

# THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

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A Position Paper

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by

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\*I affirm the honor code.

In my experience many Southern Baptist churches, apparently fearful of an "overreaction", observe Pentecost Sunday with deafening silence refusing to even acknowledge the momentous significance of that historic day on the liturgical calendar. Some seem to fear the Holy Spirit like a crazy uncle who is best kept locked away when company comes over. I came to saving faith in 1974, swept up in the "Jesus People" evangelical movement of the '70s. Talbot Seminary reflected on that amazing spiritual awakening in 2020 with an article entitled "The Jesus People Movement: 50-plus Years Later; How the Holy Spirit's Work Then Can Give Us Hope for the Future". Oscar Merlo writes, "This period is not just inspiring but birthed what scholars have called the "Fourth Wave" of revival in American history . . . The takeaway is that the spiritual awakening of the '60s contributed in the reconciliation of American society with God and with each other."<sup>1</sup>

Twenty years on active duty with the military after college took my family all over the world and we fellowshipped with evangelical churches of all traditions including conservative charismatic congregations. It was a wonderful demonstration of the incredible diversity within the Body of Christ. While I now fellowship in a Southern Baptist church, I have a soft spot in my heart for conservative charismatic churches and am comfortable fellowshipping and worshipping with them. Unfortunately, television has not been kind to the charismatic movement, exhibiting the more bizarre and extreme practices with heterodox teaching at best. However, through the decades, I personally witnessed the extraordinary and powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit, especially in Saudi Arabia working with the underground persecuted church in the early '90s.

While I am theologically charismatic, I differ with my charismatic brethren in their traditional understanding of the "Baptism In The Holy Spirit". The *Full Life Study Bible* presents their perspective, "The baptism in the Holy Spirit is an operation of the Spirit distinct and separate from his work of regeneration . . . For the disciples it was clearly a post-regeneration experience. One can be regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but still not be baptized in

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar Merlo, *The Jesus People Movement: 50-plus Years Later*, <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/talbot-magazine/2020/the-jesus-people-movement-50-plus-years-later>

the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup> In addition, traditional Pentecostal doctrine also affirms "tongues as the initial outward sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit".<sup>3</sup> In contrast, my theological position aligns with that espoused by Dr. Gregg Allison and Wayne Grudem. I concur with their understanding that the baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs simultaneous with conversion and regeneration for everyone and not as a subsequent, secondary blessing. After extensive and comprehensive analysis of the pertinent Biblical texts, Grudem concludes that baptism in the Holy Spirit, "must refer to the activity of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the Christian life when he gives us new spiritual life (in regeneration) and cleanses us and gives a clear break with the power and love of sin (the initial stage of sanctification) . . . it cannot refer to an experience after conversion."<sup>4</sup>

The key verse is 1 Cor 12:13 - "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". The *Full Life Study Bible* is adamant that this verse does not refer to the believer's baptism in the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the verse occurs in the context of Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts "given through the Spirit" (v. 8) and the entirety of chapter 12 is devoted to an exposition of spiritual gifts by God "who empowers them all in everyone" (v. 6). The Dutch reformed theologian Dirk Philips comments on 12:13, "For what is the baptism of the Spirit other than we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit from God, the heavenly Father, through Christ Jesus (Acts 2:38) . . . faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit through which all believers are gathered into one body".<sup>6</sup> Frank Thielman of Beeson Divinity School, with a PhD from Duke, comments in the *ESV Study Bible* on verse 12:13, writing, "it seems clearly to refer to the cleansing and empowering work that the Holy Spirit does in a new convert at the point of conversion."<sup>7</sup> In Acts 2:38, Peter encourages his onlookers to

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<sup>2</sup> Donald Stamps, *The Full Life Study Bible, An International Study Bible For Pentecostal And Charismatic Christians*, 1642

<sup>3</sup> Stamps, *The Full Life Study Bible*, 1642

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology, Second Edition*, 1836, Kindle

<sup>5</sup> Stamps, *The Full Life Study Bible*, 1772

<sup>6</sup> Dirk Philips, *Reformation Commentary On Scripture, New Testament IXa, I Corinthians*, 284

<sup>7</sup> Frank Thielman, *The ESV Study Bible*, Crossway, 2210

repent and receive forgiveness and promises they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit thereby echoing what Jesus had promised earlier in Acts 1:5. In the fourth century Chrysostom viewed the account in Acts 2 as teaching that at baptism, the Holy Spirit comes on everyone.<sup>8</sup> In the fifteenth century the Reformer Joahnn Eck commented on Acts 2:5-13, "Pious Christian, you should not imagine that the Holy Spirit is not present in baptism . . . He is indeed just as present now as during the time of the apostles."<sup>9</sup>

How do we explain the unusual passages in Acts (8:14-17 and 19:1-7) that narrate a delayed reception of the Holy Spirit? In Acts 8 we have a record of the gospel moving beyond Judaism for the first time, penetrating into Samaria. God sovereignly delayed the baptism in the Holy Spirit until the apostles could arrive (v. 14-17) and witness firsthand for themselves the same phenomena they experienced on Pentecost, divinely confirming the spread of the gospel beyond Judaism. In Acts 19, Paul encountered disciples who knew only of the ministry of John the Baptist and had no knowledge of Jesus. These disciples experienced regeneration and the accompanying baptism in the Holy Spirit *after* coming to saving faith in Christ (19:5). Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10 offers yet more support for the position that the baptism in the Holy Spirit coincides with regeneration. In this first encounter of the gospel with Gentiles, we have a record of the Holy Spirit baptizing them, giving Peter firsthand evidence that God was now offering salvation to the Gentiles. (Acts 10:44-47).

