

THE MEANING OF *BAPTISM* IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

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As dispensationalists we often teach more about this church age than covenant theologians. Also, we speak more about the Baptism of the Holy Spirit because of the uniqueness of this period and because of the blessings imparted by the Spirit upon the church believers.

For dispensationalists several books stand out that are almost classics in our thinking: *The Holy Spirit* (by Dr. John F. Walvoord), and *The Holy Spirit* (by Dr. Charles Ryrie). There is also an excellent chapter on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in Lewis S. Chafer's book *Major Bible Themes*. Well respected also is Merrill F. Unger's *The Baptizing Work of the Holy Spirit*. Dispensationalists would agree with almost everything written on the subject by these four authors.

Covenant theologian Abraham Kuyper gives only two pages over to the subject of Spiritual Baptism in his classic *The Work of the Holy Spirit*. In his brief treatment, he rightly says “Without [the baptism of the Holy Spirit] there can be no regeneration, no salvation.”

THE RESULTS OF THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The New Testament lists many things that take place when the Spirit baptizes us into the spiritual body of Christ.

For example, (1) As mentioned, believers are placed into the one spiritual body of Christ. (2) The Spirit then is adding to the living unity of the church. (3) By this baptism there is a sovereign arrangement of the believers in the church. (4) In salvation, the believer is removed from his position in Adam, and he is placed in Christ. (5) The believer is thus identified with Christ. (6) The believer then is identified with the work of Christ on the cross. (7) There is now a living unity of the Head and the Body, sharing one vital and eternal life with Him. (8) Christ becomes the sphere in which the believer lives. (9) Believers are conjoined to Christ. (10) Spiritual baptism is universal among believers. (11) Baptism relates to positional truth. (12) Spiritual baptism is an instantaneous act of God. (13) Believers are given a new nearness and access to God, making possible a fullness of ministry of the Holy Spirit. (14) There is now a new association with all believers. (15) And by this work of the Spirit, gifts are imparted to all believers in order to benefit the church. (16) Finally, every aspect of the Christian's life is changed because of this spiritual work of baptism by the Spirit.

While all of the above is true, in my opinion, Dispensationalists have yet to fully define what is taking place with the word *Baptism* when describing this work of the Holy Spirit! The idea of a unity and a new relationship is obvious but what is taking place with the word *Baptism*? Is this a work of cleansing, a work of refreshing, or simply the idea of a new unity with Christ only? Or, to put it this way, Why is the word *baptism* used at all? What is the implication of using the word?

ARE ALL BELIEVERS PLACED INTO THE SPIRITUAL BODY OF CHRIST BY THE SPIRIT AT THE POINT OF SALVATION?

The answer would be a loud and clear *Yes* by several important passages of Scripture. 1 Corinthians 12:12b tells us “All the members of the body [of Christ], though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.” And, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (v. 13). There is no doubt that there is a universal work of the Spirit in these passages. *All* believers are placed into the body of Christ, not just some, or a few, but *all!* Certain verses follow that make this evident:

“To each one **is given** the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (v. 7).

“But one and **the same Spirit works** all these things [the giving of the gifts], distributing to each one [the gifts] individually just **as He wills**” (v. 11).

“But now **God has placed** the members, **each one of them**, in the body [of Christ], just as **He desired**” (v. 18).

“But now **there are many members**, but **one body** [of Christ]” (v. 20).

“God **has so composed** the body” (v. 24).

“There is **no division** in the body” (v. 25).

“You [plural] are Christ's body” (v. 27).

There is “one body and one Spirit, ... one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6). The “one baptism” has to be the Spirit's baptism into the body of Christ. This could not be water baptism which would be carried out at different times, by distinct means, for different purposes. The “one baptism” has to be the Spirit's baptism that places all believers into the body of Christ! Harold Hoehner writes [in his *Ephesian* commentary]: “The 'one baptism' ... refers to the internal reality of having been baptized into (identified with) the 'one Lord' by means of the 'one faith' mentioned in this verse.” Hoehner further adds:

In conclusion, there is unity in the one Lord in whom believers place their one faith expressed in one baptism signifying their identification in His death and resurrection. This verse revolves around the second person of the Trinity. (518)

John Witmer and I conclude:

[Paul] continues listing the unities in Christ--“one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**” (v. 5). The last item mentioned is not ritual baptism, ... it is a witness to one's faith in Christ, but the spiritual truth that “by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, ... and **we were all** made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Ephesians 4:4-6 stands out as an anthem of Christian theology or small doctrinal nuggets. ... They explain in a nutshell the essentials of what Christianity is all about. ... The final and preeminent unity

