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Life in the Spirit #4

#### Sermon Summary #4

### What is Baptism in the Spirit and When does it Happen? 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

Paula was raised in a Christian home where church attendance was commonplace. But it wasn't until she was eleven years old that she began to take a serious interest in who Jesus is. That summer she attended a church camp and for the very first time consciously repented of her sins and put her faith in the atoning death of Jesus as her only hope for eternal life. It was a wonderful experience that brought both joy and a sense of relief. She never doubted from that moment on that she was a child of God.

The next few years proved difficult for Paula. She was not especially attractive and boys never seemed to pay her much attention. Her grades were average, at best, and she had few friends. When she turned sixteen Paula was invited to an overnight party where she took her first drink of beer. She won instant acceptance with a small group of classmates who before would hardly give her the time of day. She soon discovered that as long as she joined in on whatever they were doing, they included and affirmed her. Her heart was often troubled as she recognized how her behavior was contrary to what she had been taught in church, but the fear of rejection was too powerful to overcome.

It wasn't until Paula was in her second year of college that things began to change. She accepted the invitation of a sorority sister to attend a Bible-study that met each Wednesday night. It was here that she began to awaken to how far she had wandered from the Lord. She was brokenhearted and grieved that she had lived in such indifference to the Lord's faithful appeal that she return to her first love.

One Wednesday night she asked that some of the girls in her Bible study group pray for her. Paula knew that they believed in spiritual gifts, but the church she grew up in had always warned against such things. As they laid hands on her, Paula cried out to Jesus to forgive her for those many years of spiritual apathy. One of the girls praying for Paula then said, "Oh, Lord Jesus, we ask that you would pour out your Spirit on Paula and empower her to live and witness for you as she never has before."

Suddenly Paula felt a strange warmth envelop her like a blanket. She sensed what she later described as a geyser erupting from deep within her soul. Not really knowing what was happening, she then began to cry out to Jesus her praise and gratitude. The unfamiliarity of her experience was exceeded only by the joy and peace that it brought. From that day to the present, Paula has sought by God's grace to live passionately for the Son of God.

What happened to Paula? If she were to ask you to open the Bible and explain her experience, what texts would you use? What would you call it? Was she *baptized in the Holy Spirit*? Was she *filled with the Holy Spirit*? Was she *anointed with the Holy Spirit*? Or did she simply experience a renewal of faith and the profound assurance of salvation that the apostle Paul had in mind in Romans 8:16 when he spoke of the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit "that we are children of God"? Or was her experience nothing more than the emotional fruit of manipulation by her friends who wanted to win her over to their strange brand of Christianity?

There is much confusion today about "spiritual experiences" like Paula's. Christians divide over it. Churches divide over it. As for Paula, she's just happy it happened!

*What's at Stake?*

The debate over baptism in the Holy Spirit has often been summarized by answering this question: “Is the Christian life characterized by one or two stages?” Or again, “Is Spirit-baptism an *initiatory* experience for *all* Christians or a *second-stage* experience that only *some* receive?” Although it may be a bit simplistic to phrase it in those terms, the issue is still this:

Are all Christians automatically baptized in the Spirit at the moment they first trust in Christ for salvation? Or are some, if not most, baptized in the Spirit at some point in life *subsequent* to their initial conversion? Was Paula baptized in the Spirit at the age of eleven when she trusted Jesus at church camp, or did it happen nine years later during that mid-week Bible study?

The most common view among evangelical Christians is that Spirit-baptism is *simultaneous* with and essentially the *same* as regeneration and conversion. Spirit-baptism is understood as a phenomenon that comes to *all* Christians at the moment of the new birth. The only significant division among the proponents of this view concerns whether or not Spirit-baptism is a “felt” experience or happens beneath the level of our consciousness.

Others contend that Spirit-baptism is *subsequent* to and therefore *distinct* from regeneration and conversion. There are a number of variations to this view. Some, such as the late Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who served as pastor for many years at Westminster Chapel in London, identify Spirit-baptism with the “sealing” of the Holy Spirit described in Ephesians 1:13. It is an *experiential* event subsequent to regeneration (and therefore to be sought) that brings a profound, inner, *direct*, assurance of salvation. It also produces power for ministry and witness, joy, and a sense of God’s glorious presence. Those who advocate this position typically make no connection between baptism in the Spirit and the charismatic gifts.