How do we account for the claim by some to have experienced the baptism in the Holy Spirit as a second blessing *after* regeneration? There is no question that many experience some kind of sanctifying and empowering experience subsequent to regeneration. Grudem deals with this issue at length and concludes there are many degrees of empowering, fellowship with God and personal Christian maturity.<sup>10</sup> Christians who claim a "baptism in the Holy Spirit" after regeneration are often experiencing a "surge" in their sanctification, a filling of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>8</sup> Chrysostom, *Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, New Testament V, Acts*, 22

<sup>9</sup> Joahnn Eck, *Reformation Commentary On Scripture, New Testament VI*, 21

<sup>10</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 39

brought on by practices that often precede great blessing (i.e., confession of sin, recommitment to Christ, renewed vigor for prayer and worship, fresh appreciation for Scripture, evangelism, etc.). Grudem is careful to counsel us, "Though we may differ with the way this teaching is actually presented, no one should fault the good results that have come about as a result of it".<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Scripture commands us to keep on being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18-21).

Given the misunderstanding many have with the phrase "baptism in the Holy Spirit", Grudem wisely counsels us to consider adapting different terminology like "empowering for ministry" or "being filled with the Holy Spirit".<sup>12</sup> Being filled with the Spirit is not a onetime event for Christians, a point emphasized by Donald Guthrie (BD, MTh, PhD) in his commentary on Eph 5:18, "Since this exhortation is addressed to Christians, it can mean only that they are expected to seek a fuller manifestation of the Spirit than they have already experienced."<sup>13</sup> J. I. Packer characterizes Spirit-baptism as an "entry, through the communion and commitment that faith generates, into the experienced reality of Christ's resurrection life."<sup>14</sup> Millard Erickson concludes, "Baptism by the Spirit appears to be, if not equivalent to conversion and new birth, at least simultaneous with them."<sup>15</sup> Allison rightly wonders, "if, for at least some of these people, their charismatic experience of the Spirit marks the moment of their conversion to Christ rather than a renewal of their Christian life."<sup>16</sup> If the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a post-conversion event, Guthrie argues that it inevitably leads to the "impossible conclusion" that there must be those converted who are not part of the Body because of 1 Cor 12:13.<sup>17</sup> Grudem concurs, warning of a theology leading to "two class" Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1854, Kindle

<sup>12</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1855-1856, Kindle

<sup>13</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 564

<sup>14</sup> J. I. Packer, *New Dictionary Of Theology*, 74

<sup>15</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 880

<sup>16</sup> Gregg R. Allison & Andreas J. Kostenberger, *The Holy Spirit*, 468, Kindle

<sup>17</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 563

<sup>18</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1846, Kindle

Allison and Kostenberger summarize,

These passages affirm that baptism with the Holy Spirit is (1) initiatory; that is, it takes place at the beginning of salvation and occurs in conjunction with hearing the gospel, repentance from sin, belief in Christ, forgiveness of sins, and water baptism. Moreover, baptism with the Spirit is (2) universal; that is, it is true for all Christians and not just for some; (3) purposeful; that is, it incorporates believers into the body of Christ, the church; and (4) indelible; that is, it effects a permanent membership in the body of Christ, from which no genuine believer may fall away.<sup>19</sup>

Spirit-filled Christians are defined as (1) developing authentic community by rebuking, admonishing, correcting, encouraging, and edifying one another; [2] worshipping the Lord together with great delight; [3] living intentionally with gratitude; and (4) showing preference for and serving one another for Christ's sake.<sup>20</sup> I affirm continuationism with Dr. Allison and Wayne Grudem. While I have prayed privately in tongues for 47 years, I reject the position that speaking in tongues is the initial outward sign of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Paul asks a rhetorical question in 1 Cor 12:30 whether everyone speaks in tongues; it is clear the expected answer is "no". The counterargument is that this verse only refers to public tongues which require interpretation and not to private tongues. However, I see no legitimate reason to make the distinction because of Paul's emphasis in 1 Cor 12:29-30 that no single spiritual gift is universally dispensed. During Paul's elaboration on spiritual gifts, he clarifies they are given to the church by the Holy Spirit for the "common good" (v. 7). Since private tongues is self-edifying (1 Cor 14:4) as opposed to all the other gifts, I draw two conclusions: (1) tongues is the least of the gifts, and (2) I would expect the Holy Spirit to liberally dispense this gift.

We are to be Christ-centered and Spirit-dependent upon the One whom with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.

\*Honor Code: I have written this paper exclusively for 27060 WW. If I received any editing or proofreading advice, I have made all such corrections myself. I have also documented each paraphrase, direct quotation, and borrowed idea in compliance with the Turabian and SBTs style manuals.

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<sup>19</sup> Allison, *The Holy Spirit*, 392, Kindle

<sup>20</sup> Allison, *The Holy Spirit*, 405-406, Kindle

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