

The Nuts and Bolts of Ministering Spirit Baptism

By Tim Enloe

My wife, Rochelle, and I have traveled in teaching ministry for almost 15 years. Our emphasis is the Holy Spirit and His work, most specifically, leading people to understand and receive Spirit baptism. During these years, we have consistently encountered pastors who are personally discouraged with preaching or teaching on this subject — let alone actually praying with someone to receive the Baptism. On more than one occasion, even long-tenured senior pastors have confided that they have never successfully led someone into Spirit baptism.

The unfortunate but well-trodden path seems to follow a course like this. At some point, the minister addresses the subject with limited positive response. From that moment forward, this perceived lack of response dictates how the pastor views his or her own ability to minister on Spirit baptism. The next time the topic comes up, the minister often approaches it from a “spiritual risk management” perspective: “How can I talk about this without making those who don’t receive feel badly — and how can I get through this without feeling even more unproductive myself?” That person’s teaching on the Baptism begins to describe the experience as optional or, in some more unfortunate cases, as an unusual, atypical experience. It morphs from a basic step in Christian discipleship into a spiritual aftermarket accessory — or even the apologetic excuse for some people’s untimely outbursts in church services.

How can something that is supposed to increase the vitality and effectiveness of the church come to be viewed as a source of frustration — or even a liability? I believe that part of the problem is misconceptions. Just a few simple misunderstandings about Spirit baptism can actually eliminate this experience from the priorities of a minister and, therefore, the life of a church.

In our many conversations with pastors, the same simple misconceptions seem to surface. These misconceptions are what we’ll look at first. Then we’ll move on to the actual biblical process of ministering and receiving this gift — where we’ll encounter the “nuts and bolts.”

MISCONCEPTIONS

Misconception #1: When

This first basic misconception greatly hinders ministering Spirit baptism and has to do with chronology. When should a believer seek to receive the Baptism? Isn’t it for the well-worn veteran? After all, something with so much potential baggage surely can’t be handled by a fragile new convert!

The church in America struggles with discipleship and assimilation. We want results similar to the Book of Acts, but we refuse to implement the clearly stated apostolic discipleship model. How can we expect Acts-like results when we reject Acts-like processes?

The two basic steps of apostolic discipleship in Acts are (1) water baptism and (2) Spirit baptism; then teaching and fellowship would follow. Jesus established this model; He told the newly born-again believers to put life on hold until they had received this gift (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–8). The first Pentecostal outpouring was so strongly marked by this model that it affected the preaching of that day. Peter’s sermon thesis to the unbelievers was essentially: “If you want to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit, you need to get saved and baptized in water first” (Acts 2:38,39). We see the Samaritan revival in Acts 8 and the Gentile revivals in Acts 10 and 19 following the same discipleship model.

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). Paul went on to say that he did speak a message of wisdom (teaching), but it was to the mature—not to the beginner.

Why did they embrace such a seemingly volatile and risky model? The answer is simple. It was the same model under which they were discipled. 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).

Please don't misunderstand me; I believe in teaching — after all, I am a teacher by calling. But I am convinced teaching finds a deeper resting place in the hearts of those who have spiritual experience.

Misconception #2: Why

When it comes to understanding the "why" of Spirit baptism, I believe a major roadblock is built out of obsessively focusing on tongues-speaking rather than the true purpose of the gift. Why do we need to be Spirit baptized? Is the centerpiece really tongues?

I have heard sermons that are supposed to enable and encourage people to receive Spirit baptism digress into arguments over Greek verbs. While the substance of the arguments is true, the audience can easily misinterpret Spirit baptism as supplying "power to fight" rather than "power to witness." The purpose and practice of the Pentecostal reality is sidelined while the theologians brain-wrestle. Many pastors may feel too frustrated to bother entering this arena — especially when they still have two funerals and a wedding before they can find time to study for Sunday's sermon. The layperson must sit back wondering why they should even desire to receive the Baptism in the Spirit if all they have heard is tongues issues and impractical arguments.

I frequently ask leaders, "Why would someone want to receive Spirit baptism?" The typical answer is, "So they can speak in tongues and have a prayer language." Somehow we have lost the simple purity of Pentecost. Suddenly the focus is an argument that we have to win rather than a gateway to Spirit-empowered ministry. The sad reality is that when many ministers see an inkblot of a dove, the first thing that enters their minds is tongues.

