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# BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT— WHAT IS IT?

By

CENTER FOR RESTORATION STUDIES  
ANDRE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

LESLIE G. THOMAS

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Of all human ambitions an open mind, eagerly expectant of new discoveries and ready to remold convictions in the light of added knowledge and dispelled ignorance and misapprehensions, is the noblest, rarest, and the most difficult to achieve.

*James Harvey Robinson.*

John 12:42, 43

Gal. 2:11-14

# Baptism In The Holy Spirit— What Is It?

Acts 1:5; 11:15-17

*Introduction:* It has been said that a subject is half argued when it is clearly stated. Any proposition therefore should be set forth in the clearest possible terms; for unless that is done any discussion that may be had regarding it is liable to be largely verbal. Statements will be misapplied and the controversy protracted, because the persons engaged in it have different ideas of the question involved; and as long as that condition remains, no progress can be made toward a solution of the differences that may exist.

For example, Jesus said to some Jews, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews replied, "Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?" But John who recorded this conversation added this word of explanation: "But he spake of the temple of his body." See John 2:19-21. It is obvious, even to the superficial, that no agreement could ever be reached between Jesus and the Jews until they came to a common understanding as to what was meant by the word *temple*.

Again, any fair-minded person will readily admit that the enemies of Jesus were manifestly unfair to him when they used these words, with a meaning which *they* attached to them—a meaning that was *different* from the meaning which Jesus attached to them—against him at his trial. See Matt. 26:59-61. They had reference to the temple in which people worshipped; but any thoughtful person knows that Jesus never spoke of that temple. To try to make it appear that he did, because of what he did say was utterly unfair to him and wholly untrue to the facts in the case.

It is very easy, by means of a few small alterations, or with a different meaning attached to one's words, to make it appear that he is teaching something different from what was actually taught. People who do things like that nearly always try to state the other person's views in *their* words and with a meaning attached to his words which *they*, and not he, attached to them. They seldom ever use the author's words, or ask, "What does *he* mean by that expression?"

The rules of interpretation which are of common acceptance among fair-minded students require that no expression which is not clear to the reader shall be made to mean something that is contrary to the general teaching of the author, unless he makes it plain that he *meant* to teach something that is different and contrary to his known position.

## I. WHAT IS THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

1. Most students readily admit that one's background and training—what is in his mind at the time a proposition is brought to his attention—will materially affect his viewpoint concerning it; and that the reception of any truth depends largely upon one's attitude toward that truth.

(1) For example, it is well-nigh impossible for a person with a denominational viewpoint to think of *conversion* without having before his mind the idea of something miraculous; and until that idea is removed, such a person will not accept the simple gospel as it is revealed in the New Testament.

(2) It is true that many of the recorded cases of conversion found in the New Testament were surrounded by a miraculous atmosphere, that is, miracles were performed at the time they were converted (see, for example, the Pentecostans, Paul, Cornelius, et al); but what informed Bible student would affirm that those miracles "were a part of or necessary to" conversion? The miracles in question were for another purpose.

(3) During the early days of the church the gospel which is God's power unto salvation had not been fully revealed, confirmed, and reduced to writing; and it was in order to make known and confirm, as well as to edify the body of Christ, that miracles were performed. See Mark 16:19, 20; Heb. 2:3, 4; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11-16.

(4) Those who were saved from their sins were required to hear, believe, and obey the word which was spoken and confirmed, just as people today must hear, believe, and obey that which is contained in the New Testament.

(5) In no age of the Christian dispensation has conversion ever been miraculous. God revealed a law through inspired men which was later reduced to writing; but in all instances those who received the forgiveness of their sins obeyed the law of pardon to those in sin.

2. Now, just as people with the denominational viewpoint have trouble in seeing that conversion is a non-miraculous process, so it is with many of the brethren regarding the question now before us.

(1) Because they have long thought of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as some great miraculous demonstration, it seems that it is exceedingly difficult for them to think of that subject without that idea coming into their minds. And so it is when any one suggests the fact that people today receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, they immediately think that he means that same great miraculous power comes upon them.

