THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

ACTS 2:37–41

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INTRODUCTION

The great 19thc Baptist preacher C. H. Spurgeon once said, “We need to learn once again what it means to be baptised in the Holy Spirit.” And commenting on the elements of ‘wind’ and ‘fire’ on the day of Pentecost contemporary USA theologian J. Rodman Williams wrote, “To be filled with the Spirit is not so much to have something ‘more’ as it is to be in a new, wonderful and at times fearful situation of having the Spirit of God break into the whole round of existence and pervade it all. As a result of this crisis experience, which can become the steady and driving power of a mighty dynamo – the empowering of the Spirit of the Living God.” Yet, we have to say that some Christians not only act like salt that’s lost its saltiness, but pepper that has lost its pep!

This is why the apostle Peter was at pains to get his new, potential converts off to the best possible start and launch them well. The ‘Challenger’ space shuttle disaster of Jan.28th 1986, saw the shocking death of seven crew members, all killed in a fiery catastrophic explosion. This powerfully illustrates the wisdom and necessity of a proper launch. The NASA scientists involved warned of ‘technical problems’ on the run up to the day, but pressure to meet deadlines and please the tax-paying public led them to go ahead anyway, and ignore their reservations. The result was a disaster that shook the world and set back the space program significantly. It was caused by a fuel leak that damaged an ‘O’ ring seal on one of the massive rocket boosters, that exploded 73 seconds after take-off. This was an inadvertent error, but it still cost them their mission and their lives! We all need to experience a safe and thorough launch into our new life with Christ. We dare not inadvertently miss anything that God deems necessary for a long, safe and effective flight in our service for Christ.
This is the point of this pregnant passage here in Acts 2:37-41. What Peter directed and told his converts to do that day has become known as ‘The Peter Package’ of salvation. Every item in it has been the subject of argument, debate, and controversy, as the Devil has tried to blind new believers to their inheritance by throwing a great deal of dust in the eyes of already blind or confused Christians concerning their need of the Holy Spirit’s power, which available to all believers. Lively churches are made up of lively Christians. We should then helpfully challenge the carnality, disunity, disaffection, and disillusionment of many prematurely birthed believers, who need the ‘full treatment’ God has for them if their lives are to move in his power. This requires checking their spiritual foundations again. Did they get off to a good start? We dare not inadvertently overlook anything the Lord has promised to give us, to enable our mission together with Christ, however much others try to tell us “It doesn’t really matter.” Believe me, it does! But if you don’t believe me, believe the apostle Peter. He could build a vibrant ‘cooking on gas’ church far better than anyone I know.

So the next directive he gave his hearers was, ‘And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (v.38). This cannot be a reference to the Spirit’s initial miracle of regeneration, nor even the indwelling of the Spirit that accompanies being ‘born from above’, for that is assumed by Peter when he saw his hearers ‘cut to the heart’ by God’s word (v.37), for it was the Spirit who leads us to Christ and enables us to repent, and believe the gospel in the first place. Peter is now offering something as a subsequent experience to all that – namely, ‘Receiving the Holy Spirit as an endowment of power for living’, just as the 120 had experienced on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13). This is therefore not the same initial experience we had of God’s Spirit as God sovereignly pursued us, and we passively encountered the Holy Spirit in an involuntarily invasion or regenerating work of the Spirit that initiated our conversion.
‘Baptism’ or ‘Filling’ with the Spirit, is actually a subsequent, actively sought, voluntary reception of the Spirit’s power for everything else that new converts are now qualified to receive. The first experience, regeneration’, is our ‘vivification’ making us spiritually alive and enabled to believe. The second is our ‘electrification’ or ‘dynamification’, enabling just about everything else. One is for making us alive, the other for empowering that life. Dr D.M. Lloyd-Jones once wrote, “There is nothing, I am convinced, that so quenches the Spirit as the teaching which identifies the baptism of the Holy Spirit with regeneration or new birth.” So we need to be very clear on this issue. And if someone asks, ‘Surely we got it all automatically when we believed?’ I answer again in the words of Dr. D.M. Lloyd-Jones, “If you have got it all why are you so unlike the N.T. Christians? Got it all? Got it all at your conversion? Well, where is it I ask you?” This challenge is just as relevant to us all today.

