

# What Is Spirit Baptism?

By Pastor David C. Forsyth

There are seven occurrences in the NT where Spirit baptism is referred to (Matt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16; Jn. 1:33; Acts 1:5, 11:16; I Cor. 12:13), six of which relate to the difference between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ. In examining Luke 3:16 as a representative of those passages it is apparent that the baptism of Christ is in some way superior to that of John. John was the last of the OT prophets whose role was that of a herald who prepared the way for the coming king (Matt. 3:1-12, 11:1-13; Jn. 1:19-23). His water baptism was a symbol of the inward repentance that the Jewish nation must undergo in preparation for the arrival of their king.

In Luke 3:16 John announces that Christ will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, which is a reference to a future baptism that initially took place at Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4). In the Scriptures the word fire is typically indicative of God's judgment. We conclude that in this passage fire is also a reference to the judgment which the Messiah will bring to all who refuse Him (cf. Lk. 3:17) and is not a separate act of baptism. Thus the baptism of Christ is a single baptism that divides humanity into those who are His own and those who are not.<sup>1</sup>

The other remaining reference to Spirit baptism occurs in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and is crucial to understanding our position in Christ during this dispensation of the Church.

*"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slave or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."* (I Cor. 12:13 – NASB)

In this verse Paul proclaims the truth that all believers (notice that he includes himself) were placed into the body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This body of Christ has no ethnic or cultural boundaries (Gal. 3:26-28) and was formed at Pentecost (Acts 2) as symbolized by the diversity of languages that were spoken. The baptism of the Spirit that occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) was repeated three more times (Acts 8, 10 & 19) as the expansion of the church, in fulfillment of Jesus' instructions in Acts 1:8, was carried out.

## When Does Spirit Baptism Occur?

Nowhere does the New Testament either command us to seek the baptism of the Spirit, or give evidence that anyone ever did. The only requirement for salvation is to believe (Ro. 10:9-13). Thus we conclude that being placed into the body of Christ must occur at the moment of our salvation. The alternative would be to have some Christians as part of the

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<sup>1</sup> Block, Darrell L., *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament Lk. 1-9:50*. Baker: Grand Rapids, 1994, pg. 323.

body of Christ and some who were not – a condition that is in complete contradiction to the message of the NT and especially the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 4:4).

### **Observations and Conclusions**

- The Baptism of the Spirit is the activity of Christ (cf. Lk 3:16; I Cor. 12:18) whereby He places us into His body via the agency of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13). This event establishes the unity of the Church (Eph. 4:3-4) and is represented by water baptism.
- The Baptism of the Spirit brings the Christian into the mysterious unity with Christ that is referred to in the Scriptures as being “in Christ,” and is the basis of our spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3).
- The Baptism of the Spirit brings the Christian into identification with Christ in his death and resurrection and is the means for both our redemption and our victory over sin (Ro. 6:2-11; II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:12).
- The Baptism of the Spirit does not and indeed can not guarantee a certain level of Christian maturity or holiness. This conclusion is based upon the fact that the Christians in Corinth had been baptized in the Spirit (I Cor. 12:13) yet many of them were acting in a fleshly or carnal manner (I Cor. 3:1-4).
- According to I Corinthians 12:29-30 no one single spiritual gift was held by all the believers, thus Spirit-baptism can not be uniformly equated with the reception of any particular gift such as speaking in tongues.

### **A Final Thought**

The notion that the Baptism of the Spirit is a second work of grace that empowers people to greater holiness and Christian service is not only without Biblical support but is potentially destructive. It divides the Christian community into the spiritual haves and have-nots and hinders the work of sanctification in the life of the Believer. As Paul clearly writes in I Cor. 12:13, Christ immerses or plunges believers into His body causing them, via the agency of the Holy Spirit, to become one with Him. This unity is the basis of both our justification and our sanctification. To God be the Glory!

We trust that this short study has been profitable for you and contributes to your obedient walk of faith. *Psalms 119:105*

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For further study we recommend the following:

1. Major Bible Themes – Lewis Sperry Chafer
2. The Moody Handbook of Theology – Paul Enns
3. The Silent Shepherd – John MacArthur
4. The Mystery of the Holy Spirit – R C Sproul
5. The Holy Spirit – John Walvoord
6. The Holy Spirit – Charles Ryrie
7. Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine – H. Wayne House