Baptized in One Spirit

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The Measures of the Spirit

A common interpretation of John 3:34 is that God gives different measures of the Holy Spirit. The last part of the passage reads: “for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” (KJV). The line of reasoning has been that if God does not give the Spirit by measure to Christ he must to others. This has produced a fourfold classification of the measures of the Spirit: the unlimited measure (given to Christ), the baptismal measure (given to the apostles and the household of Cornelius), the miraculous measure (given to some first-century Christians), and the indwelling measure (given to all Christians). The result is to draw a distinction between being baptized in the Holy Spirit (the baptismal measure) and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (the indwelling measure).

It is quite biblical to talk about measures of faith or of Christ’s gift (referring to charismatic gifts and ministries—Rom. 12:3 and Eph. 4:7), but it is not biblical to speak of measures of the Spirit. The words “unto him” in John 3:34 in italics indicate that there are no corresponding words in the Greek original. A literal translation of the phrase would be “for He does not give the Spirit by measure.” The passage says plainly that there is no such thing as “measures of the Spirit.”

Evidence of Acts

Is there then a distinction between being baptized in the Holy Spirit and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit? When we look at the book of Acts, we must answer in the negative. In Acts the expression “be baptized in the Holy Spirit” refers to the same thing as the expression
“receive the Holy Spirit.” In fact, if we take the expressions “be baptized in the Spirit,” “pour out the Spirit,” “the Spirit came on,” “the Spirit fell on,” “promise of the Spirit,” “gift of the Spirit,” “give the Spirit,” “receive the Spirit,” and “be filled with the Spirit,” we find that, with one exception, they all refer to the same events.

This may be shown in several ways. For example, in Acts 1:4, 5, being baptized in the Holy Spirit is roughly equivalent to receiving the promise of the Father. That which the Father had promised was the Holy Spirit. In Luke 24:49 Jesus had told his disciples that he would send the promise of His Father upon them and then they would be clothed with power from on high. In Acts 1:8 Jesus clearly told them that they would receive this power when the Holy Spirit came on them. Thus the promise of the Father is the Holy Spirit. This is further seen in Acts 2:33, where it is said that Jesus received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. Here in the expression “the promise of the Holy Spirit,” the Holy Spirit is what was promised by the Father, rather than being the One who made the promise. This is made clear by the expression “received from the Father.” Thus when Peter says in Acts 2:39, “the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off,” he is referring to the Holy Spirit. This is clearly shown by the “for” which begins verse 39 and indicates that it is an explanation of the preceding verse where Peter had just said, “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” That the Holy Spirit is the gift and not the giver in this verse will be shown shortly. Thus the promised Holy Spirit which was given to the apostles when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit was also to be given to “every one whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39).

That being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the same thing as receiving the Holy Spirit can also be seen by examining the events described with the word “pour out” (Greek ekcheō) as regards the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit, Peter interpreted the events by quoting from Joel 2:28-32. In that passage (found in Acts 2:17-21), God twice says, “I will pour out from my Spirit.” Similarly, Peter says in verse 33 that Jesus “poured out this which you see and hear.” Thus the baptizing in the Spirit and the pouring out from the Spirit refer to the same event. But as Richard Rogers has noted:

This does not make pouring and baptism synonymous words. Pouring is the event from Jesus’ viewpoint. Baptizing is the event from the recipient’s viewpoint. A coin placed in a glass is immersed after water is poured upon it. The pouring is not the immersion. It is the water leaving the source. The immersion is not the pouring.
It is the result, the covering of the coin. So it is here in this case.¹

The same language is used to describe the event which took place in Acts 10 during the conversion of Cornelius and his household. In Acts 10:44, while Peter was preaching, “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word.” This event is described in verse 45 as the gift of the Holy Spirit having been poured out on them. In verse 46 they were said to have received the Holy Spirit. In Acts 11:16 Peter, in later recounting these events at Jerusalem, said that when this happened he remembered the word of the Lord, “you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit.” In the next verse he says, “God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us.” Thus the words “baptized,” “poured out,” “fell on,” “gift,” “gave,” and “receive” are all used to describe this event as regards the Holy Spirit.