All the apostles taught the necessity of this ‘filling’, ‘sealing’, or ‘baptism’ in the Spirit’, to cite similar descriptions of this divine encounter. Speaking at HTB in 1996, Pentecostal N.T. scholar Dr. Gordon Fee said, ‘For Paul the Spirit was an experienced empowering reality. Paul would not have understood most historic Protestantism. I know that sounds unkind, but it is true. The reason he would not have understood it is because he would not have understood a Christian faith in which the experienced life of the Spirit was not the key to every dimension of that life.”
1. WHAT IS THE BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT?

Baptism in water and Baptism in the Spirit are meant to settle forever for the new convert, the question of their assurance of salvation. At our water baptism we put on the uniform of a soldier of Jesus Christ. We have changed sides and joined up. Everyone, men and devils, should now know it. It’s now known to whom we belong, and whom we serve. But it is baptism in the Spirit that gives us the available weapons we are to fight with – “And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8). The Gk. word dunamis (‘power’) – the word used here – is not related to justification or sanctification, but to dynamification.

You cannot be a Christian without the Holy Spirit indwelling you (Rom. 8:9), but you can be a Christian without him empowering you (Eph.5:18). Peter is inviting the crowds who heard him, to receive very soon, even immediately, what he and his friends had waited ten days to receive that Pentecost Day morning – the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them to wait for this at his Ascension. They waited just ten days, until Pentecost, the Jewish harvest festival. From that day on, they began to ‘reap’ the nations for Christ! John the Baptist had said of Jesus, ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.’ (Matt.3:11). That had just happened to them on the Day of Pentecost. Now, it is the birthright of every new believer.

There is no question what Peter’s hearers would have understood by this, for they could see it happening before their very eyes with the first disciples, and all who were prayed for later that day!

The reference to fire was in some sense literal that day, as ‘tongues of fire’ arced and settled on the heads of each of the 120 in the upper room, in a visible sign that the Spirit came and descended upon them.
This is the great need for the entire church now – ministers, elders, deacons, members, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, vergers, evangelists, prophets. – all need the fire to fall on them! It is not just a need for the church to day, it is surely the need! It marks us out from both mad fanatics on the one hand, and cold formalists on the other. It is more than fervour or a temporary fad, that fades from one day to the next. It is not mere human enthusiasm or excitement that varies according to our emotions and moods. No! This is God on human flesh, doing what only God can do! Setting you on fire. And it is vital for all believers, as early as possible, for several clear reasons:

1. **Fire Burns** - Holy fire is a threat to anything contrary to its own nature. It has the power to burn up decay, rottenness, darkness, and paralysing cold. Have you looked at the shop window of an Electricity Showroom, and noticed the electric fires? One man was fascinated with the technology and thought the fire effect so convincing, he was sure it was real. He wondered why the heat didn’t crack the window. The sales manager showed him he fire close up. There was no heat, but a very convincing flame – fake fire, with no heat! The manager said, “I’m not surprised you were fooled. Many others have been too. Actually this ‘heater’ gives out no heat at all. It is what we call a ‘cheerer-upper’. It’s for people with central heating who want to see what looks like fire, but at no cost and no effort. It glows at the flick of a switch. It cheers them up. They don’t want a real fire, they just want something that looks like the real thing.” Many Christians are like that too. They want the appearance of fire, just make-believe. They won’t surrender to anything that will really burn. It’s just a ‘cheerer-upper’! God wants us to have much more than mere appearance of power.