I am firmly convinced the first outward sign (or initial evidence) of Spirit baptism is speaking in unlearned languages (or tongues). But the reason I am convinced of this is not because it is a foundational truth of the Assemblies of God; rather, Spirit baptism has a specific, obvious, biblical function. "Function" is the key word, not "argument." Our present culture has little tolerance for dogmatic religious types standing on soapboxes; people want practical truth they can personally engage and implement. The good news is Spirit baptism is such a truth, easy to understand and utilize.

The first two or three years of our ministry saw very few people actually receiving Spirit 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 reevaluate my approach alongside the Book of Acts, particularly the second chapter. Suddenly, the lightbulb 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. Then, some time afterward, a group of people gathering for the feast heard them. They had two basic responses. Some were amazed and some thought this noisy bunch was drunk. That's where Act 2:14 comes in. Peter stops speaking to God in his unlearned, spiritual language and begins to address the gathered crowd — probably in Aramaic or Hebrew, preaching a most convincing and well-ordered sermon. His content was obviously beyond his natural ability.

This is where the utilitarian function of tongues helps us understand precisely why we need Spirit baptism: If you can trust God to order your words in the spiritual language, how much more can you trust Him to order your words in your own language to unbelievers? Spirit baptism is about saying the right things: first, the God-inspired tongues, but also 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 the initial, physical evidence of tongues with anyone. Biblically, tongues is 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, speaking in tongues takes on a vital, functional role for the believer who wants to be a prophetic witness. Why do we need Spirit baptism? It's all about God affecting what we say — plain and simple.

We need Spirit baptism not primarily so we can speak in tongues; we need it so we can speak to lost people. We also receive the added benefit of communing with God in a new language.

I often encounter people who say, "I've received Spirit baptism, but haven't received the gift of tongues." The wording of such a statement makes it obvious they need some clarity. But, if my response begins with correction — or an argument on why they are wrong or why their experience is invalid, they will close up and be polarized against biblical truth. If I genuinely appreciate the Holy Spirit's work in the person's life and present to them the possibility they can receive a prophetic anointing to dramatically increase ministry power in their lives, they most often discover themselves quickly experiencing Spirit baptism with its biblical, confirming sign of tongues.

This focus on what are really secondary issues has also produced a generation of ministers who suffer from what I call "acute pneumaphobia." That is, they are both convinced of the reality of Spirit baptism with evidential tongues, but at the same time, they are afraid it will ruin their church's dignified reputation. Is tongues speaking a necessary drudgery or a spiritually natural blessing? Is it like a vaccination, where you grit your teeth while the needle is going in before you can enjoy its long-term benefits? Do you "have to" speak in tongues or do you "get to"?

Speaking in tongues is not a liability, but a beautiful blessing. But power for ministry is the main feature of Spirit baptism. You don't have to be afraid of tongues ruining your church if you understand that the Baptism isn't just so people can speak in tongues but so they can speak to lost people with prophetic power.

If your approach to the Baptism is merely trying to convince the listener of a doctrine, the response will be limited. But if you teach that everyone can have a prophetic experience, trusting God to give them the right things to say to unbelievers, you'll be overwhelmed at the hungry response. I have discovered that how you approach people is critical — especially in a postmodern generation.

Misconception #3: Where

Have you ever listened to yourself tell someone how you were filled with the Holy Spirit? Preachers love to use Technicolor adjectives to describe their personal experiences. Perhaps you were in the spiritual "Area 51" when you were "beamed up" to the mother ship, seeing heavenly visions as you were being filled. Or maybe it wasn't actually that grand.

I bring this up not only to confront dishonesty — no matter how well-meaning a person may be — but to convey the dangerous assumptions the listener can draw from such descriptions of otherworldly close encounters.

The where I'm addressing refers not only to the atmosphere in which someone can receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but also the actual venue. Is it only at red-hot camp meeting "Holy Ghost nights"? Or can someone receive after eating a stale doughnut at a men's prayer breakfast? Is it only after the minister has thoroughly

rubbed his shoes on the wool carpet — and adequately static-charged his fingertips — or can it happen in someone's car on the way to work? I believe we have overromanticized the reception process so much that many ordinary folks exclude themselves from receiving.

