

## THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Christian life from beginning to end is a life dependent upon the Holy Spirit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of our triune God. It is through the illuminating work of the Spirit that we come to see our desperate plight as sinners and it is the Spirit's conviction that leads us to repent of our sin and draws us to place our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior (John 16:8). Spiritual birth awakens us from spiritual death and makes us alive together with Christ (John 3:3-8; Eph 2:5). The Holy Spirit indwells those who have experienced spiritual birth (John 14:16-17) and the body of the believer is said to be a temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 6:19). The indwelling Spirit assures us that we are God's children (Rom 8:16). The Holy Spirit empowers and enables us for godly living and service as well as assuring us of our eternal inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).

A correct knowledge of the Scriptural vocabulary describing the ministry of the Holy Spirit is necessary for a proper understanding of the Spirit's work in our lives, particularly with reference to the "baptism of the Spirit", "being filled with the Spirit", the "fruit of the Spirit", and the "gifts of the Spirit".

### *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit*

This phrase refers to the event whereby a person is regenerated via spiritual birth and as a new creature in Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and inaugurated into the body of Christ. Put simply, to be baptized by the Spirit is to experience conversion, i.e., to become a Christian.

There is confusion amongst some Christians who believe that "baptism of the Spirit" is an event *subsequent* to conversion, often accompanied by certain manifestations (such as speaking in tongues). This erroneous understanding leads some to contend that believers are relegated to lives of spiritual mediocrity if they do not seek and have this "second blessing" that they call "baptism of the Spirit".

The term "baptism of the Holy Spirit" occurs only 7 times in the New Testament. The first four are each of the four gospel writers quoting John the Baptist who declared that Jesus would come to baptize in the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33). A fifth occurrence is in Acts 1:5 where just before His ascension Jesus tells His disciples that they will be baptized with the Holy Spirit shortly. The sixth reference is Peter recounting Jesus' statement in Acts 1:5 (Acts 11:16). These statements of John the Baptist and Jesus are predicting the great outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost that was promised by Old Testament prophets. Subsequent to Pentecost it became the universal experience of all those becoming Christians to be baptized in the Holy Spirit even as Peter announced in his first sermon "...Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you **will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**" (Acts 2:38). It is clear in the book of Acts that the "gift of the Holy Spirit", "the promise of the Spirit", and "the outpouring of the Spirit" were all synonymous with the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5; 2:17; 2:33). The seventh and final reference is I Cor 12:13, "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit*". This is an all encompassing statement by the Apostle Paul describing what is true of all who are in Christ's body: we were baptized by the Spirit into His body. Water baptism is a picture of this spiritual reality and just as water baptism is a once for all initiatory act, so "spirit baptism" is a once for all initiatory act. To be a Christian is to have the Holy Spirit, in fact Paul says if you don't have the Spirit you don't have Christ (Rom 8:9) and that no one can genuinely profess Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit (I Cor 12:3).

**There is not a single instance in the New Testament where believers are commanded to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit”.** It would seem the authors saw no need because their readers, being believers, had already been baptized by the Holy Spirit at their conversion. But, there does appear a different command concerning the Holy Spirit: “to be filled with the Holy Spirit”.

### *The filling of the Spirit*

The Apostle Paul commands believers to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit in Eph 5:18. It is instructive to note that earlier in Eph 1:13 Paul states that when we believed, we were “sealed” with the Holy Spirit. That verb is in the aorist tense meaning it was a one time single act that is completed, not to be repeated. In contrast, “be filled” in 5:18 is in the present tense, i.e., it is to be a repeatable and continuous action. Paul goes on to describe what a spirit filled life looks like in vs. 19-21 (singing and giving thanks to God as well as speaking and being subject to one another). Thus, the appropriate terminology to describe the activity of the Spirit in a Christian’s life *subsequent* to conversion is the language of “filling”. A life of obedience, service, and being conformed to the image of Christ is achieved by continually seeking the Lord and appealing for the fullness of His Spirit in our hearts and minds. Such filling(s) will equip us for particular tasks (Acts 4:8, 31), help us to walk and be led in ways that please Him (Gal 5:16-18), and refrain from quenching or grieving the Spirit (Eph 4:30; I Thess 5:19).

### *The Fruits and Gifts of the Holy Spirit*

The filling of the Holy Spirit is also manifested by the *fruit of the Spirit* produced in the life of a believer (“...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” Gal 5:22-23). These qualities are intended to be evident universally in the lives of all believers and the more we grow and produce these qualities the more Christ-like we become. Every Christian is also given a *spiritual gift or gifts*. Whereas the *fruit* of the Spirit is to be evident in all believers alike, the *gifts* of the spirit are varied and find diversity in their expression. God bestows these gifts according to His sovereign will and purpose (I Cor 12:4-11). The main purpose for spiritual gifts is the building up and edification of fellow believers (I Cor 12:7; I Pt 4:10). It is a marvelous provision from God that He gifts us to serve and minister in ways that surpass our own human capabilities. Some 20 gifts are listed in the New Testament but they are not necessarily an exhaustive list. A believer will ultimately be the most effective in their service for Christ and His Church when they discover their spiritual gift(s). That being said, at times a misdirected zeal results in some Christians putting an exaggerated emphasis on spiritual gifts (especially the so-called “sign gifts”). It would be well to keep in mind that the Corinthian church had been baptized in the spirit at conversion (I Cor 12:13) and had displayed numerous spiritual gifts, and yet, they had grown carnal and fleshly in their behavior, obviously having ceased to be filled with the Spirit (I Cor 3:1-3). A maturing Christian should daily seek to be filled and led by the Spirit of God, “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14).