

Spirit Baptism

Summary

Spirit baptism is the spiritual operation whereby the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 3:11) baptizes the sinner who trusts in Him into his spiritual body (1Cor 12:13) which is the Church (Eph 1:22,23). Jesus does this instrumentally with/by the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11; Acts 1:5; 1Cor 12:13).

1. Spirit baptism began in the New Covenant era (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4; 10:47 with 11:15-16).

2. It is experienced by all believers in the New Covenant (1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28; Rom 6:3; Acts 2:1-4; 10:47 with 11:15-16).

3. As the norm for the New Covenant era, Spirit baptism occurs at salvation and is not repeated thereafter, since it joins the believer to the body of Christ (1Cor 12:13; Acts 2:47; Col 2:12; Gal 3:26-28; 1Peter 2:2-5). This spiritual unity of all believers was prophesied by Jesus (Jn 10:16), prayed for by Jesus (Jn 17:21), and later demonstrated and revealed in greater detail to the apostles (Acts 10; Eph 2:12-16; 3:1-6). There are situations in the infant church transition period in which people were saved some time before receiving the Spirit, but these cases are not the norm for the age, but were unique due to historical circumstances.

4. Spirit baptism should not be confused with water baptism. John the Baptist clearly contrasted the two baptisms (Matt 3:11; Acts 1:5). Water baptism, sometimes referred to as believer's baptism, is an initiatory rite that identifies a person with Christ subsequent to saving faith (Acts 8:13; 8:36-38; 9:18; 10:44-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; Eph 2:8-9). Spirit baptism occurs without water (Acts 2 and 10; 11:16) and normally occurs simultaneous to salvation (Acts 11:12-18; Rom 8:9; 1Cor 12:13).

5. Spirit baptism should not be confused with Spirit filling. The words "*baptism*" and "*filling*" do not have the same meaning. In baptism, a person is immersed into something. To be filled, something fills the person. In Spirit baptism, Jesus immerses the believing sinner into His spiritual body at conversion, by the Spirit. This is a one-time event in a believer's life (1Cor 12:13). Spirit filling is a constant command issued to every believer to walk in the fullness of God, and can be experienced repeatedly (Eph 5:18; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 13:52).

Far from being a point of division between the Christian haves and Christian have-nots, Spirit baptism is the glorious work of Christ that unifies all true Christians in Him, by the Holy Spirit.

Interpretational Considerations

The position endorsed in this paper uses the hermeneutical principle of the *analogy of faith* (i.e., scripture interprets scripture). It is argued by some that there is insufficient evidence to support that the baptism theology of Paul in 1Cor 12:13 is the same baptism theology of Luke in Acts. The supposed fallacy of my position is assuming the word *baptism* always, or nearly always, has the same technical meaning. So it could mean an effusion of power by Luke in Acts

and an immersion into Christ's spiritual body by Paul in 1 Corinthians. It is true that a single word can have different meanings, and the immediate context can often indicate the more precise meaning. It is also true that different words can have the same meaning (or have overlapping lexical ranges). However, when the immediate context does not indicate a meaning different from the normal usage in scripture, it is sound exegetical practice to accept the normal meaning. In this case, the Acts accounts are just as likely to suggest that Spirit filling and Spirit baptism are simultaneous or causally related as that they are equivalent. Thus the Acts accounts of Spirit baptism (chapters 2 and 10) do not necessarily disclose the meaning of Spirit baptism, so much as they simply report what happened and when. Other evidence presented in this study suggests that Spirit baptism (immersion) is distinct from Spirit filling or effusion.

Study

1. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, which makes all believers one in Him.

A new operation of the Spirit began with the commencement of New Covenant era--Spirit Baptism (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-4; 10:47 with 11:16). This would characterize Jesus' ministry as contrasted to John the Baptist's ministry of water baptism (Mark 1:8). John declared that Jesus would be greater than him, and prophesied Jesus' baptism would be greater than his. He described the distinction between their ministries this way: "*I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*" (Mark 1:8; Jn 4:2). The purpose of Spirit baptism is explained in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "*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.*"