(2) Just as in the cases of the early conversions, there were miracles performed when the Holy Spirit was given during the first years of the church; but there is no indication that the miracles were a part of or necessary to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If it had been so, then the same miracles would have been performed each time.

(3) God had promised the Holy Spirit to his people (see John 7:37-39) and it did not require a miracle for him to fulfill that promise. Cf. Rom. 5:5; Eph. 1:13, 14; 1 Thess. 4:8.

3. The expression "baptize in the Holy Spirit" was for the first time used by John the Baptist, the man who introduced baptism, as we understand and use that term, among men; and it was entirely fitting that he should speak of the work that Christ would do as a *baptism* in the Holy Spirit and in fire. Any person who will stop to think will readily see that while John *literally* baptized in water, the baptisms which Christ would perform would not be literally carried out in the elements named by John, but that what Christ would really do was *figurately* spoken of as a baptism.

(1) If one will read Acts 11:17 and 15:8 in connection with Matt. 3:11 and Acts 1:5 he will see that what John and Jesus spoke of as a *baptism* in the Holy Spirit, Peter called the *gift* or the *giving* of the Spirit. The *figurative* expression "baptism in the Holy Spirit" is the *literal* "gift of the Holy Spirit;" and there is no other sense in which the expression "baptize in the Holy Spirit" is used in the New Testament.

(2) During the personal ministry of Jesus he spoke of the entrance into the kingdom he came to establish as the new birth; but when the time arrived for men to enter that institution, no inspired man, so far as the record goes, ever told any one that he would have to be born again in order to enter the kingdom of Christ. The expression "born again or anew" is figurative; "conversion," or "obeying the gospel," is literal. Any informed Bible student knows that when a person does what the Lord commands in order to become a Christian he has been born again; and it is just as scriptural to speak of the gift of the Holy Spirit as the baptism in the Holy Spirit, as it is to speak of obeying the gospel

*as the new birth, if one keeps in mind the difference between figurative and literal language.*

(3) Before the giving of the Holy Spirit under the reign of Christ, the matter was spoken of as a baptism—a figurative expression, a metaphor; but after it became a reality (beginning with Pentecost of Acts 2) it was thereafter spoken of as a gift. Cf. Acts 11:15-17; 15:7-9. Informed and thoughtful Bible students do not interpret plain and literal language in the light of the figurative; but they try to understand the figurative in the light of the plain and literal. That is what we have long tried to get those who teach the errors of Premillennialism to see.

(4) If brethren, when considering the question now before us, will interpret the figurative "baptism" in the light of the literal "gift," many of the difficulties which beset this subject will be removed. In all instances the Lord gave the Spirit; and then whatever power the recipient was able to exercise was due, not to the *amount* of the Spirit he received, but rather to what the *Lord's will through the Spirit* was concerning him. See, again, Heb. 2:3, 4; 1 Cor. 12:11.

## II. REASONS FOR DISCUSSING THIS SUBJECT

1. There is perhaps no question over which there is more confusion regarding the plan of salvation than the work of the Holy Spirit. Practically every denominational church believes and teaches that there must be some kind of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit before a person can become a child of God; and this in the face of many plain precepts and examples in the New Testament which plainly show the Lord's plan for saving men.

2. Every gospel preacher should be interested in teaching the lost the truth on this subject; for as long as people think that the Spirit must in some way, separate and apart from his revelation, operate on them before they can obey the Lord, they are not going to obey the plain terms of salvation as set forth in the New Testament.

