

# Understanding the Baptism

*by Tim Enloe*

## **Receiving the Holy Spirit's gift doesn't have to be confusing**

The empowering baptism in the Holy Spirit is promised to every follower of Christ (Acts 2:39). But the Baptism is not an automatic experience. It is a gift the believer must seek. That process of seeking intimidates too many Christians. I'd like to share four simple concepts that, when misunderstood, create barriers to people enjoying the Baptism. None of them are fatal roadblocks. All can readily be removed.

The Spirit Baptism is the inheritance of ministry power for every New Testament believer (Acts 2:39). Though the promise is still for all today, most often the process does not automatically happen; believers still need to personally seek to be filled with His power. This seeking process can become frustrating if we don't fully understand a few simple concepts about the experience.

Because the working of the Holy Spirit is generally invisible, it is easy for us to draw overly-complex—and even mystical—misconceptions about Him. The good news is that the process is not complex or difficult; Jesus is still our Baptizer in the Holy Spirit and He simply wants to help us!

## **Understanding the “when”**

When should a believer seek to receive the Baptism? Should they start seeking immediately after their salvation experience or should they wait until they have matured spiritually?

We want results similar to the Book of Acts, but we can't expect Acts-like results when we reject Acts-like processes.

You'll notice the two basic steps of apostolic discipleship in Acts are (1) water baptism and (2) Spirit baptism; then teaching and fellowship would follow. Jesus told the newly born-again believers to put life on hold until they had received this gift (Luke 24:59; Acts 1:4-8). The first Pentecostal outpouring was so strongly marked by this model that it affected the sermon that day (Acts 2:38-39). We see the Samaritan revival in Acts 8 and the Gentile revival in Acts 19 following the same discipleship model. In Acts 10, the Spirit Baptism actually precedes water baptism.

The apostle Paul admits he was intentional in putting supernatural ministry before teaching because he didn't want the Corinthians' faith to rest on the wisdom of men, but rather on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:4,5). He went on to say he did speak a message of wisdom (teaching), but it was to the mature — not to the beginner.

Why did the apostles embrace such a model? Because it was the same model under which they were disciples. Just ask Paul, whose life was altered following an epiphany on the Damascus interstate. Jesus prompted Ananias to begin Paul's discipleship the same way (Acts 9:17-18); again experiencing the two baptisms first before entering the Lord's learning program in Arabia (see Galatians 1).

I am convinced that teaching finds a deeper resting place in the hearts of those who have some spiritual experience. The baptism of the Holy Spirit can be sought by every Christian, no matter how young in the Lord.

## **Understanding the “why”**

I am firmly convinced the first outward sign (or initial evidence) of the Baptism is speaking in unlearned languages (or tongues). But that first sign is not the purpose for the Baptism.

The first two or three years of my ministry saw very few people actually receiving the Baptism. I was so frustrated; after all, that is what our ministry was supposed to target, yet there seemed to be some kind of barrier. After a few days of frustration and prayer, fasting and introspection, the Holy Spirit began to show me I was approaching this blessing with an argument. I began to re-evaluate my approach alongside the Book of Acts, particularly the second chapter. Suddenly, the light turned on! I began to see that the “why” was functional in ways I had never previously understood.

On the Day of Pentecost, they were all filled and began to speak in unlearned languages as the Spirit empowered them; they began to speak out God-inspired words in another language as the Spirit enabled them. A group of people gathering for the feast heard the ruckus of raw Pentecostalism. They had two basic responses, some were amazed and some thought this noisy bunch was drunk. That’s where Acts 2:14 comes in. Peter stopped speaking to God in his unlearned, spiritual language and began to address the gathered crowd — probably in Aramaic or Hebrew — preaching a most convincing and well-ordered sermon. His content was obviously outside of his natural ability.

This is where the utilitarian function of tongues helps us understand precisely why we need the Baptism: if you can trust God to order your words in the spiritual language, you can trust Him to order your words in English to unbelievers. The Baptism is all about saying the right things, the God-inspired things; first in tongues, but most significantly in our known languages as we prophetically minister words from God’s heart.

Since the day I began to understand Acts 2, I’ve never had to argue initial evidence with anyone. Biblically, tongues are a prophetic confirmation of a prophetic anointing to be a prophetic witness. That’s why Peter explained the event as the fulfillment of Joel’s oracle where one day everyone could be a prophet.

Suddenly tongues take on a vital, functional role to the believer who wants to be a prophetic witness. Why do we need the Baptism? It’s all about God affecting what we say, plain and simple. We don’t need the Baptism so we can speak in tongues; we need the Baptism so we can speak to lost people — and yes, we also get the added benefit of communing with God in a new language the moment we receive.

## **Understanding the “where”**

The “where” I’m addressing refers to not only the atmosphere in which someone can receive but also the actual venue. Is it only at red-hot camp meeting “Holy Ghost nights,” or can someone receive after eating a stale donut at a men’s prayer breakfast? Can it happen in someone’s car on the way to work? I believe we have over-romanticized the reception process so much that many ordinary folks exclude themselves from receiving.

When seeking the Baptism, there are some exceptional days when you can almost hear the wind and see the fire of Acts 2. These are wonderful occurrences, but they are just that, exceptional. Many times I’ve witnessed large groups of people receive rather quietly; that’s all right too.

You don’t have to create a highly charged atmosphere or be in a special meeting to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The bottom line is, Jesus is the Baptizer, 24/7, and He wants to show himself to people as their personal Baptizer in the Spirit today.

## Understanding the “Who”

Many seeking believers fall into the trap of believing they need to meet with someone who has a special gift to minister the Baptism. Nothing could be farther from the truth; only Jesus can baptize in the Holy Spirit.

It is true God gives unique spiritual passions to individuals and that special levels of faith can be cultivated for any area of ministry (evangelism, healing, compassion ministries, Spirit baptism, etc.). However, in ministering the Spirit baptism — just as in witnessing — people merely present the truth and guide the way. Jesus does the supernatural part; He always does the hard part.

The premise of our ministry is simply, “Jesus wants to.” Jesus wants to save; Jesus wants to fill; Jesus wants to heal and restore. When you are firmly convinced “Jesus wants to” fill you with His Spirit, you realize that He will — as in every other area of ministry — supply what you lack. He is the One with the special gift!

I mentioned that a special level of faith could be cultivated in this area; let me explain. When I first received the Baptism at age 12, I couldn’t imagine why anyone else wouldn’t want to receive it too. I began praying for all of my friends — and a few strangers — to receive the gift. In my zeal, God was gracious as some were filled; however many were not. This was most likely due to my inexperience and general lack of couth.

Out of frustration I stumbled upon a prayer request that has since become a heartfelt fixture in my devotional life: “Father, give me the faith to believe that everyone I pray for will receive this Gift.” I’m not sure how it works exactly, but I’ve discovered when you ask anything according to His will, He hears you. Why not ask Him for your Baptism? Since you know that “Jesus wants to,” why not partner with Him and give Him the opportunity to empower you with a greater level of faith? Why don’t you pause and ask Him right now?

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