Paul lists is “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (v. 6). In some ways, this verse is difficult to explain or grasp. It is all inclusive, expansive, and wraps up all of creation, all of history, and all things under the authority, power, and control of God the Almighty. (Bold added) (Mal Couch, John Witmer. *The Books of Galatians & Ephesians*. AMG Publishers, 170)

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE GOSPELS

There are four references to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels. The question is, do these references point to what takes place in the book of Acts and the sending of the Spirit in Acts 2. This will be dealt with below but first it is important to deal with the issue of “the fire” mentioned in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16. The preposition *en* with the Instrumental Case controls both “the Holy Spirit” and the “fire.” He will baptize the Jews by means of the Holy Spirit and by means of fire (judgment)!

It is important to note that Christ “will baptize you (the Jews) with (*en*, by means of) the Holy Spirit and [by means of] fire” (Matt. 3:11). The preposition *en* is used with the [Dat., Ins., Loc. Case form], meaning *by, by means of*. Universally, commentators believe that the *Instrumental* should be used here. The Holy Spirit is carrying out the action, but “by means of fire” is also added in the verse. Almost all hold this to refer to judgment that will fall upon the Jewish people, either at the destruction of the temple in 70 AD or at the Second Coming of Christ. (The Second Coming makes sense, though Hindson says it refers to eternal punishment for all unbelievers. Walvoord says the fire is “related to the second coming of Christ” (*Matthew Commentary*, 32. And Toussaint hints as well that the fire has to do with judgment at Christ's second coming, *Behold the King*, 69-71)

Ryrie says on Matthew 3:11 as a prediction in the Gospel, “the prediction and fulfillment at Pentecost ... and the doctrinal explanation in 1 Corinthians” (*The Holy Spirit*, 111). On this passage Walvoord says “The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not initiated until Acts 2 and the day of Pentecost and symbolized entrance into the body of Christ” (*Matthew Commentary*, 32)

When will the baptism of the Holy Spirit take place? This happens in Acts 2. This happens with the Jews but also with the Gentiles in establishing the church. This is true because of what Christ said in Acts 1:4b-5 to His disciples. Christ told His disciples that the Father had promised something specific. The Lord said:

“Which you [disciples] heard of from Me; for John baptized with water but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

It is obvious that the Lord is quoting Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16. Jewish Christian scholar Ger writes:

Jesus refers back to the ministry of His cousin, John the Baptist (Luke 3:16) to contrast water baptism with the impending baptism with, or by means of, the Holy Spirit. In total, Luke refers to John's ministry of water baptism eight times in Acts (1:5, 22; 10:37; 11:16; 13:24-25; 19:3-4), usually in contrast to Spirit baptism. The example in Acts 1:5 is typical. John's water baptism, done for the purpose of ritual purification to signify repentance, is contrasted with baptism with the Spirit. ...

This promise of Holy Spirit baptism will be fulfilled at Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4. Before we continue, a brief discussion of baptism is in order. ... Baptism is simply a transliteration of the Greek word *baptism*. The parallel Hebrew term [is] *mikvah*. (Steven Ger. *The Book of Acts*. AMG Publishers, 21)

Acts 2 also has to do with the establishment of the promised New covenant. The New covenant comes into view here. However the church does not fulfill the New covenant. Fulfillment takes place for Israel when that nation accepts Christ and repents at the beginning of the Kingdom period. The church however *presently* benefits from the New covenant when it is inaugurated here in Acts 2.

For a more complete discussion on the New covenant see my book *The New Covenant Blessings for the Church*. (Scofield Ministries, 2010). In this volume I wrote:

The Church now receives the spiritual blessings [of the New covenant]. The Church is never promised the earthly blessings [made to Israel]. The Church receives the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal. 3:14; 4:22-31) now by faith. Since the tribulation, second advent, and Millennial age are yet future, the fulfillment of this promise for Israel is yet future. (p. 56)

Dallas Seminary professor Fred Lincoln wrote:

The believer, therefore [today], participates in the worth to the sinner of the New Covenant, so that he partakes of the Lord's supper in remembrance of the blood of the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3:6). It is also said of the believer that he is a child of Abraham because he is of faith (Gal. 3:7) and [he belongs to] Christ, (Gal. 3:29). ("The Covenants." Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX: 1942)

David M. Levy of the International Ministries for *The Friends of Israel*, writes:

