

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

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**Speaker:** Mr. David Anderson

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## The Person and Role of the Holy Spirit: The Baptism of the Spirit

In 2000 I attended a Christian conference during which I heard a questioner with a strong Geordie accent. So I immediately introduced myself as being a fellow-Geordie, from Newcastle upon Tyne. It wasn't long before the "which church do you go to?" question popped up. I said I belonged to a certain group of believers who were affiliated to a chapel fellowship in the market place of a village in her vicinity. "So you don't believe in the baptism of the Spirit either" was the accusing retort! "Yes, I most certainly do! But obviously not what you think it is", I chuckled. And that was the end of our conversation! She wouldn't discuss the subject with me any further. So I plead with you to listen carefully, and without any prejudices or preconceived ideas, to what I have found from Scripture about this controversial subject.

### What do the Scriptures teach?

Let's start, as with all issues, by asking "But what does the Scripture say?" (Galatians 4:30, English Standard Version). After listing in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 the variety of spiritual gifts evident in the Christian church, Paul writes: "All these [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills. For just as the [human] body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many", verses 11-14 (English Standard Version). So the first thing to say about the baptism of the Spirit is that it is the means by which all believers are formed into the Church, here called the Body of Christ. The second point is that it was brought about by the sovereign action of the Spirit of God, who empowered the Church to act together as a whole - just like the human body where: "God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose ... there are many parts, yet one body", verses 18 and 20 (English Standard Version).

### Historical review

But I'd like to take a step back into the Gospels to establish where and when the baptism of the Spirit was first introduced. It was during the ministry of John the Baptist. John's preaching had aroused the expectations of the Jews. They thought that he might be their Messiah, even questioning it within their hearts. But John put the record straight. He said: "I baptise you with water, but He who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, to clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire", Luke 3:16-17 (English Standard Version). God had given John the Baptist a special sign so that he would recognise the Christ when He appeared. John made this clear in his witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on Him. I myself did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptise with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptises with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God", John 1:32-34 (English Standard Version). Later on in his Gospel, John the Evangelist explained that the Spirit would be given after Jesus had been glorified, John 7:39. Then during the Upper Room Discourse, the Lord Himself confirmed that His going back to God would result in the Father sending the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would dwell with the disciples and who would also be in them, 14:16-17 and 26 with 16:7 and 13. The Spirit would usher in an entirely new era for them, which we can now call 'the Spirit's day', derived from the term "that day" in John 14:20; 16:23 and 26.

During the forty-day period after His resurrection and before His ascension, the Lord Jesus prepared His disciples for life without Him on earth. He promised they would be endued with power from on high, Luke 24:49. Notice that He called this the baptism of the Spirit in Acts 1:3-5 (English Standard Version): "He presented Himself alive to [the disciples] after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for **the promise of the Father**, which, He said, 'you heard from Me; for John baptized with water, but **you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit** not many days from now". But they were still preoccupied with the fate of their nation: "they asked Him, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?'" Acts 1:6 (English Standard Version). He responded: "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth", Acts 1:7-8 (English Standard Version). Soon afterwards He ascended into heaven, when a cloud took Him

out of their sight, verse 9. They returned from Bethany on the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem in expectation and with great joy, Luke 24:52-53 and Acts 1:12-14.

These last words of the Lord Jesus, both before His death and before His ascension, definitely show that the baptism of the Spirit occurred on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2:1-4 gives the historical details of what happened that day. In obedience to the Lord's command to remain in Jerusalem, the whole group of 120 disciples was together in a house, when suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind and filled the entire place. Divided tongues as of fire appeared and rested on each one of them. At that point each was filled with the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to speak in other tongues. Soon a crowd of inquisitive festive Jews gathered to see and hear what was happening. In his preaching to the assembled crowd, Peter explained that they had witnessed something which they knew from the prophet Joel, Joel 2:28, would happen to the restored nation of Israel in the future. About those last days, God had declared: "that [then] I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams", verse 17 Peter emphasised that the amazing event they had just witnessed was from the Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had so recently crucified, verse 23. It was He, the exalted Lord and Christ, who had "poured out" the Holy Spirit. God had exalted Christ to His right hand, verse 32. And being there, Christ had received the promised Holy Spirit from His Father, verse 33. The good news for the crowd that day was that they, too, could receive the Spirit by faith: "Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise [of the Holy Spirit] is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself'", verses 38-39.

