

## *The Baptism of the Spirit*

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*(For some years we have maintained a principle only to print articles that are original to 'The Witness'. In this instance, we are departing from that principle because of the current nature and importance of the subject discussed by Professor Bruce; and gladly acknowledge the courtesy of 'Calling', published in Vancouver, B.C., for the use of this paper.)*

The baptism of the Spirit is not referred to frequently in so many words in the New Testament. It may be that sometimes, where the context so indicates, it is referred to in terms of baptism alone, without express mention of the Spirit; it may be, also, that the same experience is sometimes referred to where other words—such as outpouring, anointing or sealing—are used in connection with the Spirit. But, although some passages in the two latter categories will be touched upon in this study, it is from those passages which speak explicitly of the baptism of (or 'with', or 'in') the Spirit that we must take our bearings.

**1. John's prophecy.** While the baptism of the Spirit may well have been foretold in Old Testament times, its first explicit mention comes in the proclamation of John the Baptist: 'I baptised you in water; but he (the One who was to come after John) shall baptise you in the Holy Spirit' (Mark 1. 8, ARV; cf. parallels in Matt. 3. 11; Luke 3. 16). At the beginning of his ministry, John did not know the identity of this Coming One, but he had been given a sign by which he would recognize Him when He appeared: 'Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon Him, the same is He that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit' (John 1. 33). The day came when John did see the descent of the Spirit; 'and I have seen,' he said, 'and have borne witness that this is the Son of God' (John 1. 34).

**2. John's prophecy reaffirmed.** It was when Jesus from Nazareth came up out of the water, after being baptized by John, that the Spirit descended upon Him as a dove from the rent heavens, and the voice of God acclaimed Him as His Servant-Son. The descent of the Spirit marked Him out as the Messiah of David's line (Isa. 11. 2) and the obedient Servant of the Lord (Isa. 42. 1; 61. 1), anointed by that same Spirit to bring the glad tidings of liberation (cf. Luke 4. 18). This is the occasion referred to by our Lord when He said of the Son of Man, 'Him the Father, even God, hath sealed' (John 6. 27), and by Peter when he told Cornelius and his household about 'Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power' (Acts 10. 38). Jesus is not actually said to have been baptized with the Spirit, but it was just when He had been baptized in water that the Spirit came upon Him, endowing Him for His messianic ministry, which included the baptizing of others with the Holy Spirit. The fact that it was at His water-baptism that He received the Spirit may help to explain why the baptism of the Spirit, when it was imparted, did not supersede water-baptism, as John the Baptist's language might have led one to expect.

The fulfilment of the promise that Jesus would baptize with the Spirit had to await that further baptism which He had to undergo, according to His own words in Luke 12. 50. Until it was accomplished He was restrained from the full impartation of the blessings He came to bestow, but when He had passed through the baptism of death and emerged from it in resurrection, He knew that their full impartation was imminent. 'John indeed baptized with water', He said to

the apostles during one of His resurrection appearances to them, 'but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence' (Acts 1. 5).

**3. *The prophecy fulfilled.*** There can be no doubt that our Lord's promise, 'ye shall be baptized... not many days hence', was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when the apostles (and possibly their fellow-disciples) 'were all filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2. 4). Peter explained the event and its attendant signs as the fulfilment of Joel 2. 28 ff.: 'it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all flesh' (Acts 2. 17). It was, he further explained, the consequence and the demonstration of Jesus' resurrection and enthronement: 'Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the

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Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear' (Acts 2. 33). Not only so, but his hearers might also have a share in this outpouring: 'Repent ye,' he said in response to their anxious cry, 'what shall we do?'—'Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2. 38). Most, if not all, of the apostles themselves and other members of the upper room fellowship had received John's baptism 'unto remission of sins'; a further baptism in water was evidently not called for so far as they were concerned. But baptism in water was called for in the case of their penitent hearers—a baptism which was not only 'unto remission of sins' but also (and this was its new feature) 'in the name of Jesus Christ'. Baptism in His name was to be followed by the gift of the Spirit.

There is a sense in which the baptism of the Spirit which it was Jesus' prerogative to bestow took place once for all on the day of Pentecost, when He poured forth the promise of the Father on His disciples and their converts and thus constituted them the people of God. Baptism in water, in Jesus' name, continued to be the outward and visible sign by which those who believed the gospel, repented of their sins, and confessed Jesus as Lord, were publicly incorporated into this new and Spirit-baptized fellowship. To put it this way is to run ahead of the evidence of Acts 2; but a consideration of further scriptures will show that this is so.

When Peter, at a later date, opened a door of faith to the Gentiles by preaching to Cornelius and his household, his hearers received the Spirit while he was still speaking to them, and he took this as a sign that he had to baptize them in water 'in the name of Jesus Christ' (Acts 10. 44-48). The order of water-baptism and Spirit-baptism was reversed on this occasion — perhaps because Peter would never have commanded them to be baptized in water if God had not presented him with a *fait accompli* by sending the Spirit upon them. Peter recognized this act of God as conforming to the pattern of Pentecost; by his own account, he 'remembers the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit' (Acts 11. 16). By giving orders for their baptism, Peter publicly welcomed them as fellow-members of the Spirit-baptized community, into which God Himself had manifestly admitted them.