3. It will not help the situation for us to say that there is no such thing as a baptism in the Holy Spirit taught in the New Testament, for they can still read Matt. 3:11, 12. And if we tell them that baptism in fire, in that passage, means eternal punishment for *all* the wicked, it will not be easy to get them to see that the baptism in the Holy Spirit, mentioned in the same passage, is not for *all* the righteous. It would take a rather wide stretch of the imagination to conclude that John was speaking directly to the twelve apostles and the house of Cornelius

when he said, "He shall baptize *you* in the Holy Spirit." There were no apostles then, for Christ himself had not yet been baptized, and the house of Cornelius would not have been tolerated in a Jewish audience! John's statement in Matt. 3:11, 12 presents a contrast between the righteous and the wicked; and it is certainly a strange and arbitrary procedure to take out the cognate comparison from between these two, and refuse an equal scope to it—the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the baptism in fire—the fire being for *all* the wicked, while the baptism in the Holy Spirit is only for *two* special cases!

4. But we can tell people who have misunderstood this subject that the word "baptize," when used with reference to the Holy Spirit and fire, is a figurative expression, and we can make them see that; for no one was ever baptized in the Holy Spirit or will ever be baptized in fire, as one is literally baptized in water. People actually and literally received the Holy Spirit after Christ began his reign; and those who die in their sins will actually and literally be punished following the day of judgment.

5. It is hard for people to see why "filled with the Holy Spirit" in Acts 2:4 refers to the baptism in the Holy Spirit, while the same expression in Acts 4:31 does not refer to the baptism in the Spirit; but if we tell them that both instances refer simply and literally to the giving or impartation of the Holy Spirit, they can understand that.

6. If we tell them that there never have been but two cases of baptism in the Holy Spirit in the world's history, they will naturally wonder about Paul, for he was the equal of any of the twelve (Gal. 2:6); and if we tell them that the ability to speak with tongues was proof that the house of Cornelius was baptized in the Holy Spirit, they will have difficulty in understanding why the Ephesians (Acts 19:6), who could prophesy as well as speak with tongues, a thing that house of Cornelius could not do, so far as the record goes, were not baptized in the Holy Spirit, too, especially, since Paul said, "Greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret." (1 Cor. 14:5.) But if we explain to them that the Lord gave the Spirit to his people, and that the Holy Spirit, during the early age of the church, gave different abilities to certain people for the purpose of making known, instructing in, and confirming the word, until it could be put into permanent form, they can understand that.

### III. DIFFERENT MEASURES OF THE SPIRIT

1. But, says one, the Bible plainly teaches that there are different measures of the Spirit which were given to the Lord's people during the Christian dispensation.

(1) In the first place, there is not a word in the entire New Testament that even remotely hints that one Christian got any more of the Spirit than any other Christian did. Each Christian received the *Spirit* (cf. Rom. 5:5; Eph. 1:13, 14; 1 Thess. 4:8) which had been promised him (see John 7:37-39; Acts 2:38; 5:32); and during the early age of the church certain individuals were given miraculous powers, according to the Spirit's will (1 Cor. 12:11), for certain specific purposes; and with the completion of the New Testament, about the close of the first century, all such miraculous gifts ceased forever. See 1 Cor. 13:8; Eph. 4:8-16.

(2) It would be interesting to see some one who advocates the measure of the Spirit theory write out a definition of the *baptismal measure* of the Spirit in Bible language, and then show what advantage that one who had it had over the one who only had the "laying on of hands or miraculous measure." It is admitted by practically every one that the apostles at Pentecost and Cornelius and his household had the "baptismal measure;" but any one who reads the record knows that the house of Cornelius could not do all that the apostles could do. Those who hold this theory say that the Ephesians (Acts 19:6) only had the "laying on of hands measure;" but they, according to the record, could do more than the house of Cornelius, for they could prophesy, a thing the house of Cornelius couldn't do, if we stay with the record; and Paul says, as already observed, that the prophet is greater than the one who merely speaks in tongues.

(3) This measure theory tends only to confuse the issue. If we would simply say that the Lord gave the Spirit to his people, as the Bible puts it, and that during the age of miracles certain ones exercised a miraculous power according to the will of the Spirit, it would be much easier for people to understand our preaching, for they could read it in the Book.

2. The whole theory of the different measures of the Spirit is founded on something that is *assumed* that is taught in the passage claimed for it—John 3:34.