By examining all the scriptures on Spirit baptism, the following conclusion can be made. *Spirit baptism is the spiritual operation whereby Jesus, by or with the Holy Spirit, baptizes the believing sinner into His spiritual body, which is the church* (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5; 1Cor 12:13; Eph 1:22,23). The Old Testament predicted a new age of the Holy Spirit's ministry (Joel 2:28 with Acts 2:27). John the Baptist foretold of Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). Just before Jesus' crucifixion, He told His disciples that it was necessary that He depart and send the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16; 15:26; 16:7). Jesus said if He did not go away the Holy Spirit would not come unto them (Jn 7:39; 16:7). After His resurrection and just before His ascension into heaven, He promised His disciples they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days (Acts 1:5). In accordance with Joel, John the Baptist, and Jesus, this baptizing with the Holy Spirit began to occur in Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost a few days after Jesus' ascension as Jesus had promised (Acts 1:5; 2:27). The occasion is documented in Acts chapter 2 as confirmed by comparing Acts 1:5 with 10:47 and 11:16. Although there are three unique circumstances of subsequence (i.e., people receiving the Holy Spirit *subsequent* to believing) recorded in the book of Acts (the apostles in Acts 2, the Samaritans in Acts 8, and the disciples of John the Baptist in Acts 19), the *teachings* of the apostles indicate that the norm for the age is that Spirit baptism occurs simultaneously to salvation and is automatically experienced by all believers when they believe (Gal 3:2; 3:26-28; Rom 8:9; 1Cor 12:3,7; Jn 7:37; Acts 10:44-48 with Acts 11:1-14; Col 2:10-13), making all believers one in Christ (1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28; Rom 6:3; 8:9; Jn 17:11, 22; Eph 2:12, 16) and is not repeated afterwards.

The spiritual unity of all believers was prophesied by Jesus (Jn 10:16), prayed for by Jesus (Jn 17:21), and later demonstrated and revealed in greater detail to the apostles (Acts 10; Eph 2:12-16; 3:1-6). The new testament (not the books, but the testament-covenant itself) went into effect upon Christ the Testator's death (Heb 9:16-17). This new testament/covenant is currently in force (Luke 22:20; 2Cor 3:6; Heb 9:15; 12:24). In this new age, Jesus is building His church through the unifying operation of the baptism with the Spirit, which began on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost not many days after His ascension (Matt 16:18; Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 10:47 with 11:16; 1Cor 12:13). Through the cross of Christ, the apostles and all believers, Jews and Gentiles, are placed into this one body (Eph 2:12-16; Rom 16:7; Jn 17:21-23; 1Cor 12:13, 27) which is the church (Eph 1:22-23; 1Cor 12:27). Peter received a vision and was sent by God to the Gentiles who experienced what the Jews had experienced years earlier during the 33 AD Pentecost Feast recorded in Act 2 (Acts 10). Many years after this one body's existence, the apostle Paul received the dispensation of God's grace by revelation to make known the mystery of how the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel (Eph 3:1-6).

2. Spirit baptism is not the same as water baptism.

Spirit baptism saves; subsequent water baptism is symbolic. Spirit baptism and water baptism are distinct but inseparably connected. Spirit baptism makes believers one with Christ and His body; water baptism is the visual, physical portrayal of this spiritual reality. Jesus *spiritually* baptizes all believers by the Holy Spirit into His spiritual body which is the church (Mark 1:8; 1Cor 12:13; Rom 6:3). To signify this spiritual union with Christ, and the cleansing of sins, believers are commanded to be *physically* baptized in water as the answer of a good conscience toward God (Matt 28:19-20; 1Pet 3:21). God never commands people to be baptized with the Spirit (as this is automatic and instantaneous upon believing), but He does command people to be baptized in water (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 2:38).

Note: As periodically partaking of the Lord's Supper signifies the ongoing spiritual nourishment of the believer upon Christ (Jn 6:53-57), water baptism is a one-time initiatory rite signifying the believer's spiritual cleansing and union with Christ. Both water baptism and the Lord's Supper are memorials of Christ's once-and-for-all, never-to-be-repeated sacrificial death (Romans 6:3; 1Cor 11:26).

The one Christian baptism of Eph 4:5 has two distinct aspects: efficacious and emblematic; real and ritual; true and type; substance and shadow. The ritual portrays the spiritual reality. This is consistent with how Old Testament rituals functioned. For example, circumcision of the flesh was a token of faith, symbolic of the circumcision of the heart unto which Israel was called (Gen 17:11; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:29; 4:11). Physical circumcision was not efficacious; spiritual circumcision was.

As a result of this close connection between type and antitype, verses on Christian baptism provide insight into both dimensions of baptism. Water baptism depicts and represents what Spirit baptism spiritually accomplishes. However, this does not mean that Spirit baptism and water baptism occur simultaneously in time in a believer's life. On two occasions where Spirit baptism is explicitly identified as occurring in scripture (Acts 2 and Acts 10), it was not

simultaneous with water baptism (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5; 2:1-4; 10:44-48 with 11:16). While there are different and unique cases during the transition period recorded in Acts, the epistles convey the norm for the age to be that Spirit baptism places the believer into spiritual union with Christ instantaneously upon believing. Water baptism is not normally simultaneous with initial saving faith but should follow soon afterwards. Spirit baptism secures salvation; water baptism pictures salvation. In spiritual baptism, the instrument used by Christ is the Holy Spirit without physical effort, water, or a human baptizer. In ritualistic water baptism, a human baptizer, water, and a physically capable recipient are necessary.