However, all of the converts on the day of Pentecost were Jews, either from the locality of Jerusalem and Judea, or from the Dispersion and who were visiting Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. There were no Gentile converts. It was not until Peter preached in Cornelius' house at Caesarea, as we read in Acts 10, that any Gentiles became Christians. That preaching took place a few years after Pentecost. But the result was exactly the same as at Pentecost: "While Peter [preached], the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the [Jewish] believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out** even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, 'Can anyone withhold water for baptising these people, who have received the Holy Spirit **just as we have**?' And he commanded them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ", Acts 10:44-48 (English Standard Version). Most importantly, Peter confirmed this pouring out of the Spirit was equivalent to Pentecost when he recounted his experiences with respect to the whole Cornelius incident to the church back in Jerusalem. He vigorously defended his action of taking the Gospel to Gentiles. He said that when he began to speak the message of salvation to them, the Holy Spirit: "'fell on them **just as on us** at the beginning [i.e. on the day of Pentecost]. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John baptised with water, but you will be **baptised with the Holy Spirit**.'" If then God gave the **same Spirit** to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?' When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life'", Acts 11:15-18 (English Standard Version).

### Doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit

There is no doubt then from the Acts narrative, that the two occasions, of Pentecost and at Caesarea, on which the Spirit was poured out, constitute what Paul calls the "baptism of the Spirit" in 1 Corinthians 12:13. That is why Paul includes Gentiles as well as Jews in his statement: "For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free - and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many" (New King James Version). Having gone through the Acts account, I can now paraphrase this text: "By one Spirit all believers were baptised into one corporate body. For Jewish believers this occurred on the day of Pentecost; and for Gentile believers it happened when Peter preached in Cornelius' house at Caesarea. But all believers, whether then or now, individually partake or drink of the one same Spirit and so have been incorporated into the church of God". In New Testament times, the world was divided into Jews and all other peoples, known to the Jews as Gentiles. Within those classifications, individuals were either slaves or freemen. But, on a positive note, the church of God was formed of believers from all nations, whether Jews or Gentiles by birth; and people from all stations in life, whether slaves or freemen. All were living united to each other by the Spirit. All distinctions and differences were removed by the baptism of the Spirit. We conclude from this key verse, 1 Corinthians 12:13 that the baptism of the Spirit was a corporeal or corporal event; and that it was by this event the church was brought into being. Each believer became interrelated to the other and together they composed a single unit, the church. Paul explains this in verse 12: "For just as the [human] body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (English Standard Version). The JN Darby Translation ends verse 12 with the phrase "so also is the Christ". In reality, the church is Christ as Head with believers making up His body. Not only are they livingly attached to each other, they are also livingly attached to their Head in heaven by the Spirit, see Ephesians 4:15 and Colossians 1:18.

Someone may raise the question: “what about believers since those initial days of the church and today’s Christians?” The answer is that once the early church was formally established, a person who believes the Gospel receives the gift of the Holy Spirit immediately upon believing. Paul teaches this in Ephesians 1:13 (English Standard Version): “In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”; and again in Galatians 3:14 (English Standard Version): “we [received] the promised Spirit through faith”. In these two verses the ‘sealing of the Spirit’ and ‘receiving of the Spirit’ are equivalent to ‘being made to drink of the Spirit’ in 1 Corinthians 12:13. 1 Corinthians 12:13 also means that all believers are equal - all have drunk of, or imbibed, that one Spirit. As Paul states in Galatians 3:28 (English Standard Version): “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. However, each individual believer is a distinct member of the body of Christ, just as in the human body there are different parts: “For the body does not consist of one member but of many”, 1 Corinthians 12:14 (English Standard Version). And, just as in the human body every member has an essential function, the same is true of the body of Christ: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”, 1 Corinthians 12:27.

