

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective

Introduction

There are many issues that have been divisive within the framework of the Body of Jesus Christ, the Church. It is doubtful that any of these issues were (or are) intended to be divisive, yet Christians throughout the ages have rendered different interpretations for given passages of Scripture and thus created division in some arenas. One issue that has proven to be conflict-ridden for the past century is the doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit including its purpose and its manifestation(s). The objective of this essay is to observe the classical Pentecostal view of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, to clarify some issues that have proven to be at the center of the debate, and to examine some of the contemporary history of one denomination's quest for a deeper walk with God. In performing this task, it is hoped that through understanding, divisiveness will cease and harmony and unity will be entered into and practiced.

For the purpose of clarity in understanding the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is first important to look at the scriptural concept of baptism. The Bible contains several instances of the word 'baptism.' All usages come from the Greek word, *baptizo* or one of its derivatives and have the meaning "to dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge, to cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash one's self,

to bathe, or to overwhelm.”¹ Other instances of translation of the word in English Bibles are translated as washing(s).

Of the recordings of types of baptisms in the Bible, one such was John’s Baptism. His was that which was mentioned in all four of the Gospels and was perhaps most clearly seen in Matthew 3:6 NASV where it states, “and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.” This particular event was an immersion in observation of repentance of sins and in observation of separation unto God for service. John’s baptism was the particular event that Jesus experienced in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Christian baptism is another type and was instituted in and by the early church. It was heavily recorded in the book of Acts. This act was one in which believers made public profession of their faith. By observation of this event others knew of the new believer’s commitment to Christ. Christian baptism is one that is often viewed as a parallel with the Old Testament ritual of circumcision and is also observed as a “rite of passage” or a sign of covenant relationship with Christ and the Church. Reference to this type of baptism will be used in this essay for comparison with two others in order to give clearer understanding of the classical Pentecostal interpretation of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Baptism into the Body of Christ is another type relevant to this essay and is one in which the believer becomes a part of the Body of Christ. This event is equated with salvation and is a type of identification with Christ. Romans 6:3 NASV gives clear record of this event, “Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?” It is an event in which the person is baptized by the

Holy Spirit. (“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ...” 1 Corinthians 12:13 NASV). As Paul mentions this entrance into the Body of Christ, he “is emphasizing spiritual baptism, and the communion of spiritual food and drink. It is not the local church alone Paul is speaking of here, but the Church universal.”² For the purpose of this essay, this baptism into the Body of Christ will be referred to as the Baptism OF or BY the Holy Spirit. This is that which is performed by the Holy Spirit and is experienced by all believers at the initiation of their salvation experience.

The other type of baptism to be understood is the central topic of this essay: the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. This event was prophesied by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11, “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He Who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” This event was clearly referring to Jesus Christ as the Baptizer. The terms “Baptism IN the Holy Spirit” and “Baptism WITH the Holy Spirit” will be used to refer to this event. It should be noted at this point that there are other types of baptisms mentioned in the New Testament but they are not relevant to the theme of this particular essay. These include a baptism into Moses (1 Corinthians 10:2) and a baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29.) Again, these do have importance, but are not relevant to the content of this particular essay.

In order to establish a difference between these three baptisms, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, and water (or Christian) baptism, it becomes necessary to look at four particular elements of each of these. Each event of baptism contains an agent doing the baptizing, a candidate being baptized, an element into which the candidate is being baptized, and a particular timing for the event. At water baptism,

the candidate is the Christian, the agent is the Pastor, the element is water, and the event takes place after salvation. At salvation (or the Baptism BY the Holy Spirit), the candidate is again the Christian, the agent performing the baptism is the Holy Spirit and the element that the candidate is being baptized into is the Body of Christ. Finally, at the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, the candidate once again is the Christian, the agent performing the baptism is Christ, and the element which the believer is being baptized into is the Holy Spirit. This event takes place after salvation and after a second grace experience known as sanctification. The table below illustrates a visual configuration of this truth.

Type of Baptism	Candidate being Baptized	Agent performing the Baptism	Element of Baptism	Timing of Event
Water Baptism (Christian Baptism)	Believer	Pastor	Water	After Salvation
Baptism OF the Holy Spirit (Baptism into the Body of Christ)	Believer	Holy Spirit	Body of Christ	At salvation
Baptism IN the Holy Spirit (Pentecostal Experience)	Believer	Jesus Christ	Holy Spirit	After Salvation, After Sanctification

As these differences are noted and as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is further examined, it becomes evident that a brief understanding of the nature of the Holy Spirit is also needed. There is a great lack of comprehension of the nature of the Holy Spirit by many Pentecostals and there is a general lack of knowledge about Pentecostals by non-Pentecostals. Because of these lackings of knowledge Pentecostals have often been situated with the stigma of being “tongue talkers” and “holy rollers.” While

acknowledging that occasions of these excesses have been evident in history, it should be noted that “at the heart of Pentecostal worship and practice is a sense of living in the presence of the Holy Spirit and being led by that same Spirit.”³ This presence and leading of the Holy Spirit is a strong segment of the understanding of Him and should not be neglected or shunned due to the mentioned excesses.