3. Spirit baptism is not the same as Spirit filling.

The term βαπτίζω signifies being immersed. The term πλήθω signifies being filled. Spirit baptism is the immersion of a believer into the body of Christ, which takes place once at conversion, and permanently unifies the believer with Christ and all other believers. Spirit filling is an ongoing work of the Spirit that practically empowers the believer for God's service. As believers empty themselves of sinful self, the indwelling Holy Spirit has full sway. Filling is not getting more of the Spirit as though we receive the person of the Holy Spirit in measure or piece-meal fashion; but rather Spirit filling is the Holy Spirit having more of us as we are yielded to Him. Spirit baptism is never commanded of the believer. Being Spirit filled is commanded. Jesus and others were filled with (or full of) the Holy Spirit before Pentecost 33AD (Ex 31:3; Luke 1:15, 41, 4:1), yet the *baptism* with the Holy Spirit was a work of Jesus which he promised and commanded his disciples to wait for in Jerusalem--and did not occur until Pentecost 33AD (Matt 3:11; Acts 1:4-8; 11:15,16). The same believers were filled with the Spirit on more than one occasion (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 13:52). Obviously they were not being re-baptized into the body of Christ during these experiences. No person is ever explicitly said in scripture to be baptized with the Holy Spirit before Pentecost 33AD nor is any believer in Christ ever explicitly said to be baptized by the Holy Spirit a second or third time. Rebaptism is a foreign concept in scripture, whereas refilling or remaining full of the Spirit is commanded and illustrated throughout scripture (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 13:52; 6:3-5; 7:55; 11:24; Eph 5:18; 3:19; Col 1:9).

If 1Cor 12:13 is divorced from the study of Spirit baptism in the Gospels and Acts, then the terms *filling* and *baptism* could possibly be used interchangeably. But the Acts accounts are just as likely to suggest that Spirit filling and Spirit baptism are simultaneous as that they are equivalent. Thus the Acts accounts of Spirit baptism (chapters 2 and 10) do not necessarily disclose the meaning of Spirit baptism, so much as they simply report what happened and when. It would be hasty to conclude that Spirit baptism and Spirit filling (or effusion) are identical when they could just as likely have been occurring simultaneously (or occur in causal or explanatory relations) on these monumental occasions when so many functions of the Spirit were at work and so many epochal changes were occurring. We should also note the parallel connection of Spirit baptism with water baptism (Matt 3:11; Acts 1:5), which is an immersion versus an effusion or filling, and the comparison of Jesus' Spirit baptism with Jesus' fire baptism of judgment, which is an immersion versus an effusion or filling (Matt 3:10-12; Acts 1:5; Rev 20:15). There are many different aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry (reproving, testifying, regenerating, unifying, indwelling, teaching, filling, empowering, assuring, comforting,

etc.). To ignore semantic differences and conflate different terms such as Spirit filling and Spirit baptism can lead to doctrinal errors, which is contrary to the Holy Spirit's purpose for believers to diligently study in order to mature in doctrinal understanding (Acts 17:11; Eph 4:34; 1Tim 4:6; 5:17; 2Tim 2:15; 3:16; 4:2-3; Titus 1:9; 2:7; Heb 5:12-6:2).

The commandment to be filled with the Spirit is a commandment to all believers (Eph 5:18; 3:19; Col 1:9). It is similar to the commandment for believers to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25). The negative commands are not to quench or grieve the Spirit (1Thes 5:19; Eph 4:30).

The characteristics of Spirit-filling are Christ-like character (Gal 5:23,24), boldness to speak God's word (Psalm 39:3; Acts 2:4; 4:13,31; 13:9-11), praise, worship, thanksgiving, and submissiveness (Eph 5:18-33), leadership by the Spirit into God's will (Luke 4:1; Psalm 143:10), and giftedness to serve God as He has commanded (Ex 31:1-5; 36:1).

Since God desires every believer to be Spirit-filled, it can be concluded that the only way for a believer not to be filled is to quench the Spirit through sin (of commission or omission). The key to being Spirit-filled therefore is submitting to God.

- a. Submitting to God with single-mindedness (Acts 2:1-4 with 1:4; 2:46; 4:18-31; Luke 11:34; Matt 6:24,33; Eph 6:5; James 1:5-8; 4:7-10). Since the Spirit testifies of Jesus, the filling with the Spirit requires dying to self so the life of Jesus is made manifest through the believer (2Cor 4:10).
- b. Continued filling requires continued submission, letting the word of Christ dwell richly in the heart (Psalm 1:1-3; 119:11; Prov 23:7 with Phil 4:8,9; Eph 5:18-6:9 with Col 3:16-4:1), and not quenching the Spirit by sin (1Thes 5:19; 2Tim 2:19; Heb 3:13; Romans 6:1-18; 1Cor 10:13; 1Jn 1:5-2:1; Acts 4:8 with Matt 26:75 and Jn 21:15-17).
- c. It can be concluded that the more and more a believer matures toward Christ-likeness through submission, the more consistently Spirit-filled the believer will be (2Cor 3:18; Eph 4:13; Heb 5:12-14).