It's not nuclear physics; it's simple obedience. If you are firmly convinced that Jesus is the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, then wherever He is, it can happen — and He's omnipresent.

One of the easiest traps to fall into is to place too much credence on perceived emotional responses. Many ministers feel extreme, yet unnecessary, pressure to build emotionally charged atmospheres, places where their own personal testimony can be replicated for their congregations. I find it enlightening and burden-lightening to know that the Acts accounts of Spirit baptism never give one shred of emotional detail such as, "They were all filled and began to speak in other tongues as they cried precisely 1.4 ounces of tears." It is obvious that emotional responses are part of the way God made us, but it is also true they are secondary phenomena. Yet we still are more moved by what we can see rather than by the invisible reality. We have a tendency to misrepresent how the Baptism is received and then be disappointed when it doesn't happen our way.

When you minister on Spirit 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. The point is they receive this new power to be God's prophetic mouthpieces.

Take your heavy backpack off! You don't have to create a highly charged atmosphere or be in a special meeting for people to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The bottom line is Jesus is the Baptizer, and He wants to show himself to people as their personal Baptizer in the Spirit today. Why not seize more opportunities — even nontraditional ones — to lead people into Spirit baptism?

Misconception #4: Who

This final reoccurring misconception has to do with the minister's self-concept. Many fall into the trap of believing they need a special gift to minister Spirit baptism — a gift they don't think they possess. Nothing could be further 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 Spirit baptism — just as in witnessing — we merely present the truth and guide the way, but Jesus does the supernatural part. He always does the hard part. Like any spiritual process, you will become more at ease as you gain more experience.

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 that Jesus wants to fill people with His Spirit, you realize He will — as in every other area of ministry — supply what you lack to get the job done. 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 was first Spirit baptized at age twelve, 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. 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 that when you ask anything according to God's will, He hears you. Why not ask Him? Since you know that Jesus wants to baptize believers, 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?

If you're still convinced there is a special gift necessary to minister Spirit baptism, why don't you ask God to give it to you?

Now that we've looked at some of the most common misconceptions, let's move on to the actual process of ministering Spirit baptism.

Anticipation and Expectations

How do you tell a seeker what to anticipate without creating a false or exceptional set of expectations? The answer is in the Scriptures. The Book of Acts has a simple pattern that is repeated three times when people received Spirit baptism: Acts 2 (on Pentecost), Acts 10 (at Cornelius's house), and Acts 19 (in Ephesus) all record the same basic pattern.

The first step in the Acts pattern is to draw near to Jesus. The Acts recipients were focusing on Jesus as they were worshipping or listening to teaching about Him. Jesus was the focus because Jesus is the Baptizer. I like to use Luke 24 as a way of fleshing out how to focus on Jesus. Verse 53 shows us they were pressing in and worshipping Jesus continuously — that's a great place to start.

The second step in the biblical pattern is that the Holy Spirit will come upon the seeker. In Acts, at some stage in each of the processes, the Holy Spirit came upon everyone who received. You can trace the usage of the Greek verb *epi* ("to come upon") in conjunction with episodes of Spirit baptism in Acts. In every occurrence the Holy Spirit came upon everyone who received. You can confidently assure the seeker that the Holy Spirit will come upon them at some time while they are seeking. I always like to demystify this further, "You may or you may not be overcome with goose bumps, but you will at least be gently aware of His presence descending upon you at some distinct time."

The third step in the pattern involves the seeker yielding his voice to the Spirit's prompting. Simply stated, the believer gives his or her voice to God. The first step is initiated by the seeker as he chooses to draw near to Christ in worship. The second step is initiated by Christ as He sends the Holy Spirit upon the hungry seeker. The third step is a cooperative effort between the seeker and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives the ability to speak and the person does the actual speaking.

I have consistently witnessed the benefit of letting seekers know what to expect—so much "fear of the unknown" is then eliminated. Even the first Pentecostals had some idea of what to expect. As Christ had previously told them, He would "send [them] what my Father has promised" them (Luke 24:49), that they would be "clothed with power" (Luke 24:49), and that they would "speak in new tongues" (Mark 16:17). Another benefit of setting biblical expectations is that the seeker can recognize his or her progress in the reception process.