2. **Fire Spreads** – Given the freedom, fire will lay hold of everything in reach or combustible and set it ablaze. The Spirit’s fire is the source of all historic revivals. Major W.F. Batt once spoke of what he called ‘filleted Christians’ – who have no back-bone! They neither stood up for what they believed, nor swam against the tide of popular opinion. We all need to recover our nerve today. Only the Holy Spirit can launch our
lives and ministries for God, and then impact man, as the result of God setting us all ablaze with His presence.

3. **Fire Lights up** – It spreads a luminance and makes a radiant glow. It once possessed a common dried up bush in Sinai, without consuming it, then drew Moses aside in the desert-wilderness to see this A fire that burned, but did not consume or destroy (Exod. 3:1-10). It was God’s presence that then empowered the old shepherd-prince, to take on the might of Pharaoh and Egypt. This so transformed him, that he exposed the darkness and powerlessness of Egyptian demon gods, and the might of Pharaoh and his army, then lit the way to hope in the wilderness, for 3 million freed Hebrew slaves at the Exodus. We need the Spirit to teach, guide, rescue, lead, and inspire us.

4. **Fire Empowers** – Inside the engine of a truck, car, or railway engine, it releases such force and driving power that it drives and moves the immovable, speeding and spreading an influence over great distances at a fantastic pace. God can make our life go! – to do its work for God and man. *We all need fire!* This is the great need of the Church today – the energizing flame of God’s Spirit. The two *indisputable effects* of the Spirit’s power in someone’s life are A **CRY** of Assurance (Rom. 8:15-16), and A **CONFESSION** of Jesus (I Cor. 12:3). The first deepens our relationship with God the Father, the other intensifies our relationship with God the Son. One makes us bold before God. The other emboldens us before men.

The first liberates our worship of God, the other makes us more powerful witnesses for Christ. Too many modern versions of Christianity are so weak they couldn’t fight their way out of a wet paper bag, let alone batter down the gates of Hades! Power for Worship and Witness, are the essentials. But along with those also come all the gifts of the Spirit, the manifestations of God’s Spirit. (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; I Peter 4). **These are all the tools necessary for us to get the job done!**
The Baptism of the Spirit imparts to us the spiritual weaponry necessary to become Christ’s successful co-belligerents in spiritual warfare. Then hasten Satan’s final defeat on the back of Jesus’ victory already won for us all, at the Cross of Calvary. No wonder the Devil wants us to stay ignorant of, or totally confused about this subject – Baptism in the Spirit. No wonder much of the Church has for so long hung on like grim death for mere survival, with little or no hope, and no expectation of advance and victory in Christ. The Baptism in Spirit changes all that!

The Baptism of the Spirit is a movement of the Spirit in you and on you. It is both a ‘baptism’ and a ‘filling’. It is a movement of God’s Spirit from the ‘outside in’, so that he descends upon you and penetrates your total life, person, and human spirit. It is also a movement of God’s Spirit from the ‘inside out’, so that He pervades every part of your personality - a deluge from above, and a flooding from within. Either way, you are then said to be ‘Filled with the Spirit’ (Acts 2:4; Ephesians 5:18). The normal outlet or overflow the Spirit looks for, is the nearest exit from you – usually your mouth – in praise, prayer, and proclamation of the gospel!
2. HOW DO YOU RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The risen Christ is free from all fear, and wants you to be so too. He has unlimited authority over the powers of darkness, and wants to impart some of that authority to us all. He wants to give you a mouth that none of his adversaries can successfully resist. The way he does this is by baptizing us in his Spirit. And this power is freely available to all believers until the end of history. It has never, and could never be withdrawn until the task is finally complete. That empowering has been denied, ignored, ridiculed, feared, and neglected. But is still ours if we want Him, until Jesus returns: “For in him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.” (I Cor. 1:5-7) C.H. Spurgeon urges us again, “Only out of a full church shall the world receive salvation, never out of an empty one. The first thing we want as a church is to be filled with the Holy Ghost.”