4. The Epistles Explain Spirit Baptism.

There are those who teach that Spirit baptism is an experience which takes place subsequent to (that is, after) one's salvation and therefore should be sought by those who are already saved. This position is based largely on assumptions made from reading about the events recorded in the book of Acts. Although the book of Acts gives insights into the subject of Spirit baptism, it is crucial that one's study of Spirit baptism not be limited to the book of Acts. (Note: Doctrinal errors are commonly the result of adding to the scriptures, taking away from the scriptures, interpreting scriptures out of context, or failing to bring into consideration all the verses that deal with a subject. Sound doctrine will always consider all the verses that speak to the subject in question--not just a few.)

Spirit baptism can easily be misunderstood if Acts is one's only reference. The book of Acts is exactly what its well-known title suggests--a narrative of the *ACTS of the Apostles*. Some of the

apostles' acts were their teaching and preaching; but much of the apostles' teachings is recorded in their epistles. As a matter of fact, the Lord explains many of the events in Acts in the epistles.

The subject of Spirit baptism is a good example of this. We read of people being baptized with the Spirit in the book of Acts, but there is no doctrinal explanation of its purpose. However, in the epistles, we find a clear statement describing the exact purpose of Spirit baptism.

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. (1Corinthians 12:13)

From this verse we understand that *all believers* are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. This explains why the believer is never specifically commanded anywhere in scripture to seek or pray for Spirit baptism--because the believer has already been baptized by the Spirit--when he was saved by faith (1Cor 12:13; Acts 2:47; Col 2:12; Gal 3:26-28; 1Peter 2:2-5).

5. The Book of Acts Documents a Unique Period of Transition.

In Acts, some of the timing of events are unique to the early church. The uniqueness of some of the events in Acts is obvious just by the historical significance of the period of transition which it describes--from law to grace, from Israel to the Church, from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from Judaism to Christianity.

Only in the first century did people witness with their very eyes the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist. Only in the first century did people witness the Lord's ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Only in the first century did believers see the New Testament Church begin, and witness God begin to change his dealings with mankind from an earthly nation (Israel) to a spiritual organism comprised of Jews and Gentiles (the Church).

This unique period in history in which these enormous changes were taking place would naturally result in unique events surrounding those involved in the transition. During this transitional period recorded in Acts, Jesus was 1) empowering His followers to preach the gospel (i.e., the message of His death and resurrection) (Acts 1:8; 4:31; 8:17; 13:52), 2) showing mighty signs and wonders to confirm the word (Mark 16:20; Acts 2:43; 5:12), and 3) breaking down the wall that divided Jews and Gentiles to build His church (Eph 2:14).

Different groups found themselves in the midst of this transition:

- a) Believers in Christ who had not yet received the Holy Spirit (Luke 10:20; Acts 1:5-8; 2:1-4 11:14-16; 8:4-17);
- b) Devout Jews who had not yet heard the gospel (Acts 2:5),
- c) Devout Gentile proselytes to Judaism who had not yet heard the gospel (Acts 2:10; 10:1-2; 22; 11:14-18)
- d) Jewish disciples of John the Baptist who had an incomplete knowledge of the gospel (Acts 18:24-26; 19:1-7), and

e) Apostles who had not yet fully grasped the mystery of the Jew-Gentile Church (Acts 10:9-15, 10:25-11:18; 15:1-29; Gal 2:11; Eph 3:2-10).

The apostles were baptized by the Spirit in Acts 2 subsequent to their salvation because the Holy Spirit was not given in full measure until the day of Pentecost which is described in Acts 2 (Matt 16:18; 1Cor 12:13; Acts 11:15,16). Another example of uniqueness is the Samaritan believers in Act 8:14-17 who had not even *received* the Holy Spirit until the apostles were there to recognize and witness it. In Acts 19:1-7, the twelve men were disciples of John the Baptist who had not come to a full understanding of the gospel until they met the Apostle Paul. By comparing all the verses in Acts and the Epistles, it seems that these three cases are not the norm for the age, but were unique due to historical circumstances.

Today, people are placed in the church simultaneous (not subsequent) to their conversion (1Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-27) and receive the Spirit simultaneous (not subsequent) to their conversion (Gal 3:2; Rom 8:9; 1Cor 12:3,7; Jn 7:37; Acts 10:44-48 with Acts 11:1-14).