The Real Nuts and Bolts

The first step in ministering on Spirit baptism is personal spiritual preparation. Have you prayed about the event? Do you have a word from God? Have you asked for His help and guidance? Have you asked for an increase of faith for ministering the Baptism?

The second step involves the teaching or preaching. Simplicity, not brilliance, is what helps people to receive. I have found the more simply I define what Spirit baptism is and what it is for, the more people want to receive it. Simplicity should also be the watchword for the explanation on how to receive. One of the easiest mistakes to make — and I have made this error many times — is to preach on the Baptism and never tell anyone how to receive it. It's information without function. It's like a person buying a new computer with no instructions. If you are not sure how to explain this, take some time and create your own bullet points, then go over them again to make sure they are easily understood.

So, let's assume there has been a simple teaching accurately defining the purpose of Spirit baptism followed by an equally simple explanation of how someone can receive it. The next step is to give opportunity for people to respond and receive. Many times I use the following procedure.

I like to make a dual application to the teaching, such as, "In a moment we will have some prayer time for those who want to receive this gift (specific application). But before we do that, how many would really like to experience a fresh touch from the Holy Spirit today (general application)?" This dual application engages almost everyone in the room. Though not all may feel ready to receive now and perhaps some have already received, almost all can affirm their desire for a fresh encounter with the Holy Spirit. When you feel the consensus in the room, invite everyone to step forward and pray for a few minutes. Inviting everyone to respond together also helps remove the first-time seeker's potential fear of being the "only needy one."

When people begin to gather and pray, I will casually ask, "How many want to be baptized in the Holy Spirit for the first time?" When they respond, I will typically ask them to listen as I restate the three steps to receive — draw near to Jesus, the Holy Spirit will come upon the seeker, and the seeker must yield his or her voice to God. This reinforces biblical expectations for the process.

This is where you, as the minister, can start feeling levels of anxiety and pressure to produce results. Do not go there. Only Jesus can baptize someone in the Holy Spirit, so relax! You have been obedient to proclaim this biblical truth, Now, your only job is to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and to the people you are there to help. Jesus will do the hard part.

I like to lead a simple worship chorus to help people sensitize their hearts to God. Hunger plus worship equals an amazingly easy atmosphere in which people can receive. When the song is over, I encourage them to begin to praise Jesus out loud. In just a few moments, people will begin to receive.

After several minutes, I will ask, "How many have received so far and have the proof of a new spiritual language?" After they respond, I will then say, "If you haven't yet received, that's fine. Sometimes it takes a little while. However, there is never a wasted moment in seeking Christ. If you have a few more minutes, please continue to seek Him." I will then begin to minister to people individually, taking time to listen to the Holy Spirit's leading. He will help you if you slow down and listen to His voice.

I also try to pay special attention to those who are very introverted. Many times "loners" struggle to receive in a group setting, so be sensitive to the way they are wired. I will frequently ask such a person, "Are you more quiet in your worship? That's fine. Some people receive better by themselves. Do you think you can find a quiet place where you can be alone in the next day or so?" I encourage them to do so as soon as possible and remind them of the three steps to receive. Many times they receive in their car on their way home from church! They are hungry, and Jesus wants to baptize them.

It is important to reinforce that sometimes it can take a little while because some personalities are very impatient and can easily become frustrated, or worse yet, discouraged.

Finally, I instruct those who have received to try out their new prophetic power as soon as possible. "Visit with a lost person and give God opportunity to speak through you in the next day or so. You now have proof that you can say what God wants you to say." Otherwise, they can follow the path of many previous Pentecostals and think it is okay to have the power and to do nothing with it. We don't need any more "pew potatoes." People who have experienced the Holy Spirit's power yet refuse to be obedient to witness tend to get rather frustrated and infectiously grumpy.

CONCLUSION

I am absolutely convinced from the Scriptures and personal experience that God is still moving in Pentecostal power. I am equally convinced we must contend for a fresh demonstration of His power in our churches and our

communities. We must cling to the biblical imperatives of Spirit baptism and its accompanying sign of tongues speaking; but we must also frame these truths in the practical, utilitarian ways the Bible presents. If you don't think the models you've witnessed in the past would fly in your church context, don't throw the truth out with the bad model. Strategize with the Holy Spirit. Let Him anoint you with creativity to present and minister this truth in unique, nontraditional ways. After all, we can't do the job without the power