The baptism of the Spirit then is a historical corporeal or corporal truth which Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 12. It teaches that everything concerning the constitution of the church is spiritual in nature, that is, originating from the Holy Spirit. Therefore, its activities are to be directed by Him. By being baptised into the Spirit, all natural distinctions between believers have been done away, submerged by the Spirit. Therefore, the church is not a human organisation. Neither does it depend on man’s natural abilities or gifts or qualifications to function. Everything in church should be by the activity and enabling of the Holy Spirit. Verses 4-7 form a key section of the chapter: “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good [of the church]”. It helps to see that Paul expanded upon these statements.

- “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” is explained in verses 7-11. In summary they mean that a variety of capabilities to serve are given by the gracious ministry of the Spirit.
- “There are varieties of service, but the same Lord” is explained in verses 12-27. These verses show that there are many forms of service under the headship of Christ.
- “There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who is working” is explained in verses 28-31.

This last statement is important, that literal translation being, “there are different workings but the same God who is working”. God’s empowering for effective service, His working, is stated in 3 other ways throughout the chapter:

- First of all, verse 18 says that: “God arranged the members in the body [of Christ], each one of them, as He chose”. He sovereignly did this by the baptism of the Spirit as we learnt from verses 11-14. The practical effect is that every member is dependent upon every other member in the church. Verses 15-21 elaborate on the impossibility of self-sufficiency for the Christian believer - the foot, ear, eye, etc. cannot opt out of the body!
- Secondly, verse 24 says that: “God has so composed the [human] body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it”. Primarily, this verse speaks of how God has constituted the human body so that each part is vital for the functioning of the body as a whole. What naturally happens in the human body practically should happen in the church. Verses 25-26 state what the practice of the church should be in this respect: “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together”. Whilst it is always good that care and concern is shown for the worldwide or global church, Paul insists it should be an evident feature of the local church. In verse 27 he emphatically and directly applies what he is saying to the Corinthian church: “Now you [Corinthians] are the body of Christ and individually members of it”.
- Thirdly, verse 28 says that: “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues”. We can readily see that in this verse Paul means the total church rather than the global or local church. Here he is referring back to verses 12-13 and how God set up the entire church by the baptism of the Spirit. Ephesians 2:20-22 teaches this total church, which consists of all believers from Pentecost to the Rapture, is built on the foundations of apostles and prophets and is continually growing into a temple, which will ultimately be the eternal dwelling place of God through the Spirit.

**Practical Applications**

I finish today with some of the practical consequences of the baptism of the Spirit. I have already mentioned the most important one. It is that genuine concern and care for each member must be seen in my own local church. We can so easily be diverted into questioning what gifts are evident in our churches and how they compare with other churches that are known to us! But God has placed me in a local Christian fellowship. To paraphrase verse 27: “your local church is to be a microcosm, or miniature expression, of the whole body of Christ. You are all individually interdependent members of it”. Does my church set-up allow for the Spirit of God to work freely and to direct all our activities as He wills? What gifts have I received from the Spirit? Verses 29-30 make the obvious point that there is diversity as well as unity of the body of Christ, which means we will not all exhibit the same gifts of the Spirit! In this respect, verse 8 lists things to say in church by the Spirit: “to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit”; and verses 9-10 list things which can only be done by the Spirit: “to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues”. But the chapter finishes with a challenging directive to: “earnestly desire the higher gifts”. Verse 31 ends with Paul saying that there is “a still more excellent way”. Supremely, it’s the way of love which is to be manifested in church. After describing its features in chapter 13, he returns to its practice in the local church by saying: “Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy”, 14:1. Challenging issues for all of us!

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