(1) Neither the King James, the American Standard, nor the Revised Standard Version make it clear, beyond dispute, that it was God who gave Christ the Spirit by measure. The italics of the King James Version show that the translators did not find any original words for *unto him*.

(2) But assuming that the passage does mean that God gave the Spirit to Christ without measure, a thing I think is true, that does not say

that he would give different measures to his disciples. If a man should have three sons and send them away to school, and some one should remark concerning one of them that the father gave him every assistance that he needed, that would not argue that he did any less for his other sons. Thayer defines the expression "not by measure" to mean "not sparingly." God equipped Christ for the work that he sent him to do; and he equips every one else for that which he wants him to do.

3. It is a principle of the Restoration Movement, and no less of the Bible itself, that Bible things should be expressed in Bible language. See I Cor. 2:13. Now, just what is there to be gained by the measure of the Spirit theory, especially since there is not a word in the Bible about it, but on the contrary the Bible specifically says that the difference in miraculous powers during the early age of the church was due, not to the *amount* of the Spirit one had, but to the *will* of the Spirit. The baptism in the Spirit is figurative language and is equivalent to or identical with the gift of the Spirit, and we have a plain statement of the scripture for that. See Acts 11:15-17.

4. It is sufficient to know that *literally* there is no such thing as a "pouring out" of the Spirit, or a "baptism" in the Spirit. These are alike but metaphors, designed, by the resemblances they suggest, to present to the mind, in various aspects and from various points of view, the most lively and correct ideas possible of a *fact*, which, in whatever form or imagery it may be clothed, *itself always remains the same*, and is simply and unfiguratively the impartation or *gift* of the Holy spirit to those who believe. Cf. John 7:37-39.

(1) Thus, when different metaphors are used with reference to the impartation of the Holy Spirit "pour forth," Acts 1:17, 18, 33; "fell," Acts 10:44; "pour out," Acts 10:45; "received," Acts 10:47; "baptized," Acts 1:5; 11:16), we are not to understand that different acts were performed; but that each one of these expressions, in its "figurative" import, refers to one and the same thing—viz., *the giving or impartation of the Holy Spirit*.

(2) Taken in their literal and unfigurative meaning, the terms just referred to are not synonyms and would not be understood as referring to one and the same thing; but they are not used in their literal sense in the passages cited.

(3) The expressions "lake of fire," "outer darkness," "furnace of fire," "bottomless pit," and eternal destruction" are not synonyms when used in their literal and unfigurative sense; but who would be willing to deny that they refer to one and the same thing when they are used in

a figurative sense to indicate hell or eternal punishment?

(4) When people speak of the "baptism in the Holy Spirit," if they would think of it in the sense in which Peter spoke of it, namely, a "gift" or the "giving" of the Spirit, the only sense in which it is used in the New Testament, it would be much easier for them to harmonize all the New Testament statements that are made with reference to our relation to the Holy Spirit; but when they begin to think of the question as some great miraculous demonstration, *per se*, they will soon run into some difficulties, if they attempt to consider *all* that is said in the New Testament on this question.

#### IV. A NEW CREATION

1. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature [there is a new creation, margin]: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new." (2 Cor. 5:17.) *The Revised Standard Version* reverses the textual and marginal readings.

(1) A man gets into Christ when he obeys the gospel as it applies to the alien sinner (see Rom. 6:3, 4; Gal. 3:25, 27); and it is in Christ that he becomes a new creature, or a new creation.

(2) The passages just cited tell how one gets into Christ, while Tit. 3:5, 6, tells how the "renewing" is brought about: "Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

a. The original word for "renewing" occurs only twice in the New Testament, Rom. 12:2 and Tit. 3:5; and it is defined by Thayer to mean "*a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better; . . . effected by the Holy Spirit, Tit. 3:5.*"

b. Thus when one obeys the gospel God gives him the Holy Spirit as a gift, Acts 2:38; sends the Spirit into his heart, Gal. 4:6; the Spirit dwell in the Christian, 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; and it is through the Spirit that God dwells in his people, Eph. 2:19-22. The soul is subjected to the Spirit which now dwells within it, and is expected to submit its entire nature to the Spirit's control. See Rom. 8:1-17. The Spirit is not forced upon the Christian, but "because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6.)