So how do we personally participate in his energising power? How do we receive the Spirit? Acts 2:37-41 gives us all the clues we need. It is clear here that Peter was offering the gift of the Spirit to people who wanted to be rightly orientated and related towards God. You can’t hold on to sin and take hold of the fullness of the Holy Spirit at the same time! One has to go. Therefore three responses are needed:

1. Confess any known sin – Be convicted of hidden sin and crippling moral strongholds, then renounce them. This is not a plea for perfectionism, simply a summons to ‘Get real!’ God gives the Spirit to the repentant. Peter said later, “We are witnesses of these things and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:32), i.e. people who are determined to please God, without excuses, hesitation, or equivocation, for the rest of their lives. You are not to become morbidly introspective here, but rather respond to what God’s word is showing you, so that you will not grieve the Holy Spirit by
deliberately indulging in some vice or unholy activity as if it was not
dangerous. Are there well-defined wrongs and clear offences against
God that you feel convicted about, or made conscious to you by the
Spirit?”, e.g. Occultism, Sexual immorality, Covetousness, Envy, Broken
relationships, Unforgiveness, Carnal ambition, Fear? Then repent of
them, and let them go from your life in Jesus’ power.

2. Yield yourself to Christ – Saving faith includes submission to the
Lordship of Christ. You don’t want to ‘quench the Spirit’, so settle this
now by telling him, “I will do whatever you tell me. I will yield to your
revealed will for me at every stage, and act on the directions and
promptings of the Spirit from now on, as He fills me.” You choose not to
‘resist’ the Spirit or say ‘no’ to God. You want to ‘walk in the Spirit’ now,
and not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal.5:16). So, are you willing to
be whatever God wants, willing to go wherever God sends, and willing
to do whatever God clearly commands? Then, ‘Be filled with the Spirit’!

3. Come to Christ himself – In our water baptism we signified our new
union with Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Baptiser, and the medium into
which we are baptized is Christ himself (I Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3). But with
Baptism in the Spirit, the Baptizer is Christ himself and the medium into
which He baptizes us is the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:8). So don’t
come to a minister or a friend, or a building, instead come to Christ. But
very often, as seen in Acts, someone may lay hands on you to receive
the Spirit, and prays to God to do this for you (Acts.9:17; 19:6). But it is
always Christ himself who actually gives us His Spirit in fullness, so we
can be empowered.

4. ‘Ask for’ and ‘drink of’ his Spirit – Jesus said, “If any man is thirsty
let him come unto me and drink” (Jn.7:37). We only ever ask for what
we really want. You only drink that which you know you need, and are
convinced that it will really do you good. But it is a simple thing to ‘ask’,
and ‘drink’, but both are done by faith in God’s promises to his children,
e.g. “If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how
much more does your Father in heaven know how to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?” (Lk.11:13).

Sometimes the Lord may delay this until your are more desperate, and less casual! Luke 11:9-12, Jesus says, "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? Or for bread, will give him a stone?” And note the encouraging significance of these words:

(1) This gift is for God’s ‘children’. You have to be a Christian to receive the Spirit – it is for God’s children only. If you’re his child, and know Jesus as your Saviour, then you now qualify.

(2) Don’t think in terms of any harm or danger – scorpions, snakes, and stones, God has no intention of giving you, Jesus challenges us to believe. God will not give you something other than what you want, nor less than what you wanted, and certainly not something you don’t want at all! He will not frighten, hurt, or disappoint his children. Instead he give us an ‘egg’, a ‘fish’, and ‘bread’, i.e. everything we need for our spiritual health, and only things that are definitely good for us. So, if you believe, you will receive.

(3) Realize that this is not ‘A’ level Christianity. It is our basic need – ‘the children’s bread’! You cannot live without this. It is the staple ingredient for effective living. This is just part of the beginning for converts. You have not arrived. It is not the terminus. This is just the next gateway to more, the so much more, that still awaits you as you ‘Walk in the Spirit’.

‘ASK AND YOU WILL RECEIVE!’