Finally, some believe God made only one New Covenant that will be fulfilled eschatologically with Israel, ratified by Christ's blood, but participated in soteriologically by the church today, thus opening the way for Him to bless Jewish and Gentile believers alike spiritually during the Church Age. However, the promised provisions of national, spiritual, and material blessings made to Israel will only be fulfilled to a redeemed Israel during the Millennium. (*Israel My Glory*. January/February, 2010)

ACTS 2 AND THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Did the Holy Spirit's baptism take place in Acts 2? Some say it did not because it is not mentioned in the verses at the first of the chapter. However, the experience of Peter in Cornelius' house shows something different. As Peter spoke there the Gentiles accepted Christ. "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message" (Acts 10:44). The verse before tells us "Everyone who believes in [Christ] receives forgiveness of sins" (v. 43). All of the Jews (the circumcised) who had come with Peter "were amazed because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also" (v. 45).

The key to what was happening is found in verse 47. Peter said, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who **have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?**”

The clincher is found in 11:15-16: Peter said, “And as I begin to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as **He did upon us AT THE BEGINNING. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'**” “At the beginning” refers to Acts 2.

Peter added: “God granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (11:18). At the Jerusalem Council Peter further said: “God gave to “them the Holy Spirit, just as **He also did to us** cleansing (*katharizo*, Aor. Act. Part.) their hearts by faith (15:8-9). *Katharizo* may be related to the idea of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as mentioned by Peter in 2 Peter 1:9. There Peter writes about “purification (*katharizo*) from former sins.” The word is defined as “to purify by cleansing,” “to cleanse,” “to remove by cleansing.”

OTHER IMPORTANT WORKS OF THE *BAPTISM* OF THE SPIRIT

The baptism of the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ's death. But too, we are seen to go through the spiritual process with Him of a kind of union whereby we receive “newness of life” and are joined in “the likeness of His resurrection” (Rom. 6:3-5). As well, “our old man is crucified with Him “that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (vv. 5-6). Paul adds in Colossians also that we are “buried with Him in baptism,” meaning the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Col. 2:12).

BUT STILL THE QUESTION: WHAT DOES THE *BAPTISM* OF THE HOLY SPIRIT MEAN?

Could it mean “a washing”? *Baptismos* is used that way in the New Testament. “As the *washing* of cups and pots” (Mark 7:4, 8). “[Of the Jewish] doctrine of *baptism*” (Heb. 6:2). “... meats and drinks, and various *washings*” (9:10).

Do these references help us get a fix on how *baptizo* is also used when referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit? I believe this is the case.

JOHN THE *BAPTISTEES*

Why is John the prophet called *the Baptist* (Nom. Masc. Sin.)? This word is used fourteen times in the Gospels and it is always referring to John! What was he doing? He was dipping and washing repentant Jews in the Jordan river. The water was seen as a ritual cleansing agent, ... yet water in itself did not make anyone spiritually clean. But it was a picture of a *washing* because the individual had come to John with contrition in regard to his sins. He was repenting for what he was doing sinfully in his life. Therefore he was changing the direction of his life and receiving a cleansing by repenting.

“John the Baptist in those days was coming preaching ... repent” (Matt. 3:1).

“No one was greater than John the Baptist ...” (11:11, 12).

“John the Baptist ... miraculous powers are at work in him” (14:2).

“The people ... acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John” (Luke 7:29).

It is important to recognize that baptism, while it brings about a union with certain additional doctrinal ideas such as: “unto repentance,” “into His death,” “into His burial,” “into His resurrection,” “the old self crucified with Him,” “into newness of life.”

As well, “to cleanse,” “to be washed,” “to make clean,” is part of the work that is taking place when the word *baptism* is used. Thus, to be baptized by the Holy Spirit, must also have “a washing,” “a cleaning” concept with the word. This is generally not stated by those who teach the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the union concept with Christ, that is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, brings about a cleaning work for the believer.

Paul further writes: “You were also circumcised (not with hands) having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were raised up with Him ...in the working of God, who raised Him up from the dead, ... He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions” (Col. 2:12-13).

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. **For** all of you **were baptized** into Christ having clothed yourselves with Christ. ... You are all **one** in Christ Jesus. And since you belong to Christ ...” (Gal. 3:26-29).

ACTS 2:4: WHAT IS THE FORCE OF *FILLED* BY THE HOLY SPIRIT?

