

Spirit Baptism & Seeking Gifts

1 Corinthians, Vol. 25

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1 Corinthians 12:13 & 31

Three portions of this chapter cry out for more attention. One is cryptic, and the other two are often misunderstood and/or misapplied. The first of our three segments for tonight is 12:1-3: **False claims to spiritual gifts.**

1 Corinthians 12:1–3: *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*

It must have been shocking to the Christians in Corinth that some among them were actually doing things which were the very same things pagans do in their worship. Some Corinthian Christians were equating unusual spiritual experiences accompanying spiritual gifts with similar experiences they had before becoming Christians. Some of these things had been carried over into the life of the church, so that sometimes **demonic activity** was **confused** with the work of the Holy Spirit in the church.

Paul gave a two-fold test for distinguishing between demonic activity and the work of the Holy Spirit through spiritual gifts. The first part of the test is negative, the second is positive.

1. **The negative test:** *"No one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed.'"* **Accursed** is the Greek word *anathema*, which means "dedicated to God for the purpose of destruction." It's impossible to be certain of a historical circumstance in which these words would have been heard and approved in the Corinthian church, but it must have occurred in order for Paul to mention it. This raises several questions:

Question: What person made such a statement? To whom does this test apply?

Answer:

Question: Where was the statement made?

Answer:

Question: What was the condition of the person at the time of saying "Jesus is accursed?"

Answer:

Question: How could such a thing be said of Jesus? Where could this have come from?

Answer: It might involve Deuteronomy 21:23.

Question: How could such a statement have been tolerated and even approved by anyone in the church?

Answer: It might be that early forms of the heresy known as Gnosticism may have been present in Corinth.

2. The positive test: *"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."* This is full confession of the Lordship of Jesus, including declaring your allegiance to Him.

It is only when the correct view of the doctrine of Christ is intended that a person can say *Jesus is Lord* and we can be certain that the person who says it truly belongs to Him and is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Spirit Baptism

1 Corinthians 12:13 mentions what is often referred to as ***Spirit Baptism***. This meaning of this term is a matter of controversy because of several ways it is misrepresented, mainly within the modern Charismatic Movement. Paul included himself and all the Christians in Corinth when he described this act of God whereby all believers become members of the body of Christ at the moment of true faith.

Prediction And Fulfillment

Baptism in this case has no direct connection to water baptism. The Greek words *baptizo* (verb) and *baptisma* (noun) literally mean ***immerse*** and ***immersion***. They can be used for actual baptism by immersion in water, or metaphorically to describe something else (as in 12:13).

Already in 1 Corinthians we've seen this word used for both water baptism and as a metaphor. Christian baptism was introduced at the very beginning of this church. This is

one of the things that united Jewish believers and Gentile believers by participating in the same symbol of salvation.

Acts 18:8: Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized.

Paul referred to water baptism when he was confronting the Corinthians for their divisions based on following personalities.

*1 Corinthians 1:13–16: Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you **baptized** in the name of Paul? I thank God that I **baptized** none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were **baptized** in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I **baptized** any other.*

We've also seen Paul use the word **baptize** as a metaphor for being closely identified with something.

1 Corinthians 10:1–2: For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

That describes Israel's solidarity and oneness with Moses. They were inextricably identified with him.

Rather than water baptism, this use speaks of the fulfillment of both an Old Testament and New Testament idea:

Numbers 11:29: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

Isaiah 32:15 looks forward to the coming of the Holy Spirit to be "poured out upon us from on high."

Isaiah 44:3: God says "I will pour out My Spirit on your offspring."

Joel 2:28-29: God says "I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind."

Matthew 3:11: John the Baptist says "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."

John 7:39: (Referring to Jesus) "But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was

not yet glorified."

John 14:16-17: *"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you."*

Acts 1:5: *"John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

The fulfillment of all these promises came on the day of Pentecost, and then Peter gave an explanation of the phenomena people saw when the Holy Spirit arrived in His new ministry in believers. Peter proclaimed (Acts 2:15-21) the arrival of the predicted outpouring of the Spirit by referring to Joel's prophecy and calling it *"the promise of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:33) and *"the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38).

It is the result of this "pouring out" of the Holy Spirit that a person becomes a member of the body of Christ. That is the truth stated in 1 Corinthians 12:13. The baptism in this verse is the act by which a believer is placed into the body of Christ. Christ is the baptizer in a remote sense, but the Spirit is the agent of baptism as stated here.

When And Why It Was Delayed

This was not a once-for-all event, limited only to the day of Pentecost. It also occurred when some *Samaritans* came to faith (Acts 8:16), when *Gentiles* first came to faith as a group in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-45, 11:15-16) and with some *former disciples of John the Baptist* (Acts 19:6).

Since then, this act is repeated every time a person repents and places his or her faith in Christ. The miraculous phenomena of speaking in tongues at the moment of the coming of the Holy Spirit to a new situation was limited to the four occurrences listed above.

