

'BAPTIZED BY THE SPIRIT'-- WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

Theme: In considering 'the baptism of the Spirit', our understanding must be guided by Scripture.

Let's begin this lesson by stating a principle. It's an important one that we must always be careful to follow in understanding the doctrines of the Bible. It's one that, if we are careful to keep in mind, will save us a great deal of misunderstanding and frustration. And that is that we must make sure to allow the Bible to be the interpreter of our experience rather than allowing our experience to be the interpreter of the Bible. This principle is vital to follow in studying what the Bible tells us about the Holy Spirit.

With today's lesson, we begin to consider the Spirit's ministry of 'baptizing' the believer. It's a subject over which many sincere believers disagree; and that disagreement grows, it seems, from out of interpreting the Bible's teaching on the basis of perceived experiences rather than the other way around.

There are various forms that this difference of opinion has taken; but it can basically be summed up this way: Is the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" either (1) a work that He always performs for all believers "positionally" at the time of salvation, or (2) an event that each individual believer should seek from the Holy Spirit "experientially" some time after salvation? The position of this study is toward the first option. But it needs to be said that the second option—sometimes called 'the second blessing view'—has been held to and taught by several very reliable and trustworthy Bible teachers (such as R.A. Torrey, D.L. Moody and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones). It's a position typically held by Pentecostal Christians.

This is an "in the family" discussion between genuine believers—all of whom love the Lord Jesus Christ, and all of whom esteem the Bible, and all of whom desire the fullness of the Holy Spirit for all who profess the name of Christ. But a faithfulness to the authority of Scripture—as a matter of first order—requires that we be governed by what the Bible itself means by "the baptism of the Holy Spirit".

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With that in mind, let's begin then by answering the question:

I. WHAT IS THE 'SECOND BLESSING' VIEW OF THE SPIRIT'S BAPTISM?

A. R.A. Torrey—a key proponent of the 'second blessing' view—pointed to such passages as Matthew 3:11, Acts 1:5 and 2:3-4 for the idea that 'the baptism of the Spirit began at Pentecost.¹ In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist spoke of Christ; saying,

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11)²

It's pretty clear that John, in this verse, is speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit at

Pentecost. This is confirmed to us by what it says in Acts 1:5, where the Lord Jesus spoke to His apostles about ‘the Promise of the Father’;

“... for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5).

As we know from Acts 2, this 'not many days from now' event was, indeed, the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. But Dr. Torrey went on to point to Acts 10-11 (that is, to the story of the Roman converts in the household of Cornelius) to show that the experience of Pentecost can be repeated in the life of the believer *after* Pentecost. In explaining his position, his three main points are (1) that “the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a definite experience of which one may and ought to know whether he has received it or not” (see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4); (2) that it “is an operation of the Holy Spirit distinct from and additional to His regenerating work” (Acts 1:5; 8:14-17); and (3) that it is “always connected with, and primarily for the purpose of testimony and service” (Acts 1:5, 8; 1 Corinthians 12).³

- B. Very few of those who hold to this ‘second-blessing’ viewpoint of the baptism of the Spirit would suggest that it was something that was essential for salvation (i.e. that unless you have experienced the definite 'second-blessing' baptism of the Spirit, you are not saved). But they would nevertheless emphasize that this experience is essential for vital Christian living. The Reformed theologian Anthony Hoekema—who was *not* an advocate of this position—explained the ‘second-blessing’ view with these words:

“... though the Spirit regenerates a man and enables him to repent and believe in Christ at the time of conversion, the Spirit does not come into the believer’s heart as a Person who fills his life completely and who now dispenses the full complement of His gifts until the time of the Spirit-baptism (a shorter way of saying, ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’), which is an experience distinct from and usually subsequent to conversion. In other words, though the Spirit touches a person’s life at the time of conversion, He does not come into one’s life in His totality until the time of the Spirit-baptism. In Neo-Pentecostal circles, one is not considered to have available to him the full power of the Holy Spirit until he has experienced Spirit-baptism; hence all Christians are urged to seek such a Spirit-baptism.”³

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So then; that’s the teaching of those who hold to the ‘second-blessing’ view of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Many who hold to this view sincerely testify to the enriching experience they have had as a result of receiving this 'second-blessing baptism' experience of the Holy Spirit; and they also speak of the benefits that this experience has had in their lives and ministry. Their sincerity should not to be doubted.