A Short Synopsis of the Work of the Holy Spirit

The Hebrew word translated as Spirit is *rûach* and it carries the meaning of breath, wind, or spirit.⁴ This word was used in the Bible as early as Genesis 1:2 where the “Spirit had an active part in creation.”⁵ Dr. Clark Pinnock states that the “Spirit is the Bible’s way of speaking of what we would call the transcendent power of creation.”⁶

The Greek word generally translated as Holy Spirit is *pneuma* and refers to “the third person of the triune God, the Holy Spirit, coequal, coeternal with the Father and the Son.”⁷ He is seen as the One Who compelled Jesus to the wilderness after His baptism and Who empowered believers in the early church to “turn the world upside down.”⁸

In addition to the prior-mentioned Genesis text, the Holy Spirit was very active in the Old Testament. For instance, after King David’s sin with Bathsheba, “the presence of the Spirit in his life meant forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation. (Psalm 51:11-12)”⁹ In the Book of Judges, it is recorded that the Holy Spirit empowered those leaders of Israel known as the Judges to perform their tasks.¹⁰ Further, in the Old Testament, “all the true prophets of God carried on their ministry [only] by the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ Prophetically, according to Isaiah 11:2 and Isaiah 61:1, “it was expected that the Holy Spirit would rest upon the [coming] Messiah in a special way and equip Him for the messianic task.”¹²

In the Old Testament it is to be noted that God anointed [only certain] individuals with the Holy Spirit to fill particular offices and perform certain tasks¹³ and that these visitations occurred only at certain times. It quickly became evident in the New Testament, however, that “the Spirit would not only reside in the Messiah and a select few, as in the past, but would be poured out upon ‘all flesh’ (Joel 2:28-29).”¹⁴ Instances and appearances of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament include “Jesus’ miraculous conception in Mary by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-20),”¹⁵ Simeon’s inspiration by the Holy Spirit to bless Jesus as a baby in the Temple (Luke 2:27-28), “and the Holy Spirit’s presence at Jesus’ baptism as the Spirit came upon Him, confirmed His Sonship, and inaugurated His ministry. (Matthew 3:16-17)”¹⁶ Further, it was through the power of the Holy Spirit that Christ offered Himself on the cross¹⁷ and by that same power was He raised from the dead.¹⁸

One wonderful aspect of the Holy Spirit is that He was not only active in the Old and New Testaments but that He is still active in the life of believers today. An important characteristic of His contemporary work is that He “makes Christ’s work of redemption universally accessible.”¹⁹ Another important feature is that He bears fruit in those who follow Him. This, of course, is in reference to the fruit of the Spirit as found in Galatians 5:22-23. Of this list of nine specific facets of the Spirit in the life of the believer, is it not “appropriate that ‘love’ (agape) should head the list of the Spirit’s fruit—for God is love.”²⁰ Other references to the fruit of the Spirit can be found in Romans 6:22, Philippians 1:11, and Ephesians 5:9.²¹

“In these last days God is again pouring out His Spirit as He did in the apostolic era. It is the responsibility of those who receive the gift, Pentecostals believe, to share it

with others and to bring to full completion the purpose of Pentecost.”²² The ability to share with others is enhanced with aspects also referred to as gifts. A delineation of the empowerment of believers by the Holy Spirit with certain “spiritual gifts” is recorded in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.²³ This last days distribution of gifts has various purposes for diverse levels of edification, understanding, revelation, and empowerment and is ordained of God and still available in and to the Church today. They are mentioned as those gifts that follow believers²⁴ and portray the fact that the Kingdom of God is functional upon the earth. It should be noted that “the charismata (sign gifts) are not limited to a special class or rank of Christians”²⁵ but instead may follow all believers.