It is important to observe that this Spirit baptism does not occur at a time subsequent to salvation, and it is not the same as the filling of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

There are only three times when the baptism of the Holy Spirit was delayed until some time after people had believed: The original group in Acts 2, who were specifically told by the Lord to wait until the Holy Spirit came, the Samaritan believers in Acts 8, and the group in Cornelius' household in Acts 10 and 11.

In the latter two cases, there is a clear reason for the delay: The coming of the Spirit was delayed until apostles were present to witness the event and verify that it was the same thing that had happened to the original Jewish believers. If it had not occurred that way, the body of Christ would likely have been immediately fractured into Jewish believers, Samaritan believers, and Gentile believers.

The case in Acts 19 is different. Those people were not believers in Jesus Christ until the gospel was preached to them. They knew only of John the Baptist until Paul arrived and preached the gospel to them. When they heard the gospel, they believed immediately and received the Holy Spirit.

Filling And Baptism Are Different Things

The filling of the Spirit is a matter of the Holy Spirit having control over the life of a Christian, and is the result of yielding completely to the Spirit and the word of God (Ephesians 5:18, Colossians 3:16). Every Christian has been baptized by the Spirit into the Body (1 Corinthians 12:13) but being filled with the Spirit requires the choice to submit.

The only case in which the filling of the Spirit took place in direct connection with Spirit baptism is on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Throughout the rest of Acts and throughout the epistles, the filling of the Holy Spirit is described apart from the moment of initial baptism and indwelling.

Spirit Baptism And Tongues

Speaking in tongues was never an essential part of Spirit baptism, nor did it always happen in conjunction with Spirit baptism. Speaking in tongues occasionally accompanied Spirit baptism in the period recorded in Acts, but it was never normal even in the first century. Those who claim that speaking in tongues is a necessary sign of receiving the Holy Spirit are simply wrong, and they misrepresent Scripture.

1 Corinthians 12:13 says that ***all Christians are baptized into one body***, and 12:30 says that ***not all speak in tongues***. That is abundantly clear!

There are only three instances in Acts in which tongues is directly connected with the outpouring of the Spirit. It is a serious flaw of interpretation to say that those three historical events define the doctrinal truth about tongues and Spirit baptism when the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12 is so clear.

Baptism by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13) needs no outward verification, and in almost all instances it comes with no outward sign. It was, and is, an invisible action whereby the Spirit of God quietly does His work to place a new believer into the body of Christ. Once a person was made part of the body of Christ by Spirit baptism, he or she may or may not have exercised the gift of tongues during the period of the early church in which the gift operated.

Receiving The Holy Spirit

The second half of 12:13 states that at the same moment the Holy Spirit baptizes a person into the body of Christ, the Spirit also takes up residence within that person. This is the concept of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The metaphor of "drinking" is a vivid word picture to describe the fact that the Holy Spirit becomes an important presence and power in the life of a Christian at the moment of salvation. Every Christian therefore possesses the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9) just as Jesus promised (John 14:17). It is by the power of the Spirit (Ephesians 3:20-21) that believers can accomplish the will of God.

Romans 8:9: *However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*

John 14:16–17: *"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. . . ."*

Ephesians 3:20–21: *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

1 Corinthians 12:31. This verse is an interpretive battleground. We know it forms the transition from the content of chapter 12 to the content of chapter 13. But what does it mean, and how should it be applied?

1 Corinthians 12:31: *But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.*

We know that the meaning cannot possibly be "Seek to obtain the best spiritual gifts you can." That would contradict everything else in the chapter.

The actual meaning can be either of two possibilities, based on the intended meaning of the Greek word *zeloute*, translated **seek**. This verb can be either in the indicative mood (a direct statement) or the imperative mood (a command). In this kind of Greek verb, it is impossible to tell which is intended because the forms are identical. Context must determine which it is, but in this context it's difficult to know which interpretation is correct. Here are the possibilities which do not contradict the rest of the passage:

1. As an indicative, it is a sarcastic indictment of the Corinthians. The meaning would be: *"You are playing the pseudo-spiritual game of seeking superiority by seeking gifts you believe are superior, and you are seeking them for fleshly reasons. I am going to show you a more excellent way (chapter 13)."*

2. As an imperative, it is a command to the entire church. It is addressed to the assembled body of believers. Taken this way the meaning is "As an assembled church, when you are gathered together, follow the priorities described in verses 28-30. Seek that which edifies the entire body, not that which pleases your fleshly desire to be the center of attention. I am going to show you a more excellent way (chapter 13)."

The form of the word is plural, so it is not proper to interpret it as a command to individuals. It far better fits the context of addressing the whole church.

The tradition of translating *zeloute* as a command has contributed to misunderstanding because many abuse it by making it into a command to seek out certain gifts. Paying attention to the context refutes that interpretation, but it appears better to translate it as an indicative in order to better agree with the rest of chapter 12.

Now you're ready to fully understand "The Love Chapter."