But this leads us to ask ...

II. HOW DOES THE BIBLE ACTUALLY SPEAK OF “BAPTISM” IN THE SPIRIT?

- A. As we have stressed before, it must always be the Scriptures—and not a particular experience itself—that must be our guide in understanding that experience. Various

Scripture passages do indeed speak of ‘the baptism in the Spirit’. But an important way to differentiate between those passages is to distinguish some as being “descriptive” (that is, passages that merely report the occurrence of something or some kind of event), and those that are “instructive” or “theological” (that is, passages that specifically explain or interpret the nature or purpose of something or some kind of event).

- B. There are four instances in the Gospels in which some form of the expression “to be baptized in the Spirit” occurs (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; and John 1:33—all of these being the report of John the Baptist concerning the coming ministry of Jesus); and another is found in Acts 1:5 (containing Jesus’ promise to the apostles that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit ‘not many days from now’). These five references describe the event of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; which was promised in Joel 2:28-29 and was fulfilled in Acts 2:16-21. Another “baptism in the Spirit” is described in Acts 11:15-16 in the household of Cornelius (a Gentile). But as Peter described this event, he said, “Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 11:16; a clear reference to Pentecost). According to Peter’s words, the event in the house of Cornelius was *not* being viewed by him as an entirely different “second Pentecost”, but rather as an extension of the first and only Pentecost; and this is further shown by the fact that Peter then told his fellow Jewish believers,

“If therefore God gave them [that is, the Gentiles] the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17).

These passages, then, cannot be said to be speaking of a ‘second-blessing’ kind of baptism. Instead, they all are properly understood as only ‘descriptive’ of the “baptism of the Spirit” as the one-time event of Pentecost; at which time the church was born. The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 first involved the Jews; but the same event was later said to have extended to the Gentiles; so that both Jews and Gentiles would be one church.

- C. There are two New Testament passages that use the word “baptism” in a spiritual sense; and both of them are “instructive” or “theological” in purpose.
1. The first one is 1 Corinthians 12:13; which says,

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

This cannot be referring to a unique post-salvation experience—a kind of subsequent ‘second-blessing’ experience that only some believers may have had and that other believers may not have had. And that’s because in this verse, Paul repeatedly says that “all” to whom he wrote experienced it as a past-tense action by the Holy Spirit of which they were the passive recipients.

2. The second passage is Galatians 3:26-27; which says,

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as

were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:26-27).

Note that this is describing a positional reality—a theological truth that applies to all believers—rather than an experience that some may or may not have felt. It is presented as being universal in nature—that is, applicable to “all” who are “sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”; regardless of any ‘felt experience’ that they may or may not have had.

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Phew! That’s quite a bit! Hopefully, though, it is helping us to define our term a little more clearly.

But we’re far from finished with this subject. All we have done so far is to describe the ‘second-blessing’ view; and to show why (respectfully), we cannot see it as supported by the teaching of Scriptures that speak of the baptism of the Spirit. In our next lesson, we need to talk further about the “positional” view of baptism in the Spirit.

But in conclusion, it seems wise to affirm the reality of the kind of experience that R.A. Torrey described at the beginning of our study (see I.A.). He did, in some respects, describe something genuine and real; but we simply disagree with how he defined it. It seems better to call it (as we will show later) a remarkable “filling” of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) rather than the “baptism” of the Spirit. This way we will be able to talk about it as a genuine, biblically defensible, individual, necessarily-repeatable experience from the Holy Spirit (“filling”); but we will thus not end up confusing it with passages that really describe a one-time-only, non-experiential, positional work of the Holy Spirit (“baptism”).

And if we see things carefully in that way, then—as someone once said—it becomes very desirable to have a *true* 'second blessing' of the Holy Spirit ... and a third ... and a fourth ... and a fifth ... and ...

¹All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

²R.A. Torrey, *The Person and Work of The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), p. 171.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 172-9.

⁴Anthony A. Hoekema, *Holy Spirit Baptism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), pp. 10-11.