The Methodist evangelist John Wesley taught a second transforming work of grace, distinct from and subsequent to the new birth, in which the Spirit roots out of the Christian’s heart all sinful motivation. The result is that “the whole of his [the Christian’s] mental and emotional energy is henceforth channeled into love for God and others: love that is Christlike and supernatural, strong and steady, purposeful and passionate, and free from any contrary or competing affection whatsoever” (Packer, 132).

This state of “perfection”, according to Wesley, occurs instantaneously through the same insistent, expectant, empty-handed faith through which we received the grace of justification. One may still lack knowledge and act foolishly. But such “mistakes,” said Wesley, are not to be regarded as “moral transgressions”. Perfection, then, is primarily a matter of love for God and men being the constant driving force in one’s life. On occasion, both Wesley and his followers would refer to this experience as the “baptism in the Holy Spirit”.

Perhaps the most well-known of those who embrace a two-stage view are classical *Pentecostals* such as The Assemblies of God. The classical Pentecostal view is clearly articulated in points 7. and 8. Of the “Statement of Fundamental Truths” of the Assemblies of God:

“7. The Promise of the Father. All believers are entitled to, and should ardently expect and earnestly seek, the promise of the Father, the Baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all the early Christian Church. With it comes the enduement of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,8; 1 Cor. 12:1-31). This wonderful experience is *distinct from and subsequent to* the experience of the new birth (Acts 10:44-46; 11:14-16; 15:7-9) [emphasis mine].

8. The Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost. The Baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God

gives them utterance (Acts 2:4). The speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:4-10, 28) but different in purpose and use.”

There are three crucial elements in the classical view. First, there is the doctrine of *subsequence*. Spirit-baptism is always subsequent to and therefore distinct from conversion. The time intervening between the two events may be momentary or conceivably years (nine years, for example, in the case of Paula).

Second, there is an emphasis on *conditions*. Depending on whom you read the conditions on which Spirit-baptism is suspended may include repentance, confession, faith, prayers, waiting (“tarrying”), seeking, yielding, etc. The obvious danger here is in dividing the Christian life in such a way that *salvation* becomes a *gift* to the *sinner* whereas the *fullness of the Spirit* becomes a *reward* to the *saint*.

Third, and most controversial of all, they emphasize the doctrine of *initial evidence*. The initial and physical evidence of having been baptized in the Spirit is speaking in tongues. If one has not spoken in tongues, one has not been baptized in the Spirit. Those in the Assemblies do not deny that a person may be saved without speaking in tongues. But tongues is itself the evidence that one has also been baptized in the Spirit.

We now come to the contemporary *Charismatic View*. Generally speaking, most charismatics endorse the two-stage doctrine of subsequence (although an increasing number are beginning to question this). Many, however, reject any conditions on which Spirit-baptism is suspended and do not believe all Spirit-baptized Christians necessarily speak in tongues.

The *Third Wave* is a term used to identify evangelicals who not only believe in but consistently practice and minister in the full range of the Spirit’s gifts. According to this view, ***Spirit-baptism describes what happens when one becomes a Christian***. Therefore, all Christians, by definition, have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. However, there are also multiple, *subsequent* experiences of the Spirit’s activity. After conversion the Spirit may yet “come” with varying degrees of intensity, wherein the Christian is “overwhelmed”, “empowered”, “anointed”, or in some sense “endued”. This “release” of new power, this “manifestation” of the Spirit’s intimate presence, is most likely to be identified with what the NT calls the “filling” of the Spirit.

#### *The Apostle Paul on Spirit Baptism*

Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 12:13 is the principal text for this topic – “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

I believe that Paul is here referring to the fulfillment of that very famous prophecy of John the Baptist concerning Jesus. You will recall Mark 1:7-8 (cf. Matt. 3:11) where John declared:

“After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Note clearly that **the Holy Spirit doesn’t baptize anyone**. It is Jesus who baptizes “in” or “with” the Holy Spirit. The analogy with water baptism is clear. Just as John immersed people in water and saturated them with water, so Jesus will immerse people in and saturate them with the Holy Spirit.