There are other examples in Acts of the relation of the external baptism in water to the inward irruption of the Spirit; we may think of the experience of Paul (Acts 9. 17, 18), of the Samaritan believers (Acts 8. 12-17), and of the twelve Ephesian disciples (Acts 19. 1-7). In each case there are interesting, and indeed problematical, details into which we cannot enter at present; but in each case those concerned were welcomed into the Spirit-baptized fellowship.

The sequence of events—especially the sequence of water-baptism and the receiving of the Spirit—might vary; but this variation does not affect the essence of the situation.

**4. *The Pauline doctrine.*** While Luke in the Acts gives us the history, it is Paul who gives us the theology. It is, indeed, in the light of Paul's theology that it was possible two or three paragraphs ago to run ahead of the evidence of Acts 2, and emphasize the corporate character of Spirit-baptism, and its relation to water-baptism.

The clearest of all Paul's statements on the subject comes in 1 Cor. 12. 13: 'For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit' (or 'were all irrigated by one Spirit'). The meaning is not in doubt: baptism in the Spirit is the means by which individual believers are incorporated into the body of Christ. It is not a private experience which members of a spiritual elite may enjoy; Paul takes it for granted that all the members of the Corinthian church, without discrimination, had received this baptism in the Spirit as truly as himself, and were accordingly as truly 'in Christ' as he himself was.

To the same effect he writes to the Galatians: 'as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ... ye all are one man in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3. 27, 28). Is this water-baptism or Spirit-baptism? It is both; Paul does not contemplate the one without the other. Baptism in the Spirit is the inward and spiritual grace; baptism in water is its public sign. This may be seen in the treatment of the same subject in Rom. 6. 3 ff.: 'all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death... that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life... united with Him in the likeness... of His resurrection.' There are indeed some expositors who see only Spirit-baptism in these words, to the exclusion of water-baptism. But it is safe to say that those who first read them could not have failed to recognize a reference to their baptism in water

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here; besides, the symbolical death, burial and resurrection with Christ imply the baptismal submergence in the water followed by emergence from it. On the other hand, the Spirit is present and active throughout this experience, even if He is not expressly mentioned in Rom. 6. It is crystal-clear when we turn to Rom. 8 that walking with Christ in newness of life, united with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, is made possible only by the Spirit. To walk thus in newness of life is to 'walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.... But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through His spirit that dwelleth in you' (Rom. 8. 4-11). That is to say, the Spirit imparts life to the believer now, and guarantees his resurrection hereafter. But it is only as the believer is 'in Christ Jesus' (v. 1), incorporated into Him by the Spirit's baptism, that he receives from the Spirit present life and the hope of immortality.

To be baptized in the Spirit is to be immersed in the Spirit, or to have the Spirit poured out upon us (cf. Rom. 5. 5; Tit. 3. 6), so that we are in the Spirit and the Spirit in us. Moreover, since it is the Spirit who conveys the risen life of Christ to His people, by that same token we are in Christ and Christ is in us. But it is the body of Christ that is animated by His risen life; the individual believer shares that life because he is a member of the body. So, too, in Eph. 1.

13 f., when believers are said to have been 'sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise', against the day when God redeemed His 'own possession', that 'possession' is the whole elect community.

Later in the Epistle to the Ephesians, the context in which the 'one baptism' of ch. 4. 5 is mentioned suggests the same corporate emphasis. If this 'one baptism' had been baptism in the Spirit as distinct from baptism in water, it would have been associated with 'one Spirit' and not with 'one Lord'. But the point here made is that Jewish and Gentile believers alike (as in 1 Cor. 12. 13) acknowledged one Lord, shared one faith in Him, and had undergone one baptism into His name—a baptism whose external sign was immersion in water but whose inward reality involved their engrafting into Christ by His Spirit.

The same truth reappears in Eph. 5. 26 where it is the Church as a corporate entity that Christ in love purchased with His life, 'that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word'. The 'washing of water', accompanied by the word of confession (the response of a good conscience, according to 1 Peter 3. 21), is again the outward sign which proclaims the regenerative cleansing within and 'renewing of the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3. 5). It is 'in Christ' that individual believers share in this inward renewal and purification.

This work of the Spirit by which believers are incorporated into Christ might be accompanied by miraculous manifestations of various kinds (Gal. 3. 5). These were of evidential value, not of the essence of baptism in the Spirit. They were sporadic in their incidence. No one believer experienced all of them; some might experience none of them. The seven questions in 1 Cor. 12. 29, 30 (Are all apostles? ...) all imply the answer 'No'. But the 'most excellent way' which Paul proceeds to show in the following chapter is the one infallible token of baptism in the Spirit and membership of Christ. Those who have been baptized into Christ may be expected to exhibit the graces of Christ, by the spontaneous reproduction of the fruit of the Spirit. 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control' (Gal. 5. 22 f.).

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