Now it is sometimes objected that Peter did not directly say that this falling on the Gentiles of the Holy Spirit was the baptism in the Spirit; rather, he merely said that he remembered Jesus’ words about the apostles being baptized in the Holy Spirit.² While this is true, Peter made it quite clear that he considered the events to be the same thing by using such phrases as “the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15), “God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us” (Acts 11:17), and later at the Jerusalem conference, “giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us” (Acts 15:8). Peter was saying that the words Jesus had spoken about being baptized in the Holy Spirit also applied to the Gentiles.

Having seen that the experience of the household of Cornelius may be described as both being baptized in the Holy Spirit and receiving the Holy Spirit, we need only to look at the expression “gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 10:45. It is obvious from the context that it was the Holy Spirit himself which was poured out on the Gentiles. Thus the phrase “the gift of the Holy Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit. Now when one writer (i.e., Luke) uses the same phrase (i.e., “the gift of the Holy Spirit”) in similar conversion accounts, it is reasonable to expect

that phrase to mean the same thing in both passages. Thus "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2:38 means "receive the gift which is the Holy Spirit." This is both good Greek and good English, as illustrated by the fact that "drink a glass of water" refers to drinking the water. Thus all penitent believers who are baptized are promised the Holy Spirit. This certainly does not mean that they will speak in tongues as Cornelius did, for "speaking in tongues" was a charismatic gift which the Spirit gave. Nowhere is it said that tongues are the sign of receiving the Spirit. Further, not only did the household of Cornelius receive the Holy Spirit as a gift promised to all Christians, but Acts 11:17 records that Peter said, "God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us." In other words, when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit, they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus the expressions "be baptized in the Holy Spirit," "pour out the Holy Spirit," "the Holy Spirit fell on," "the Holy Spirit came on," "gift of the Holy Spirit," "promise of the Holy Spirit," "give the Holy Spirit," and "receive the Holy Spirit" are all used to refer to the same events.

**Filling Not the Same**

One other expression in Acts which is often confused with "be baptized in the Holy Spirit" does not mean the same thing. This expression is "be filled with the Holy Spirit." It is not unusual to hear people talk about the "baptism or infilling of the Holy Spirit" as though these two were the same thing. In reality, however, "being baptized in the Holy Spirit" refers to receiving the Holy Spirit, while "being filled with the Holy Spirit" refers to coming under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The former is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, while the latter may be repeated several times. There are examples in scripture of one receiving the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit at the same time, such as was the case with the apostles on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:4 and apparently with Paul at his conversion in Acts 9:17. But there are also examples of a person being filled with the Spirit at a later time. The book of Acts records at least three occasions on which Peter was filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31). In fact, the Gospel of Luke gives three instances of people being filled with the Spirit who had not ever been baptized in the Spirit (Luke 1:15, 41, 67). While there are cases of the filling with the Holy Spirit being accompanied by prophecy (Luke 1:67) or speaking in tongues (Acts 2:4), there are other cases where it was accompanied by nonmiraculous things, such as boldness (Acts 4:31) and joy (Acts 13:52). In fact, the command for Christians to be continually filled with the Spirit, in
Ephesians 5:18, is accompanied by singing, praying, and being subject to fellow Christians.

**Evidence Other Than from Acts**

There are other passages of scripture which give support to the idea that "be baptized in the Holy Spirit" is a metaphorical way of saying "receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." One is Mark 1:8, where John the Baptist says, "I baptized you in water; but he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit" (ASV). Now it is obvious that the first "you" cannot just be referring to the apostles, or just to the apostles and the household of Cornelius. Now let us take the "you" in the second clause of that verse. As Moses Lard said, "Here is the same word, used by the same speaker, in the same connection, and applied to the same people, without one restricting or limiting circumstance." Is it not obvious that the promise of being baptized in the Holy Spirit was given to many more than just the apostles?

A second passage to consider is Titus 3:5, 6 which says (1) that God saved us through the bath of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit and (2) that God poured out the Spirit upon us. The "us" cannot be limited to the apostles, for it is the same "us" that were saved (verse 5), justified and became heirs in hope of eternal life (verse 7). It is clear that Paul says that all Christians have experienced the bath and outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which, as we have already seen, is the same thing as saying that all Christians have been baptized in the Spirit.

