

PENTECOSTAL PERSPECTIVES ON
CHARISMATIC ACTIVITY OF THE SPIRIT

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The Pentecost event of Acts 2 serves as the foundation for understanding Pentecostal³¹⁰ theology and praxis. Besides Pentecostals deriving their name from this event, the Christocentric foundation of understanding the person and work of the Holy Spirit leads Pentecostals to maintain additional features to their pneumatology, which make them slightly distinctive, even from their Charismatic counterparts. Pentecostals around the world adhere to a doctrine commonly known as the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit.' Though this doctrine has been the source of much controversy, particularly during the modern Pentecostal movement of the twentieth century, it led to the broadening of theology and experience among Catholics and Evangelicals, evidenced in the 1960s by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and the Charismatic Movement.³¹¹

Though members of the broader Christian community have accepted various aspects of Pentecostal theology, there remain a number of misconceptions concerning the charismatic dimension of Pentecostal pneumatology. Admittedly, some of these misunderstandings result from extremes that have presented themselves within the Pentecostal movement. Various Pentecostal groups and scholars have responded to such extremes. These include the New Order of the Latter Rain, the Jesus Only Controversy, the Prosperity Gospel, and others. Given these extremes, much like those found in other Christian traditions, one could understand the misgivings some have toward differing theological positions of other traditions.

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³¹⁰ Given their rejection of the concept of the Trinity, the use of the term 'Pentecostal' excludes reference to Oneness Pentecostals.

³¹¹ Gary B. McGee, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004), pp. 365-66.

Understanding the meaning behind the specific use of certain words/phrases serves as one of the most difficult aspects of theological discussion. Terms such as predestination, justification, sanctification, etc. possess a theologically loaded connotation for a majority of individuals in the Church, no matter their theological background or tradition. The goal of this article is to explain the concept of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, along with the closely related idea of Spirit manifestations, from a Pentecostal perspective and clarify various misconceptions associated with the Pentecostal presentation of the doctrine.

When discussing the topic of Spirit baptism, it is important to discover where and how the phrase (or various related phrases) is used. The Greek New Testament contains seven occurrences at which some form of the word rendered “baptize” is used in conjunction with the phrase rendered “in/by/with the Spirit.” Luke uses these words to express the idea three times. Paul uses them once. The other gospel writers each use these words to express the concept of Spirit baptism once in their gospels. Because the popular Pentecostal expression of the phrase finds its basis within the Lukan corpus, attention will first be given to the Pauline text.

Spirit Baptism as Conversion

The Apostle Paul uses his letter to the Corinthians to inform them, “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” (1 Cor 12:13). Within the context of the Corinthian church, known for its divisions based upon individuals (1 Cor 1:10-17), social status (1 Cor 11:17-34), and the diversity of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12, 14), Paul points out the commonality they share as believers—the Holy Spirit.³¹² Despite how other New Testament writers present Spirit baptism, for Paul, “it is

³¹² Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), pp. 66-67.

the way to become a member of the body of Christ.”³¹³ Given the idea that salvation is a Trinitarian work, “all Pentecostals recognize that the Spirit is the agent by which we are incorporated into Christ and born anew.”³¹⁴

The foundation for this understanding of Spirit baptism appears in the Old Testament. The book of Ezekiel contains God’s promise to place his Spirit within his people (Ezek 36:26-27; 37:14). The purpose of this indwelling of the Spirit provides the people with the capacity to walk in the Lord’s statutes and obey him (Ezek. 36:27). This work of the Spirit occurs when one has the ‘born again’ experience (John 3:6).³¹⁵ Based upon a biblical theological framework, Pentecostal theology understands this concept in Ezekiel to be the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.³¹⁶ Given Paul’s use of the idea of Spirit baptism in relation with his presentation of regeneration, Pentecostals acknowledge Spirit baptism in terms of conversion.

Despite this understanding of Spirit baptism, Pentecostals do not see conversion as the only biblical presentation of the concept. The construction of Luke’s narrative presents the understanding of Spirit baptism in a different fashion than Paul’s epistle. As a result, Pentecostals find it necessary to acknowledge Luke’s theological independence and avoid reading the Lukan corpus through Pauline lenses. Reading Luke’s writing in this way allows the audience to understand the message he is communicating, without the imposition of Pauline ideas.

³¹³ Veli-Mati Kárkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 32.

³¹⁴ Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 113.

³¹⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), p. 73.

³¹⁶ Anthony D. Palma, *The Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), p. 96.

