

**Acts 2:1-4, 32-33; 4:31
& 1 Corinthians 12:13
“Spirit-baptized and Spirit-filled”**

Introduction

As we said last week, apart from Pentecost, Christmas and Easter can do us no good. It is God’s Spirit who brings to the believer the benefits of Christ’s life, death and victory. We should do the same kind of heart preparation for Pentecost that we do for Christmas and Easter.

This morning, on Pentecost Sunday, I want to continue that thought, focusing particularly on the too often confused difference between the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit. These are both crucial to the life of the believer, and a bit of clarity should be helpful on this point where there is so much confusion. We may not agree on every detail, and there is much that is debatable in these matters. But we should try to be clear on the broad outlines of the Bible’s teaching, or we may be susceptible to falling into one of two extremes: either the constant fear of losing the Spirit and so of losing our salvation, or the arrogance of thinking that, by virtue of being a Christian, we already have all that can possibly be had in this life of the presence and power of the Spirit.

Body

1. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of the baptism of the Spirit?

There are, arguably, two different baptisms that are called by this same name, and that has caused significant confusion throughout the history of the church. I say “arguably” because some excellent Christian teachers (such as John Stott) believe that the Spirit-baptism of Acts 2 is precisely the same as the Spirit-baptism described in 1 Corinthians 12. Since Scripture interprets Scripture, the clearer passages interpreting the less clear, those who find 1 Corinthians 12:13 to be the clearer text, interpret both baptisms as describing regeneration (being born-again). Others, finding Acts 2 to be clearer and more compelling, interpret both baptisms as describing an empowering for ministry.

But I believe (along with such diverse teachers as A.J. Gordon, Andrew Murray, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones) that these two texts do not describe the same thing, and so should not be used to interpret each other. The Spirit-baptisms described are closely related, but are not, I think, the same thing. So, what are they?

In Acts 2, we see fulfilled the words spoken by John the Baptist about Jesus: "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11). So, Peter says in his Pentecost sermon, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." *In this baptism, Jesus is the one who baptizes with his Spirit.* He pours out his Spirit on those who are his, and empowers them for the ministry he has entrusted to his church, namely, the extension of God's kingdom through the discipling of the nations. The emphasis is on giving his resurrection power to his body, the church.

This, I believe, was the once and forever baptism of the body of Christ, for all of human history. Just as Jesus only needed to be born once in order to enter the world and dwell in human flesh, so too the Spirit of God only needed to be poured out once in order to take on the body of Christ, the church, and through it, to dwell in human flesh. Precisely for this reason, the great church father, Augustine, spoke of Pentecost as "the birthday of the Holy Spirit," although the Spirit had been present in the world since creation (Genesis 1:2), in the same way that the eternally begotten Son of God can nevertheless be spoken of as having been born at a certain point in time.

But we must be very careful at this point. Many who agree that Pentecost was utterly unique go on to draw an egregious conclusion, and to think that, because of this, every believer has all that he or she can ever receive of the Spirit because the Spirit has been given once for all. This is manifestly not true, based both on the further testimony of the book of Acts, as well as on the history of revival within the church. So the question is this: if the Spirit has been poured out upon the church, why do we often experience the Spirit in such a slight and limited degree.

Before we can answer that, we need to look at the other baptism also referred to as Spirit-baptism. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul speaks again of a baptism of the Spirit, but here – and this is important – the Spirit is the baptizer, uniting us to the body of Christ. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body ... and we were all given one Spirit to drink."

This is Paul's description of the salvation by the Holy Spirit of an individual Christian. It is the same thing that Jesus called being born-again. Here the Spirit convicts us of sin, and brings us to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. This also is once and for all, not for the entire body of Christ, but for the individual believer. That it is true of every believer is obvious, for Paul writes, "We all were baptized by one Spirit." Even those who disagree with what I am saying, and who hold that the baptism of Pentecost and the baptism described here by Paul are one and the same baptism, must acknowledge what I am now going to say:

Namely, that *this brings us to the heart of our problem: By virtue of being baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, we should now have the benefit of the once-for-all baptism of the Spirit that Christ gave to his church at Pentecost. We should all have, not only the Spirit of God whom we clearly have if we have been born-again, but we should also have the tremendous power for life and ministry that marked the church at Pentecost. However, this we clearly do not ordinarily experience. And – remarkably – neither did the first Christians continue daily to have the same power for life and ministry that they had received at Pentecost (see Act 4:31).*

All of which brings us to the question of what it means to be filled with the Spirit: what it means, and how we can experience it.

2. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of the filling of the Spirit?

It is quite remarkable, and very important to our understanding, that the great baptism of Pentecost is itself actually described in Acts 2 as a mighty filling of the Spirit: “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Act 2:4). This is important, because it shows us that what is always referred to as being filled with the Holy Spirit is related directly to the empowering experience of the believers at Pentecost, rather than simply to the Spirit-baptism of 1 Corinthians that describes our salvation.

