, and the notion of subsequence.

Some Christians refer to the baptism of the Spirit as being a special spiritual experience that is evidenced by speaking in tongues and other signs. The miraculous gift of languages has been dealt with by myself in another study, but suffice to say that this understanding of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is erroneous for at least 3 reasons:

1. Every Christian is baptised by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12), but not every Christian has the gift of tongues, even if one believes that such a gift is still valid in the Church Age.
2. Only 3 occurrences of speaking in tongues are found in the Book of Acts, but there are 7 occurrences in that historical account of being filled with the Holy Ghost.
3. The two main evidences of being filled with the Spirit are bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23), and having spiritual power to win souls (Acts 1:8).

The notion that one gets salvation at one point and the baptism of the Spirit later is often referred to as the doctrine of **subsequence**. This is a key charismatic doctrine. This teaching says that a Christian receives the Holy Spirit at conversion in a limited way. Later on, in a subsequent experience the Christian receives the "fullness" of the Spirit, by being baptised with, in or of the Spirit. This experience is accompanied by speaking in tongues, new spiritual motivation and sometimes miracles. They teach that the Baptism of Holy Spirit:

1. Is usually distinct from and subsequent to (after) the new birth.
2. Is evidenced initially by the sign of speaking in tongues.
3. It must be earnestly sought.

The **only** passages which Charismatics can use to support this doctrine are in the book of Acts, as **nothing** in the epistles supports the idea. However, there is no consistent pattern in Acts concerning receiving the Holy Spirit. See chapters 2, 8, 10, 19. For example, why didn't the 3,000 or the 5,000 speak in tongues, in view of the promise given in Acts 2:38, 39?

Which passages do Charismatics use to teach subsequence?

1. 1 Corinthians 12:13 cannot be used because it says that the Holy Spirit baptises every believer into the body of Christ at salvation. No tongues are mentioned, nor are we commanded to seek the Baptism. The gospels and epistles do not show subsequence.
2. In Acts 2 and 8, believers received the Spirit after salvation: an element of subsequence.
3. In Acts 10, at Cornelius' household, believers were baptised in the Spirit at salvation: no subsequence.
4. In Acts 19, John's disciples at Ephesus were baptised in the Spirit at salvation: no subsequence.

Believers spoke in tongues in Acts 2, 10, 19, but not in Acts 8 at Samaria. Believers did not seek earnestly for the baptism in any of Acts 2, 8, 10, 19. None of Acts 2, 8, 10, 19 ever commands tongues for anybody else.

It is indisputable that Charismatics develop their theology of the baptism of the Holy Spirit from Acts chapter 2. However, the disciples did not receive the Holy Spirit in John 20:21-22 and then receive the baptism in Acts 2. It was a promise of the Holy Spirit to be given later:

John 20:21, 22 "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, **Receive ye the Holy Ghost:**"

4. Do I need the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

Charismatics teach that after the resurrection, the eleven disciples received the Holy Spirit in the upper room, but that they later on received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost which then gave them their real power. This view is wrong because:

1. John 7:39 "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." This refutes the Charismatic idea that the disciples had the permanent indwelling Holy Spirit in John 20:22. They did not have the permanent indwelling Holy Spirit because Jesus had not yet ascended, nor was He yet glorified in heaven. The Holy Spirit would not come until after Jesus had ascended to heaven to receive the glory He had with the Father before the world began (John 17:1-5).
2. John 16:7 ".....if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." Jesus ascended to heaven, then 10 days later, the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.
3. Acts 1:8 "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me...." This teaches that in Acts 1:8 the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon the disciples, not at all. They were still waiting for the Holy Spirit to come on them. Here, receiving power to witness, came at the same time as they received the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit had come on them in John 20:22, they would not have been waiting, nor would they be powerless.
4. Acts 1:4 "they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, ye have heard of me." This promise was made in John 14:16, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever."

Acts 8:14-17 is another passage used to prove the doctrine of subsequence. Subsequence is present here, in a period of transition between the covenants, but this does not prove that subsequence is the rule for the entire age. This occurrence proved visibly and supernaturally that the hated Samaritans were included in the new covenant.

Acts 10:45-47 is also used as proof of subsequence. But, God showed the Jews here supernaturally that the Gentiles were part of the church, and note that Cornelius immediately received the Holy Spirit. Acts 19 is also used to prove subsequence. But, there is no interval here, no subsequence. The disciples

knew only of John; they were not yet saved. They believed and were baptised in the name of Jesus, and received the Holy Spirit.

No one asked for the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, 8, 10, 19, or anywhere in any letter to any New Testament church. Why? Because the Holy Spirit always indwelt a person at the point of salvation. Romans 8:9 "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is not of his." How can a believer have Christ, but not the Holy Spirit? You can't separate the Godhead. Colossians 2:10 "Ye are complete in Him." If we have Christ as Saviour, we are complete; we do not need a second blessing, nor a baptism of the Holy Spirit because we already have it at salvation.

Remember that the book of Acts is a historical narrative of the experiences of the early NT churches; the epistles contain instructions for believers throughout the church age. Acts is an inspired historical record of the apostolic period; every event or phenomenon is not necessarily normative for the entire church age. Charismatics have, however, erroneously assembled a doctrinal system that views the extraordinary events of the early apostolic age as tokens of spiritual power that are to be routinely expected by all Christians for all time. But, the book of Acts was never intended to be a primary basis for church doctrine. It is a record of the period of transition from the Old Covenant to the New. Acts is not a norm for the church age, but a narrative of the transition period:

1. From Synagogue to church.
2. From law to grace.
3. From Old Testament saints to New Testament Christians.
4. From mainly a Jewish body of believers to the body of Christ where there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

Summary:

The phrase, "baptised **with** the Holy Ghost" refers to the previously unknown doctrine of being indwelt and sealed with the Holy Spirit. This phrase is found only in reference to the events of the Book of Acts. It was predicted by John the Baptist, and was primarily fulfilled in Acts 2. The phrase "baptised **by** the Holy Ghost" refers to the way in which every Christian has been placed in the church by the Holy Spirit. We have been baptised into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, and He has equipped us with unique gifts for the purpose of edifying the church. This was accomplished once and for all at the time of salvation.