Spirit Baptism as Empowerment

Pentecostals understand the pneumatology of Luke-Acts to emphasize the activity of the Spirit in relation to prophetic speech.³¹⁷ The concept of Spirit baptism explicitly appears in Luke-Acts three times. Interestingly, each occurrence is in relation to John the Baptist's teaching concerning the Messiah's work of baptizing with the Spirit. The first episode presents John the Baptist proclaiming the one who would come after him and baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:15-16). Next, Jesus speaks to his disciples concerning John's teaching (Acts 1:4-5). Lastly, Peter recounts Jesus' words as he explains the events which took place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:16). Stopping here, one understands that Jesus is the Messiah who functions as the agent of Spirit baptism, but it leaves Lukan readers with the question of what he means by his use of baptized "in/by/with the Holy Spirit."

Luke presents the concept of Spirit baptism through various words/phrases. These include "baptize" (Luke 3:16), "clothed with power" (Luke 24:29), "promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4), "receive power" (Acts 1:8), "filled with" (Acts 2:4), "fell on" (Acts 10:44), "came on" (Acts 19:6), etc. The end of Luke's gospel and the recapitulation of these events at the beginning of his second volume provide an example of this within the context of a few verses. The end of Luke's gospel shows Jesus telling his disciples, "I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The beginning of Acts picks up this idea and shows Jesus instructing his followers to remain in Jerusalem and "wait for the Promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). He goes on to connect the promise with John's teaching and declares, "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). Jesus also informs the disciples about the power they will receive when the Spirit

³¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Spirit in the Gospels and Acts: Divine Purity and Power* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p. 190.

comes upon them (Acts 1:8). Ten days after Christ's ascension, the disciples in Jerusalem experience that which Jesus foretold. Luke notes, "...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). This shows just a few words/phrases Luke uses synonymously when discussing the idea of Spirit baptism.

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|---------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <u>Luke</u> | <u>Luke</u> | <u>Acts 1:4</u> | <u>Acts 1:5</u> | <u>Acts 1:8</u> | <u>Acts 2:4</u> |
| <u>24:29a</u> | <u>24:29b</u> | | | | |
| promise | clothed | promise | baptized | you shall | filled with |
| of my | with | of the | with the | receive | the Holy |
| Father | power | Father | Holy Spirit | power | Spirit |

The disciples being "filled with the Spirit" in Acts 2:4 functions as the fulfillment of the promise of Spirit baptism in Acts 1:5. When this occurs, the crowd raises questions as to what the events mean. The Apostle Peter addresses the crowd, using the Old Testament in order to explain what they observe.

Even as the Pauline perspective on Spirit baptism appears in the Old Testament, the Lukan presentation of Spirit baptism also finds its basis there. In his explanation to the crowd, Peter utilizes the text of Joel 2 in order to explain that the miraculous events taking place are the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Even as Ezekiel prophesied concerning the regenerative work of the Spirit in the new age, Joel spoke of an outpouring of the Spirit that would transcend lines of age, gender, and social status. Peter proclaims, "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy..." (Acts 2:17). Ultimately, Peter explains Pentecost as the inauguration of the universal, eschatological, prophetic dimension of the Spirit's work.

Pentecostal doctrine explains, "being filled with the Spirit is not a once-for-all experience,"³¹⁸ as the Scriptures

³¹⁸ Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), p. 54.

record multiple infillings with the Holy Spirit. Because of this, Pentecostals must express clarity for those outside their community when discussing the topic of Spirit baptism. Peter, who is filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:4), is filled again before the council (Acts 4:8), and again when the disciples pray for boldness (Acts 4:31). Pentecostals understand Peter's initial filling with the Spirit in Acts 2 to function as his Spirit baptism experience. The latter occurrences function as other charismatic experiences of the Spirit. This provides the idea among Pentecostals that there is one baptism (in the Lukan sense), but multiple fillings.³¹⁹ This also leads to the conclusion that baptism/filling with the Spirit does not serve exclusively as a regenerative experience. If it did, this would mean the Apostle Peter had three salvation experiences over the course of three chapters.

The multiple accounts of this type of interaction with the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts display Luke's presentation of the baptism with the Holy Spirit as an experience of charismatic empowerment occurring subsequently to and separately from conversion.³²⁰ Though the idea of subsequence can be a temporal one, the Pentecostal concepts of subsequence of Spirit baptism (as empowerment) relates to a separate aspect of the Spirit's work in regeneration; and the empowering experience only being available to those who have had the regenerative experience. Maintaining continuity with the Old Testament sign of being filled with the Spirit, Luke presents the manifestation of prophetic speech—in the form of tongues—accompanies this experience.³²¹ As a result, those within the Pentecostal

³¹⁹ General Council of the Assemblies of God, *Where We Stand: the Official Position Papers of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2003), pp. 226-27.