There is no doubt that the disciples were baptized by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. The only word that may relate to this happening is *filled* (*pimplemi*). It is almost exclusive to Luke-Acts. It is in the Aorist Passive form. It means “to satiate,” “to wholly take possession of,” to confirm by an event, “to fulfill, complete,” “to be full of.”

The Holy Spirit was now in charge of the disciples. He was “giving them utterance” (v. 4). While some in this conference may disagree, I believe Peter's quoting of Joel 2:28 in Acts 2:17 was taking place at that moment in time.

Thus, where Peter quotes the Lord saying “And it shall be in the last days that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind” (v. 17), I believe was taking place at that very moment. However, I hold to the fact that the New covenant is launched here at Pentecost by which the church benefits from it, but it is not fulfilled until the Jews accept Christ at the start of the Kingdom dispensation.

There is no doubt that the Pentecost event is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as we have shown, because of what Peter says later. He said when speaking to Cornelius' household:

“I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? ... God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:16-18).

KEY VERSES LEADING UP TO THE *BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT*

Matt. 3:11: John: “On the one hand, I am baptizing (Pres. Tense) you by means of water into repentance, but on the other hand, He who is coming after me is mightier than me, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize (Fut. Tense) you by means of (*en*) the Holy Spirit and [by means of] fire.”

Mark 1:8: “I (John) baptized (Aor. Tense) you by means of water (N, Sin., I), but He will baptize (Fut. Tense) you by means of Holy Spirit (N, Sin., I).”

Luke 3:16: “On the one hand, I am baptizing (Pres. Tense) you by means of (*en*) water, on the other hand, the one one is coming is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize (Fut. Tense) you by means of (*en*) the Holy Spirit and [by means of] fire.”

John 1:33: John: “But He who sent me to baptize (Pres. Inf.) by means of (*en*) water, ... He is the one who is baptizing (Pres. Part.) by means of (*en*) the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 1:5: “For on the one hand, John baptized (Aor. Tense) by means of water, but on the other hand, by means of (*en*) the Spirit you shall be baptized (Fut. Pass. Ind.) [by means of (*en*)] the Holy Spirit ...”

Acts 11:16: “On the one hand, John baptized (Aor. Tense) [by means of] water, on the other hand, you shall be baptized (Fut. Pass.) by means of (*en*) the Holy Spirit.”

These passages tie the water baptism of John with the coming cleansing work of the Holy Spirit in His impending work of spiritual baptism. The connection is important in our understanding of the work of the Spirit as He unites us with Christ. That union brings about a positional spiritual cleansing. But too often this is not spoken of when we study the work of the baptism of the Spirit. In God's eyes, as we go through the spiritual process of the death, burial, and resurrection with Christ, we are **positionally** cleansed from sin by this action and by this union.

Thus, the work of this spiritual and positionally washing is done by God's Spirit!

THE POSITIONAL “WASHING” (BAPTISM) OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The *DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY* (Zondervan, gen. ed. Collin Brown) has an outstanding treatment of the spiritual washing of God's Spirit in His baptismal work for the believer in the dispensation of the church age. Below are some of the important points brought out in THE *DICTIONARY* article:

There is evidence that the word *bapto* was sometimes used in secular Greek of a ritual bath. For religious ablutions *louo* was often used of washing of the whole body, and *nipto* was used in reference to washing or rinsing.

In the LXX *baptizo* occurs four times. In 2 Kings 5:14 it is used in the reference to Naaman's sevenfold immersion in the Jordan. This is a significant reference for understanding *baptizo*. See also Judges 12:7. It is important to note that in both Jewish and Christian contexts, the word normally means “to immerse.” This definition remains in usage. The word is also used for cleaning vessels (Lev. 6:28). See Num. 19:18; Psa. 51:7 (50:9), Ezek. 36:25.

On 1 Corinthians 12:13 Brown translates the passage this way: “We were all immersed in one Spirit ... and were all saturated in the outpouring of one Spirit.”

Brown notes that Titus 3:5 can be translated: “He saved us through the washing characterized by the regeneration and renewal wrought by the Holy Spirit.”

One cannot escape the idea of the cleansing work of the Spirit in the baptism process. Somehow we have overlooked this concept in the Spirit's baptismal work. As the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ we are cleansed spiritually by this union with the Savior.

THE HEBREW WORD *TA'VAL* AND THE GREEK WORD *BAPTISM*

The parallel word for baptism in the Old Testament is *ta'val*. “Baptism is a ritual linked with ceremonial dippings or immersions” (*Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*). In the LXX the Greek word *baptizomai* is used for *ta'val*. The Greek word *bapto* is also used for *ta'val*. “To dip, to wash” is the meaning of *ta'val*.

