

BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Missing person: The Holy Spirit

Many people may have had an experience like that of the little girl who heard the Holy Ghost (as the Holy Spirit is sometimes called) mentioned in church from time to time, but so vaguely and infrequently she could only guess what sort of ghost this might be. So one day, when she ventured down into the dark furnace room in the church's cellar, she decided with a child's firm logic that this spooky place must be where the Holy Ghost lurked.

The fact is, adult believers often act as if the Holy Spirit really was hiding in the church cellar. They may know something about the Holy Spirit, but they don't know Him personally or realize that He is God in the same way the Son and the Father are God. When they read the Bible, many people are surprised to find that the Holy Spirit was at the very dawn of time: "The Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" (Genesis 1:2), and many are amazed to find out there are approximately 100 references to the Holy Spirit throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Nevertheless, the Spirit's role is fundamental both to creation and the life of the believer. When a person comes to Jesus Christ, he receives Christ into his heart. The Spirit of God comes and joins with the spirit of the believer. This "indwelling Spirit" reproduces the life of Jesus in the believer's life.

What, Then, Is The Baptism In The Holy Spirit?

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is an empowering for service that takes place in the life of the Christian (Acts 1:5,8). In it we are immersed in the Spirit's life and power.

To illustrate, if we drank water from a glass, then the water would be inside us. However, if we went to the beach and stepped into the ocean, then we would be in the water. We receive, as it were, a drink of the Holy Spirit when we are saved, but when we are baptized in the Spirit, it is as if that initial drink becomes an ocean that completely surrounds us.

Just as the indwelling Spirit that Christians receive when they are saved reproduces the life of Jesus, so the outpoured, or baptizing, Spirit reproduces the ministry of Jesus, including miracles and healings.

Why Do We Need The Baptism In The Holy Spirit?

We need a power beyond ourselves for service and ministry in Christ's Kingdom.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), He knew that His disciples could not fulfill it in their own power. Therefore, He had a special gift in store for them: It was His plan to give them the same power that He had -- the power of the Spirit of God. So, immediately after giving them the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father promised, "which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5). He further promised: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The disciples waited in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded, and one day when they were all together, "suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing winds, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" (Acts 2:3,4). Then Peter explained to the crowd that gathered that they were seeing the working of God's Spirit and told

them about Jesus. The Christian church began that day with the disciples and the 3,000 people who joined them as a result of the day's events. We can undertake making disciples of all nations with some degree of success without the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but when we do, we are undertaking a supernatural task with limited power.

It is God's will - it is His commandment - that we be baptized, or filled with the Holy Spirit: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). The knowledge and reality of the empowering Spirit enables us to reproduce the works of Jesus.

When May I Receive The Baptism In The Holy Spirit?

It can take place at the moment you confess faith in Christ, as in the case of the first Gentile convert, Cornelius (Acts 10:44-46; Acts 11:15-16); but often it occurs some time after the salvation experience (Acts 8:12-17).

Is There Anything To Fear?

Some people fear that if they ask for the baptism in the Holy Spirit, what they experience won't be the authentic working of the Spirit. But once they do ask for it, they are always glad they did. God doesn't cause us to do anything we don't want to, and all His gifts are good and perfect (James 1:17). Jesus said, "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:11-13). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is an even better gift than any material gift you could receive, and God wants you to have it because He loves you and wants the very best for you.

What Should I Do Before Asking?

The Bible says that a wise man counts the cost before he begins to build a tower (Luke 14:28). This beautiful experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a free gift, but you must be willing to submit fully to God to receive it.

Jesus will respond to a totally yielded vessel. He never asks anything of you that you are incapable of giving, nor does He ever fail to give you something greater in return when you do give your all. The joy He gives through total obedience to Him far outweighs anything you could possibly give up.

There is one more important consideration: In Acts 8, a man named Simon, deeply involved in the occult, wanted to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter sharply rebuked Simon, commanding him to repent. Therefore, if you ever at any time had anything to do with the occult (Ouija boards, fortune tellers, seances, horoscopes, ESP, transcendental mediation, hypnotism, or other such practices), you must renounce and turn away from all such sinful participation, and you must ask for God's forgiveness and cleansing.

How Do I Receive The Baptism In The Holy Spirit?

You only have to do two things.

First, once you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior you just have to ask God to baptize you in the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "Ask, and it shall be given to you" (Luke 11:9).

Second, believe you have in fact received this gift from God. The apostle Paul, writing to the Galatians, said, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?"

(Galatians 3:2). The answer, obviously, is faith. You have to believe that if you ask, you will receive.

Pray this prayer if you sincerely desire to receive the baptism in God's Holy Spirit:

"Heavenly Father, at this moment I come to You. I thank You that Jesus saved me. I pray that the Holy Spirit might come upon me. Lord Jesus, baptize me now in the Holy Spirit. I receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit right now by faith in Your Word. May the anointing, the glory, and the power of God come upon me and into my life right now. May I be empowered for service from this day forward. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for baptizing me in Your Holy Spirit. Amen."

Now, having asked and received, begin to practice the power of the Spirit. An ideal place to begin is where the first apostles did, praising God in a new language. To do this, begin praising God out loud in whatever words come to you. Tell Him how much you love Him. Thank Him, worship Him, and yield your voice to Him. Now let Him give you new words of praise you never heard before. Praise Him with those words, too. You'll find that this can be a very rewarding experience of communication with God that will build up your faith. Continue to pray to God each day in the language that the Holy Spirit has given you.

But this "prayer language" is just one of the gifts that God wants to give you through the baptism in His Spirit.

The Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit would manifest Himself among them in special gifts, of which speaking in tongues was only one: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware....To one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

and to another the distinguishing of spirit, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues" (I Corinthians 12:1,8-10).

Paul also wrote that the Holy Spirit produces "fruit" in the lives of believers. These are virtues that demonstrate Jesus' righteousness in the lives of His disciples: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

So, in asking for the baptism in the Holy Spirit you are availing yourself of these gifts for advancing God's Kingdom and allowing the Holy Spirit to further cultivate in your life the fruit of righteousness - two great helps in living a life God can use mightily for His glory.

That's the way it is with God. God is offering the baptism in the Holy Spirit to people who need only to reach out and receive it in order to be on fire to fully serve Him.

Walking in the Spirit

By now you can see that the Holy Spirit is so much more than a shadowy figure to pay lip-service to on Sunday morning. He can be with you and in you to bring new life to your Christian walk. Likewise, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is more than a single experience. It is a continual dependence on the Spirit for guidance and strength in all circumstances. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25).

The baptism in the Holy Spirit cannot be earned. You cannot become "good enough" to receive it. It is a gift from God. It is not a "cure-all" for your problems. But the same wonderful power that enabled Jesus to open blind eyes, to command the elements of nature, and to live a life pleasing to the Father during His ministry on earth is also available to you. Ask, and it shall be given to you.