The Holy Spirit also produces a special ‘leading’ in the lives of believers. In fact, He initially showed this ‘leading’ in the life of Jesus as the Spirit led Christ into the wilderness after baptism to prepare Him for His ministry.²⁶ That same ‘leading’ is available to believers today as they seek God’s plan for their lives and as they are convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit. Church of God historian, Dr. John Sims stated it another way as he said, “The Holy Spirit works... internally as the illuminating and convincing Spirit.”²⁷ It is through this convicting, drawing, and leading power that “the Holy Spirit is the One Who applies the saving benefits of the cross to us.”²⁸

Finally, for the purpose of grasping an understanding of the Holy Spirit, it must be recognized that He is alive and active in the contemporary Church. The church has been designated as that which furthers the Gospel, disciples, nurtures, fellowships with one another, and shows forth the manifest presence of God to the world. “It is interesting and significant that a mark of spiritual worship in the Spirit-filled church mentioned in Acts 2:42-47 is was their unity in the spirit, their togetherness and fellowship.²⁹” As a

continuation of the early Church, “Spirit-filled Christians [today] must continue the mission of Jesus Christ in the world through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.”³⁰

Biblical Instances of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

There are several Biblical promises of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. One is found in the previously mentioned passage of Matthew 3:11 where John the Baptist states, “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” This, of course, was referring to Jesus in His office as “Baptizer in the Holy Spirit.” Another promise is found in Luke 11:13 where it is stated, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” Also, a biblical metaphor is given for the infilling of the Holy Spirit through the imagery of the former and latter rains.

The image of the latter rain doctrine is derived from the two major seasons of rainfall in Palestine. The first came in the fall and prepared the soil for planting. This ‘former rain,’ Pentecostals believed, corresponded to the first Pentecost (Acts 2), which initiated the work of the church, the great planting of the Gospel. After the apostolic era, however, the church experienced a great drought of the Spirit. It lost much of its force and power as Rome institutionalized and sacramentalized virtually all spiritual activity.

In Palestine the Latter Rain occurred in the spring of the year. It ripened the crops for harvest. Pentecostals believed this corresponded to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the twentieth century for the purpose of renewing the church and preparing the world (that is, the harvest) for the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Gifts and miracles reappeared in an extraordinary manner, they believed, because God was equipping the church to gather the harvest of the last days. These beliefs clearly defined the church’s agenda of evangelizing the world and preparing the church for the return of Christ.³¹

By contemporary Pentecostal/ Charismatic understanding, the latter rain of Palestine is seen as a fresh movement of the Holy Spirit that has been taking place since the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps the key scriptural promise for this Baptism in the Holy Spirit is found in Acts 1:8 where Jesus stated, “but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

The Book of Acts (often called the “Acts of the Holy Spirit”) records five specific instances of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon humanity. These are recorded in chapters 2, 8, 9, 10, and 19. In each of these chapters, at least one individual is baptized in the Holy Spirit. (In most of these chapters there are several who have this experience.) Typically there is some type of manifestation observed that causes others to know and recognize this “filling.”

Contemporary Understandings and Pursuits of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

It is at this point that early Pentecostals began to search. They desired an understanding of what the physical manifestation was that caused others to recognize this Baptism as an act of God. (After all, even though Acts does not record the manifestation among the Samaritans in Acts 8, it is obvious that some type of sign was visible. This is so stated because a man named Simon observed something so astounding that he sought to purchase the power causing this phenomenon to come upon mankind.) A large group of these Pentecostal believers came to the conclusion that the common recurring evidence of the infilling of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts was the manifestation of speaking in other tongues. In fact, “at the turn of the twentieth century, the Holy Spirit was poured out anew upon believers at Camp Creek, North Carolina; in Topeka, Kansas; at Azusa

Street; and in various places around the world. This latter rain outpouring was accompanied by speaking in other tongues [in every instance]. However, the primary emphasis by these early Pentecostals was not the presence of glossalalia; instead, those receiving this experience were convinced of a special spiritual breakthrough meant to empower them to fulfill a special purpose in the last days.³² Modern Pentecost was, they believed, “a ‘latter rain’ movement intended to prepare the church for the second coming of Christ.”³³ “What was important to [these early Pentecostals] was their experience of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives and the conviction that the Holy Spirit was repeating what He had done in the apostolic Church.”³⁴ In particular as it relates to the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, it is historically known that “three men [began] praying for the spiritual heritage of their Baptist church between 1884 and 1886.”³⁵ (Unfortunately, “their spiritual passion was not shared by many others in their mountain community on the border of North Carolina and Tennessee.”³⁶) “In late 1886, the three met at [the] Barney Creek Meetinghouse with a few neighbors who did share their eagerness for spiritual renewal.”³⁷ One of the three, a preacher named R. G. Spurling Jr. “urged [the seekers] to form a Christian union that would reassert the authority of the Scriptures, foster Christian unity in the community, and restore the spiritual life of primitive Christianity.”³⁸ The church began as a small following of enthusiastic believers which “was distinguished more by its passion for a deeper spiritual walk with God than by a specific doctrine or practice.”³⁹ Soon, as these three men and their small following met regularly to seek the Holy Spirit (or ‘tarry’ as many referred to it,) “revival broke out at Shearer Schoolhouse near Camp Creek, NC.”⁴⁰ During this revival, “worshippers expressed the felt presence of God through weeping, shouting, and