The expression, “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” in Acts describes the action taken by the risen, glorified and exalted Christ in receiving the Holy Spirit from the Father and pouring the Spirit out upon his body, the church. After Pentecost, the expression, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” describes the experience of believers receiving afresh the empowering presence of the Spirit with nothing that blocks or limits the Spirit’s power in their lives.

In other words, after Pentecost, it is no longer called the baptism of the Spirit, because that had already taken place once-for-all at Pentecost. But the experience is the same, whether among Jews who had already received the Pentecost baptism, but who now needed a fresh filling of the Spirit (Acts 4:31), or a group of newly converted Samaritans (8:17), or a household of Romans (10:44), or a band of Greek disciples (19:6).

What, then, is the filling of the Holy Spirit?

The filling of the Holy Spirit is simply this: it is the life and power of the risen Christ flowing into our life, as air flows into healthy lungs when we breathe deeply. At birth, a baby draws a deep breath and fills its lungs with air. We hear it cry out, and we laugh with joy to know that it is alive. From that moment on until death, there will always be air in the lungs, even when the child is “out of breath” or sick with pneumonia, and gasping for air. There will

always be some breath in the lungs. Thus it is when one is born again: the Spirit is given, and if we grow to spiritual health, the lungs will grow ever stronger and larger in capacity. The body will be replenished with oxygen, if the lungs stay healthy and strong. But, if through illness or laziness, the lungs grow weak, the entire body suffers, and is unable to do the work it once did, or to know vigor and strength. What is needed then is healing, exercise and restoration to health and strength – something to heal the lungs and enable them once again to be filled with the breath of life.

When God fills us with his Spirit, he graciously enables us once again to breathe deeply of the Spirit, who is the breath of God, the breath of everlasting life. If I take a deep breath, it is reviving, strengthening, necessary for the task at hand. But I cannot make do on one breath. I need to breathe; fresh air must constantly be flowing into my lungs. *Thus, we must always be being filled with the Spirit.* When something obstructs the passage of fresh air into my lungs, I grow weak and sickly. This is precisely the problem in the church today: too many of us have a sort of spiritual emphysema.

3. What, then, might hinder us from being filled with the Holy Spirit?

The first question we need to ask is this: Have I yet had the baptism of 1 Corinthians 12:13? Have I been born again? Has God's Spirit yet baptized me into the body of Christ? Until I have been born anew, I cannot experience anything of the life of God in my life. If you don't know, then ask God to send his Spirit to convict you of sin, and to renew your heart and mind. Don't stop crying out to him for his Spirit. He has promised those who keep asking will be given God's mercy, those who keep seeking will find grace upon grace, those who knock will have the door of salvation swung open wide.

The second question is for those who have been born again, but whose lives experience so little of the refreshing power and joy of God's presence. Ask yourself this: Are there patterns of sin in my life that I have permitted to take root and grow? If so, am I willing to ask the Lord to reveal them to me, not as precious things that I must sacrifice to him, but as what they really are: cancers eating my soul, spiritual tumors filling my lungs and keeping me from breathing deeply the Spirit of God.

The third question is for those of us who have been born again, who have known something of the Spirit's presence and power, and yet who long for more of the reality of the Spirit of God in our daily lives. Ask yourself this: Am I willing to seek every day to relinquish control of my life to the sovereign Lord of life, who created and redeemed me to glorify him and enjoy him forever? What would that look like? How differently might I spend my time, my money? How differently might I plan my future?

Once you have experienced the filling of the Spirit of God, nothing is ever quite the same. When you are not living in that fullness, you long for it. It's like someone who has gotten all out of shape, and now finds it hard to do what he once did with joy and vigor. You lie around remembering being fit and lean and longing to get back to where you once were.

4. What happens when a person is filled with the Holy Spirit?

God's Spirit ignites within us love for God and for one another, expressed in some of the following ways:

- Grief at sin, your own sin and the sin you see around you. What once charmed you now fills you with sadness.
- Desire for God's Word, to study and meditate upon it, so that you begin to hear God speak into your life as his Spirit brings the Word to mind and applies it to your present circumstances.
- Desire to do his will, not out of fear, but out of gratitude, and out of the knowledge that his ways lead to life and joy and peace.
- Desire to worship him, to gather with God's people and offer him prayers and praises.
- Desire for others to know him, for the privilege of sharing his grace and encouraging others go on into life in Christ.
- Desire for the day when Christ consummates history, wipes away tears and makes all things new.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by simply asking you what I've been asking myself this past week: Are you filled with the Spirit? If not, why not? The Spirit of God has been poured out upon the body of Christ. Have you been born again by God's Spirit? If so, then you have already breathed the Spirit of life. Why go on living at a reduced capacity?

As we come to the table this morning, let's ask the Lord to show us those things – those attitudes, behaviors, patterns of living according to the flesh rather than according to the Spirit – that may be holding us back from the life of joy, and power, and peace, that God has offered his children since that first Pentecost, and continues to offer us today.

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