**The One Baptism**

The major objection to this view is that Ephesians 4:5 says that there is only "one baptism." The traditional view within the Restoration movement has been that since there is only one baptism and we know that baptism in water was never done away with, baptism in the Spirit must have ceased before Paul wrote this. I would like to suggest that the scriptures teach that there has always been only one baptism for Christians. There is not a baptism in water and another baptism in the Spirit (even if this last be limited to only a few at the beginning of the church); there is only a baptism in water and in the Spirit; that is, baptism has both a physical and a spiritual aspect.


This agrees with Jesus’ statement in John 3:5, where he joins the two by saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Now if to be born of water refers to baptism in water, then consistency would say that to be born of the Spirit refers to baptism in the Spirit.

In the same way Paul tells the Corinthians in I Corinthians 6:11 that they had themselves bathed (Greek ἀπολύω—the word occurs only here and in Acts 22:16 in connection with Paul’s baptism) “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” The bathing in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be baptism in water (cf. Acts 10:48), while the bathing in the Spirit of our God would be baptism in the Holy Spirit. That baptism should have dual elements is not strange when it is noted that baptism has several objects: into forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), into Christ’s death (Rom. 6:3, 4), into the one body (I Cor. 12:13), and into Christ (Gal. 3:27). That one baptism can be in two elements at the same time is clearly shown by I Corinthians 10:2—“and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”

**Baptized in One Spirit**

But is there a scripture which says plainly that all Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit? As a matter of fact, there is. It is Corinthians 12:13, which says (ASV), “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit.” Many English translations have “by one Spirit,” taking the Greek preposition ἐν to have an instrumental force here. While it is true that ἐν can have an instrumental force (as it evidently does in I Cor. 12:3, 9), there are three reasons for preferring the locative meaning “in” here.⁶

First, the locative meaning “in,” rather than the instrumental meaning “by means of,” is the basic meaning of the word. A word is

usually taken to have its basic meaning unless the context dictates that a secondary usage is implied, and the verse in question taken in context contains nothing which would require en to mean "by means of." J. W. McGarvey, who argued against the locative meaning here, admitted, "If we were to consult the context alone, there would be found nothing in either the grammatical or logical structure of the sentence to forbid the use of in." Second, in all other passages except Acts 10:48 ("And he commanded them to be baptized in [en] the name of Jesus Christ") the use of en with the verb "baptize" (Greek baptizo) indicates the location or element in which one is baptized. Consistency would urge the locative meaning here also. And third, the phrase "baptize in Spirit" occurs here in I Corinthians 12:13 as well as in the other six passages generally agreed to refer to "Holy Spirit baptism" (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16). It would indeed be strange for Paul to use a phrase such as "baptize in Spirit," a phrase so central to Christianity, with a totally different meaning from the other writers.

Thus I Corinthians 12:13 also refers to "Holy Spirit baptism." But it refers to baptism in water, too, as is seen by the parallel between "into one body" and "into Christ" in Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27. Therefore, there is only "one baptism"—a baptism in water and the Spirit.

Some Consequential Considerations

This conclusion is opposed to many of the popularly held ideas on the subject of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Three consequences need to be considered. First, note that Paul says that we all were baptized in the one Spirit, not just the twelve apostles, or just the twelve apostles and the household of Cornelius, or just those who have received a moving experience accompanied by "tongue speaking." All Christians have received this baptism. Second, note that Paul uses the past tense "were baptized." This baptism is a past event in the Christian's life. Nowhere in scripture is a Christian instructed to seek to be baptized in the spirit, but rather he is told that he has already been baptized in the Spirit. When he became a Christian, he was not just baptized in water, but also in the Holy Spirit. And third, note that Christians

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were baptized into one body. This body is the church (see Eph. 1:22, 23). There are not some in the church who have been baptized in the Spirit and some who have only been saved but are seeking to be baptized in the Spirit. All who are in the body of Christ were baptized in one Spirit into it. And thus we can say with Paul, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."