Note also that Paul uses the same language as John the Baptist: we are baptized “in” one Spirit, not “by” the Spirit. Jesus is the baptizer. The Spirit is the element, so to speak, in which we are baptized.

And how many of the Corinthians does Paul have in view? How many Christians are baptized in the Holy Spirit? Paul says clearly in v. 13 – “For in one Spirit we were **ALL** baptized into one body . . . and **ALL** were made to drink of one Spirit.”

Thus what Paul is saying is that all Christians are immersed or baptized **BY** Jesus **IN** the Spirit, the result of which is we are made to be one spiritual body, regardless of whether we are Jewish or Gentile or slave or free.

Some try to argue that whereas v. 13a refers to conversion, v. 13b describes a second, post-conversion work of the Holy Spirit. But parallelism is a common literary device employed by the biblical authors. Here Paul employs two different metaphors that describe the same reality. Furthermore, whatever occurs to those in v. 13a occurs to those in v. 13b. In other words, the same “we all” who were baptized in one Spirit into one body were also made to drink of the same Spirit. The activity in the two phrases is co-extensive.

Paul is probably using two vivid metaphors to describe our experience of the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion, at the time when we became members of the body of Christ, the Church:

*Baptism*, or immersion in the Holy Spirit, and  
*Drinking* to the fill of the Holy Spirit . . .

the purpose or goal of which is to unite us all in one body.

Thus, our “saturation” with the Spirit, our experience of being “engulfed” in and “deluged” and “inundated” by the Holy Spirit results in our participation in the spiritual organism of the body of Christ, the Church. It may even be that in v. 13b Paul is referring to the OT imagery of the golden age to come in which the land and its people have the Spirit poured out on them:

“until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest” (Isa. 32:15).

“For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants” (Isa. 44:3).

“And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 39:29).

Thus, conversion is an experience of the Holy Spirit analogous to the outpouring of a sudden flood or rainstorm on parched ground, transforming dry and barren earth into a well-watered garden (cf. Jer. 31:12).

In view of Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 12:13, I’m led to draw the following conclusions.

First, baptism in the Spirit is a metaphor that describes our experience of the Spirit at *conversion*: we are immersed and submerged in him and forever enjoy his presence and power.

Second, *all* Christians are baptized in the Spirit at the moment of the new birth, not subsequent to it.

Third, biblical usage demands that we apply the terminology of “Spirit-baptism” to the conversion experience of all believers. However, this *in no way restricts* the activity of the Spirit to conversion! The NT endorses and encourages multiple, subsequent experiences of the Spirit’s power and presence.

Among the texts that should encourage us to expect post-conversion encounters with and experiences of the Holy Spirit are Luke 11:13; Rom. 5:5; 8:15-17; Gal. 3:1-5; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:16-19; 5:18; Phil. 1:19; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 Pt. 1:8; as well as the many passages in Acts that speak of believers being “filled” with the Spirit for ministry and life. The Spirit who was once given and now indwells each believer is continually “given” to enhance and intensify our relationship with Christ and to empower our efforts in ministry. But we need not label any one such experience as Spirit-baptism.

Thus, evangelicals are *right* in affirming that all Christians have experienced Spirit-baptism at conversion. They are *wrong* in minimizing (sometimes even denying) the reality of subsequent, additional experiences of the Spirit in the course of the Christian life. Charismatics are *right* in affirming the reality and importance of post-conversion encounters with the Spirit that empower, enlighten, and transform. They are *wrong* in calling this experience “Spirit-baptism”.

*Distinguishing between Baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Filling of the Holy Spirit*

What we’ve seen thus far also helps us differentiate between Spirit-baptism and Spirit-filling. Spirit-baptism is a metaphor that describes our reception of the Spirit at the moment of our conversion to Jesus in faith and repentance. When we believe and are justified, we are, as it were, deluged and engulfed by the Holy Spirit; we are, as it were, immersed in and saturated by the Spirit. The result of this is that we are made members of the body of Christ, incorporated into the spiritual organism called the church, and permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Spirit-baptism is therefore *instantaneous* (i.e., it is not a process), *simultaneous* with conversion, *universal* (i.e., all Christians are recipients), *unrepeatable*, and *permanent*.