## V. SOME OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

1. *The pouring out of the Spirit, mentioned in Tit. 3.6, refers to the apostles.* There is not a word in all the context that so indicates. Verse 3 shows the ones the apostle had in mind. But if pouring on the day of Pentecost "resulted" in the baptism in the Holy Spirit, then the same thing happened in Paul's case, for the language is identical in meaning and use. See Paul's use of the pronoun "us" in the verse under consideration.

(1) If Paul received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, then there were more than two cases—the twelve and the house of Cornelius—in the world's history!

(2) The word "richly" in Tit. 3:6 does not seem to indicate that the Spirit was given to the Lord's people in a limited measure. This adverb, according to Thayer, means "*abundantly, richly.*" See Col. 3:16: 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Pet. 1:11, the only other passages in the New Testament in which the word occurs.

2. *There is one baptism.* (Eph. 4:5.) There is only one literal baptism, the only one that we are commanded to submit to, the only one that we can obey; for no man was ever commanded to submit to Holy Spirit baptism, or any other baptism, except in water, as an act of obedience. Cf. Heb. 6:1, 2. See Milligan's comments on this passage in Hebrews.

(1) The New Testament speaks of suffering as a "baptism." See Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50. If it is literally true that there is now but one baptism, then no one can be baptized in suffering now. He could during the days of Christ; but if he suffers the same *measure* now it would not be a baptism! Cf. 2 Tim. 3:12; Rev. 2:10.

(2) If people will keep in mind the difference between a *literal* baptism and a *figurative* baptism, they will not have any trouble here.

*Conclusion:* The Holy Spirit was never sent to any one during the present dispensation for the purpose of convicting or converting him. The gospel is God's power unto salvation. The baptism in the Holy Spirit, predicted by John and Jesus, was literally fulfilled when the Spirit was *given* to the Lord's people, beginning with the apostles on Pentecost of Acts 2. Whether given directly, or by the laying on of hands, it was the Lord who gave the Spirit in every instance; and what the recipient was able to do in the way of exercising miraculous powers depended, not on *the amount of the Spirit* which he had, but on what the Spirit whom

he possessed *willed* for him to do. See Heb. 2:3, 4; 1 Cor. 12:4-11. There is no such thing as "measures of the Spirit," in the sense of one Christian having more of the Spirit than another Christian, mentioned in all the New Testament.

All baptized penitent believers were ~~promised~~ <sup>promised</sup> the gift of the Holy Spirit, following the remission of their sins. Acts 2:38, 39. The word "gift" in Acts 2:38 is identical in *meaning* and *use* with its occurrence in Acts 10:45 and 11:17; and, as in the case of the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost to the apostles, at the house of Cornelius, or anywhere else under the reign of Christ, it means nothing *more nor less* than the impartation of the *Spirit* to those who believe—obedient believers. Cf. John 7:37-39.

After the age of miracles had passed away, about the close of the first century of the Christian era (1 Cor. 13:8; Eph. 4:8-16), the Spirit was still given by the Lord as a gift to his people (Acts 2:38, 39); but there is no indication that the Spirit after that age ever enabled any one to exercise any miraculous power. The Spirit is not given for that purpose now, that is, it is not God's will that the Spirit give miraculous power to any one now. Reading the New Testament, we find that the Spirit is given to comfort us (John 14:16, 17), to help our infirmity (Rom. 8:26, 27), to strengthen us with power in the inner man (Eph. 3:16), and to assist us in bearing the fruit that is well-pleasing to God (Gal. 5:16, 22, 23, 25); but at no time and in no way is the influence of the Spirit exerted on a Christian today except in an through his law—the New Testament. See Rom. 8:2.

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