³²⁰ From the multiple accounts of Spirit baptism presented in Acts, Luke notes a distinction between conversion and empowerment in Acts chapters 8, 9, and 19.

³²¹ Biblical theology reveals continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. The continuity presented within the Pentecostal understanding of "Initial Evidence" is the manifestation

tradition believe the initial physical evidence of Spirit baptism is a particular form of prophetic speech known as tongues.³²²

Present-day Manifestations of Gifts

Directly tied to the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the practice/theology of spiritual gifts. Multiple lists of gifts bestowed by God appear in the New Testament. Seeing that the Spirit is no longer relegated to a few individuals—prophets, judges, kings—the gifts are no longer limited to a few but are made available to all (1 Cor 12:6). Though the popularity of the cessationist position has diminished over the years, it seems necessary to explain why Pentecostals believe in the continuation of spiritual gifts.

As previously noted, Pentecostals maintain a high Christology, in which they ground their pneumatology. When reading Peter's explanation of the events at Pentecost, he does not end his explanation with Joel's text. He appeals to the Psalms to give his listeners further clarification. He moves beyond identifying the event to providing information concerning its source and purpose—Jesus Christ.

Using David's words, Peter notes the death of David and the presence of his body in the grave. These facts reveal David must have been referring to someone besides himself when he proclaimed God's Holy One would not see corruption (Psalm 16:8). Noting David's role as a prophet, Peter reminds the crowd of the Davidic promise that his seed would eternally sit on the throne. Luke proceeds to note Peter's use of David's comment concerning the exaltation of another to God's right hand of authority (Acts 2:34-35, cf. Psalm 110:1). By way of the Old Testament scriptures, Peter poignantly proclaims the

of prophetic speech. The discontinuity exists within the manifestation of a particular form of prophetic speech—glossolalia.

³²² William W. Menzies, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (ed. Stanley M. Horton; Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1993), pp. 135-38.

outpouring of the Holy Spirit results from Christ's exaltation to the right hand of God. As long as Jesus remains at the right hand of the Father, he will continue to pour out the Spirit on all people.

Addressing the Idea of Cessation

Pentecostals understand the Scriptures teach the gifts will cease. The question to be answered is not if they will cease, but when they will cease. Various theories have been presented noting the cessation of gifts after the death of the last apostle, after the canon was complete, etc. Given the Pentecostal understanding of Christ's departure and exaltation inaugurating the age of the Spirit, one must also place the conclusion of this age within the eschatological framework of Christ's return. As a result, when reading Paul's statements to the Corinthians concerning that which is partial, Pentecostals understand this to refer to gifts given by God to the church. The question becomes who/what is the perfect to which Paul refers. The entirety of the epistle confirms the perfect as Christ, as the "gifts have to do with the edification of the church as it 'eagerly awaits our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed' (1:7)."³²³ At that time, "[we] shall know fully, even as [we] have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

As a result, Pentecostals read Scripture in a way that calls for the continued propagation of the idea that the charismatic function of the church should continue until Christ's return. Some go on to say, "biblical theology not only supports such a reading, it prescribes it."³²⁴ The disclaimer given to this practice is that the gifts must be exercised in conjunction with love (1 Cor. 13).

³²³ Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), p. 208.

³²⁴ Oss, Douglas. "A Pentecostal/Charismatic View." in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (ed. by Stanley Gundry. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), p. 265.

Similar Manifestations within Non-Christian Religions

Pentecostals understand analogous manifestations occur within their religious practices and those of other religions. Because they adhere to Paul's statement that "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3), Pentecostals attribute these occurrences within other religions to a source other than the Spirit of God. The Scriptures reveal Pharaoh's magicians performed some of the same signs as Moses (Exodus 7:11, 22; 8:7) and a slave girl operating under demonic influence possessed what appeared to be the gift of prophecy (Acts 16:16-18).³²⁵ Given these biblical accounts, Pentecostals believe "counterfeit" manifestations of the Holy Spirit can occur within non-Christian religions. Few Christians, if any, would utilize the parallel works of Pharaoh's magicians to invalidate the miracles performed through Moses in Egypt. Nor would many deny the gift of prophecy because of a slave girl with a "spirit of divination." Given this same line of thinking, Pentecostals find no reason to question the legitimacy of manifestations occurring among Christian believers in the present-day.

³²⁵ F. F. Bruce. *The Book of Acts*. (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 312.