In the LXX we read: Naaman “went down and dipped (washed, immersed, *baptizomai*) himself seven times ... and he was clean” (2 Kings 5:14). “You shall dip (immerse, plunge, *bapto*) the hissoop in the blood” (Exod. 12:21). “He dipped (immersed, plunged, *bapto*) his finger into the blood” (Lev. 9:9).

BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Few writers mention the cleansing work in the baptism of the Spirit. They usually simply emphasize the union and new position with Christ, but not the cleansing aspect of being joined with the spiritual body of Christ. In the opinion of this author, Acts 1:5 seems to hint strongly at the cleaning work. Christ told His disciples that John “baptized” with water but that the disciples (and others) would be “baptized” with the Holy Spirit. “With water” is the Instrumental case (by means of) and “with the Holy Spirit” used the preposition *en* (*by means of*). Thus, “John baptized by means of water” and “you shall be baptized by means of the Holy Spirit” work in tandem with each other. “John baptized” uses the Aorist Tense and “you shall be baptized by means of the Holy Spirit” uses a Future Passive.

The purpose of this paper is to focus on the word baptism (as a washing, cleansing) that is generally left out in the discussion of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. *The baptism*, brings about many doctrinal aspects of this union with Christ. But a washing, a cleansing, also takes place by the work of God's Spirit. In his discussion on the baptism of the Spirit (*Major Bible Themes*) Chafer only highlights “the new union, the new position, and the new association” we now have with Christ. The positional washing aspect is not mentioned.

However, Robert Girdlestone in his classic work *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, has an excellent article on *baptism* that focuses on the washing. He writes that the word has great latitude including

the case of ceremonial acts of cleansing. ... Cleansing by washing. ...
In the Apocrypha Judith 12:7 we read “She washed herself (*baptizomenos*) at the fountain of water.” This was for ceremonial cleansing. In Sirach 34:25 we read “washed or bathed, in order to be cleansed from ... pollution which arises from contact with the dead. ... With the Hebrew verb *ta'val* we

find either bapto or parabapto as a rendering. ... In the LXX we find the process of dipping or having water poured over the person. ... Baptism is pre-eminently symbolical of cleansing. ... In 1 Peter 3:21 we find “the putting away of the filth of the flesh.”

When a believer ... is baptized, we are to understand that, by profession ... , he has become a disciple of Christ, and is one with Him by faith; he dies to sin, in union with the Captain of Salvation; he is buried with Him; he puts on the Lord Jesus Christ, as one puts on armour or clothing; he walks in newness of life; and he is admitted into the society or body of those who are similarly cleansed.

The ceremonial application of clean water [is] to the person, ... a symbol of the purifying efficacy of Christ's blood and of the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, ... [these] are the grand points to be observed.

The primary idea then of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a washing or cleansing done by the Spirit. This takes place by the union the child of God has with the spiritual body of Christ brought about by the same Spirit. This is a new position the believer has. It is Positional Truth! We are “cleaned up, washed” by the Spirit because of the holiness, righteousness, perfection, sinlessness of Christ.

On John 3:5, A. T. Robertson writes in his *Word Pictures*:

Calvin makes water and Spirit refer to the one act (the cleansing work of the Spirit). ... [Christ] meant to turn the mind of Nicodemus away from the mere physical ... to turn his attention to the birth from above by the Spirit.

On John 7:37-39 Robertson adds,

The reference is not to the existence of the Spirit but to the new dispensation of the Spirit. ... John writing at the close of the century, inserts this comment and interpretation of the language of Jesus as an illusion to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (as the Father promised). The Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit is called “glorious.”

Nicoll concludes:

Our past shows a need for cleaning. ... Water is not an actual spiritual agency in the second birth; it is only a symbol. ... The same is found in Titus 3:5: “We were [of the flesh] but He saved us by the bath of regeneration [even] the renewal [re-newing] of the Holy Spirit.”

Thus, we are blessed, washed, and cleansed by the Baptism of the Spirit into the spiritual body of Christ!

For thus by (by means of, en) one Spirit were were all washed [by being placed] into one body (the body of Christ) ... and were all made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:13)

Nicoll says “this is an outward affusion and an inward absorption; the Corinthians were at once immersed in and saturated (potizo) with (by means of) the Spirit.”