unusual forms of spiritual ecstasy.”⁴¹ “Many who had ‘prayed through’ to the sanctification experience at Camp Creek spoke in ‘other tongues’ and were themselves perplexed by the strange phenomenon they had experienced.”⁴² It was inevitable that “the community’s curiosity to this ‘tongues experience’ and to the emotionalism of the meeting soon turned negative and violent. Before the revival ended, several homes had been pillaged and burned. Even religious leaders in the community as well as the local sheriff took part in the persecution of the small band of believers.”⁴³ “In 1902, [this small band of Christians] reorganized under the name ‘the Holiness Church at Camp Creek.’”⁴⁴ At their Second General Assembly the 1907, “the churches officially changed their name to the Church of God.”⁴⁵

An important key issue about this newly formed denomination was the belief “in speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance and that it is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ It was also believed that “miraculous signs should follow true believers.”⁴⁷ Further, it was believed that “all believers were accorded equal spiritual opportunities. Each could receive the blessings and grace of God that were believed to come through the experiences of conversion, sanctification, and the baptism by the Holy Ghost.”⁴⁸

While each of these beliefs is active in the contemporary Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), it should be noted that the primary emphasis is not on the manifestations in general nor on speaking in tongues in specific. Instead, at both the turn of the twentieth century and present, “the primary purpose of Pentecost [is] to proclaim the Gospel.”⁴⁹ Further, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee) believes “that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church in these latter times has been for the

purpose of preparing the church for the soon return of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰ With such an important task at hand, it is amazing that the requirements for receiving such a gift are so few. They include a belief in the Biblical promise of the Holy Spirit, the reception of a clean heart⁵¹ through faith in Jesus Christ, and the exercise of faith to receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Summary and Conclusion

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit is considered a “cardinal doctrine” for all realms of the Pentecostal church. However, this baptism is not understood among the Pentecostal ranks as a simple ability to speak with other tongues or rare and special gifting appointed only for a select few; instead it is viewed as an endowment with power to communicate a life-changing Savior to the entire world. It is not reserved for the few but is instead available to whosoever is willing to ask, to receive, and to respond. Finally, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is essential equipment needed to accomplish the last days mandate of letting the whole world know of Jesus Christ and His salvation. It is desired that every Christian comes to a clearer and more receptive understanding of this once divisive doctrine and further that there should be a unity of the faith regarding this exciting dimension of Biblical doctrine.

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Endnotes

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⁶ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p 25.

⁷ *Thayer's Greek Definitions*.

⁸ Acts 17:6 NASV.

⁹ Arrington, p. 31.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 33

¹¹ Ibid, p. 35

¹² Sims, p. 26.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Hebrews 9:14 NASV.

¹⁸ Romans 8:11 NASV.

¹⁹ Pinnock, p. 21-22.

²⁰ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 498.

²¹ Charles W Conn, *Like A Mighty Army Moves the Church of God*, (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 311.

²² Sims, p. 27.

²³ Conn, p. 311.

²⁴ Charles W Conn, *Like A Mighty Army Moves the Church of God*, (Cleveland, TN: Church of God Publishing House, 1955), p. 311.

²⁵ John A Sims, *Our Pentecostal Heritage: Reclaiming the Priority of the Holy Spirit*, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1995), p. 45.

²⁶ Matthew 1:18, 20, Luke 1:35 NASV.

²⁷ Sims, pp. 19-20.

²⁸ French L. Arrington, *Christian Doctrine, A Pentecostal Perspective, Volume three*, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1994), p. 27.

²⁹ Ibid, p.43.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 25

³¹ Ibid, p. 23-24.

³² Sims, p. 23.

³³ Ibid, p. 23.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 15.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 13.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, p. 14.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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⁴⁷ Mickey Crews, *The Church of God: A Social History*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), p. 69.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.11.

⁴⁹ John A Sims, *Our Pentecostal Heritage: Reclaiming the Priority of the Holy Spirit*, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1995), p.37.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 21.

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