

Holy Spirit 05

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Do Christians receive the Holy Spirit when they are saved? If so, how is this experience different from the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Yes, when persons accept Christ, the Holy Spirit begins a great work in their lives. The Spirit convicts them of sin, convinces them of righteousness, and dwells within them (John 6:44; 14:17; Roman 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13). No one becomes a Christian without this gracious work of the Holy Spirit.

However, there is an additional and distinct ministry of the Holy Spirit called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Baptism is an empowering gift from God the Father that is promised to every believer (Matthew 3:11; Luke 11:13; 24:49; Acts 2:33, 38). It helps the Christian to live a holy life and also brings a new devotional attachment to Jesus Christ, making Him very real and precious. The primary purpose of the Baptism is to give greater power for witnessing (Acts 1:8). Other benefits include a greater joy in spiritual service, and a heightened sense of one's mission to the world.

Can a person receive eternal life in heaven without the baptism in the Holy Spirit? If so, why should we be baptized in the Spirit?

Receiving eternal life does not depend on being baptized in the Holy Spirit; for salvation is by grace through faith alone (Habakkuk 2:4; John 6:28, 29; Galatians 3:6; 5:6; Ephesians 2:8). It is a gift purchased for us by Christ when He was crucified. All we have to do is accept the gift. Just as the repentant thief on the cross next to Jesus was assured of entering paradise that very day we too are assured a place in heaven with the Father if we believe in Jesus Christ. It is most unfortunate that some have said, "Unless you have spoken in tongues you will not go to heaven." This is not true. It is contrary to the Scriptures.

At the same time, although the Bible does not say the baptism in the Spirit is required for salvation, it does tell us that Christ commanded His first followers to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). The Bible commands us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). This personal encounter with the Holy Spirit should be sought and cherished by every believer. With it comes a new and fuller dimension of spiritual understanding and a flow of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:9-13).

Once a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit, why is it necessary to be refilled later?

On the Day of Pentecost 120 disciples (committed followers of Jesus) were "filled" with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). This fulfilled the promise Christ had made to them a few days earlier. He had said, "John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). But this initial experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is only the beginning of a lifelong experience. God wants us to remain filled with the Spirit. Perhaps an analogy will best clarify this. As Christians we may be compared with a reservoir for producing electrical power. When we accept Christ, construction of our reservoir is complete. We now have the potential to be useful and to affect lives. But until the flood gates are opened and the cascading river waters pour through, no power is realized. So it is when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit. We open our lives to God and the Holy Spirit pours into us and through us. It is then we become most effective in God's service.

As with the reservoir, this power-generating experience is not intended to be a one-time occurrence. It is to be an ongoing process. When our spiritual power runs low, we need to return to the Source and let the blessed Holy Spirit pour into us again, bringing fresh power. This happened to the early followers of Jesus. They had already been baptized in the Spirit; but later on, when persecution arose, they needed a new surge of spiritual power; so they prayed to the Lord once again and "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31).

As the Spirit-filled believer serves the Lord, there is an expenditure of spiritual power. It becomes necessary for him to open himself afresh to the Holy Spirit in order that his power may be replenished. The command in Ephesians 5:18 is literally, "Keep on being filled with the Spirit." Here lies the secret of Spirit-filled living. The Spirit-filled life is a continuous process of receiving and giving, of being filled and sharing with others, of receiving power from God and spending it in gospel service.

Who should be baptized in the Holy Spirit?

When the believers were assembled in prayer on the Day of Pentecost, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). Not one was left out. It was not just the apostles, who were filled, but all the men and all the women in that company of 120 persons. Then the apostle Peter addressed the onlookers and told them that they should be filled. He said "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off -- for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39).

As Peter said, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is for every believer in every generation. It is an all-inclusive promise of universal dimension. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is promised to every Christian believer.

Why are some people baptized in the Spirit immediately, while other seek so long without receiving the experience?

Just prior to His ascension, Jesus told His disciples, "In a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). Some 20 days later they were filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4). Earlier the Lord had said, "I am going to send you what my Father promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). No doubt the disciples obeyed this directive; they remained in Jerusalem and spent much time in prayer. There was a "waiting" for the Spirit to come. However, once the Spirit had fallen there was no further incident of "waiting" or "tarrying." Today there is no longer any reason for waiting, except as "waiting" may relate to the preparation of the heart for the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

Some believers have received the Baptism almost immediately; others have waited for various periods of time. Why? (1) Because the Holy Spirit is sovereign, He will move and work only as He chooses. (2) Because the Holy Spirit does not impose himself on any believer, some will require a period of waiting before they are prepared to yield themselves fully to His divine control. (3) Because "filling" may involve a process, there are some believers with an authentic baptism in the Spirit which may have been preceded by wonderful and meaningful times of waiting in God's presence. Seekers should realize that any period of "waiting" only brings them closer to the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon their lives.

When an individual is seeking the baptism in the Holy Spirit, can anything be done to prepare his life or environment that will quicken the infilling?

The question is often asked: "What can I do to claim the promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit for my life?" One thing the believer should do is to seek the Baptizer rather than the Baptism. It is Jesus who baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit. Seekers should focus their attention on Him rather than on an experience.

There are other steps that, if taken, will assist seekers. (1) Understand that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. It should be received with gratitude and giving of thanks to the Giver. It cannot be earned or merited. It can only be accepted with an open and willing heart. (2) Be fully persuaded that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is both biblical and doctrinally correct. (3) Confess any known sins in your life and resolve to live a righteous life with God's help. (4) Begin to worship the Lord with expressions of praise and adoration. (5) Express to the Lord, who is the Baptizer, a desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit for His glory. (6) Yield to any deep "welling up" within your spirit and allow that inner surge to break through in expressions of worship, praise, and adoration in a language unknown to you but meaningful to God.