Spirit-filling is also a metaphor describing our *continuous*, on-going experience and appropriation of the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit is to come under progressively more intense and intimate influence of the Spirit. Spirit-filling can be forfeited and subsequently experienced yet again, on multiple occasions, throughout the course of the Christian life.

There are *two senses* in which one may be filled with the Holy Spirit. First, there are biblical texts which describe people as being “*full of the Holy Spirit*” as if it were a *condition* or consistent *quality* of Christian character; a moral *disposition*; possessing and reflecting a maturity in Christ (see Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3,5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:52, lit., “they continued to be full”). This is the ideal condition of every Christian. It emphasizes the *abiding state* of being filled.

Second, there are also texts which describe people as being “*filled with the Holy Spirit*” to enable them to fulfill or perform a special task or to equip them for service or life-long ministry (see Luke 1:15-17; Acts 9:17). On certain occasions, perhaps a spiritual emergency of sorts, a person may be “filled” with an immediate and special endowment of power for an especially important and urgent task. Thus, someone who is already filled with the Holy Spirit may experience an additional filling. That is to say, no matter “how much” of the Holy Spirit one may have, there’s always room for “more”!

See Acts 4:8,31; 13:9; Luke 1:41,67. Also, in Acts 7:55 Stephen, though “full of the Holy Spirit”, is again “filled” with the Spirit to prepare him to endure persecution and eventual martyrdom, as well as to “see” the vision of Jesus

In sum, to be filled with the Spirit is different from being baptized in the Spirit.

There is one baptism, but multiple fillings.

In no NT text are we commanded to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. There is no appeal to do something in order to be baptized; there is no exhortation or imperative. On the other hand, we *are* commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). Thus it is possible to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, to experience the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and yet *not* be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, to be “full of the Holy Spirit” is to reflect a maturity of character; it is the ideal condition of every believer. To be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is to experience an anointing for power, purity, proclamation, and praise.

*Putting it all in Perspective*

In the final analysis, does it matter all that much whether we refer to a post-conversion encounter with the Spirit as “baptism” or “filling”? Aside from the fact that we ought always strive to be as biblically accurate as possible in our use and definition of terms, I think not. Perhaps an illustration will help in making my point.

Let us suppose that you reach into the cabinet for medication to relieve a persistent headache and take hold of what you believe is aspirin. Unfortunately, the label on the bottle has long since worn off. Nevertheless, the medicine works. Fifteen minutes after swallowing two tablets, your headache is completely gone. Your spouse then informs you that the medicine you took was, in fact, Tylenol. Does this news cause your headache to return? It shouldn't. The medicinal value of the Tylenol is not diminished simply because you mislabeled it. Calling it aspirin in no way altered the physical properties of what was, in fact, Tylenol.

My point is that the reality of “post-conversion” experiences of the Holy Spirit is not undermined should it be discovered that we have “mislabeled” the event. The spiritual “medicine”, so to speak, still works. The issue is whether or not the encounter was real, not what we call it.

Whereas I prefer to reserve the terminology of Spirit-baptism for what all experience at conversion, the fact that the Pentecostal/Charismatic applies it to a subsequent, and more restricted, empowering does not in and of itself invalidate the latter phenomenon. The important issue is whether or not the NT endorses *both* the initial saving work of regeneration and incorporation into the body of Christ on the one hand, *and* the theologically distinct (though not always subsequent) work of anointing for witness, service, and charismatic gifting on the other. I believe that it does.

So what happened to Paula? In my opinion, Paula was converted to saving faith in Christ at the age of eleven while at church camp. At that moment she was *baptized in the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit also came to permanently indwell her. On that night nine years later Paula was *filled with the Holy Spirit* as she cried out to the Lord to renew her commitment and empower her for a live of service to his glory.

“Come, Holy Spirit!”