

The Charismatic Baptism of the Holy Spirit Destroys the Sacrament of Baptism

On May 8th, 1974, I was baptized in St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Milwaukee, WI. I was baptized with water while these words were spoken: "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." I was also baptized with the Spirit who turned me from the broad road leading to eternal destruction. My baptism gave me forgiveness of sins, unity with Christ, and the power and ability to live a new life for Christ. This was my firm conviction wrought by the Scriptures. Never did I question that until I went on an evangelism visit about a month and a half ago. We talked for 45 minutes or so about many different things. Finally we came to baptism. The residents claimed they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. I quickly confessed that I, too, was baptized by the Holy Spirit. That wasn't enough, and they brought out two pamphlets for me to read. I was told I had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit and that I must pray for that gift. I was at a loss for words, for I didn't really know what Scripture to reference. Thus, I left promising to read the pamphlets and return later to talk in greater detail. I didn't doubt my baptism, but I didn't necessarily know how to defend it. Therefore in this paper, I will explore some of the different views of baptism and Spirit baptism, examining passages that deal with the subject. I will show that requiring a baptism of the Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, empties Holy Baptism of its meaning. It also adds a new 'gospel' and a new law to be obeyed. ***The Charismatic Baptism of the Holy Spirit Destroys the Sacrament of Baptism.***

Matthew 3:11 says, "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." These words were fulfilled on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples and they spoke in foreign tongues. The Bible does teach a baptism of the Holy Spirit, but let's look at the way some churches understand that today.

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod teaches a baptism of the Holy Spirit. However, this is not separated from baptism with water and the Word. Through water and the Word the Holy Spirit enters a person's heart and pours out his gifts on the recipient. The Holy Spirit can also work through the Word without water to impart faith (cf. thief on the cross) and spiritual gifts.

The Catholic Catechism says concerning baptism, "The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification...giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of Holy Spirit" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, p. 322). The Catholic Church also teaches a baptism of the Holy Spirit that comes through water and the Word. Baptism gives the person the power and ability to live a new life.

The Evangelicals denomination differ widely on their view of baptism. Some teach in line with what the Wisconsin Synod believes. Others go to the extreme of Pentecostalism. Lightner, in his book summarizing Evangelical Theology, divides Evangelicals into two basic schools of thought. The first one he calls "Covenant Theology" into which he places Lenski. He says that it is common for this group "to relate the baptism of the Spirit very closely with believers' baptism" (Lightner 118). The other group of Evangelicals practice "Dispensational Theology." They separate Spirit baptism from baptism with water and the Word. Lightner says, "that which identifies believers with Christ is not water but Spirit baptism" (120). While I do not really understand what the author is trying to say here, he does take power away from baptism and separates baptism from the working of the Holy Spirit. He goes on to say, "All believers since the day of Pentecost are thought to be baptized by the Spirit" (Lightner, 120).

This above statement reflects the Pentecostals' teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They stress Baptism by the Holy Spirit in everything. Erling Jorstad, an authority on Pentecostalism, says, "The doctrine and practice of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit give Pentecostalism, in its old and new forms, its unique character within Christianity. Without it, there simply would be no Pentecostalism; with it, the Pentecostalists are convinced they have the

miracle working-powers of God through the Holy Spirit as the evidence of their faith" (Jorstad, The Holy Spirit in Today's Church, 58).

Jorstad defines Spirit Baptism as "a second encounter with God (the first is conversion) in which the Christian begins to receive the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit into his life" (Jorstad, The Holy Spirit in Today's Church, 59). They clearly separate baptism with water and the Word from Spirit baptism. The former deals with salvation, while the latter empowers them for service. The first experience of the power of God is conversion which includes no gifts or blessings from the Holy Spirit. "But the Lord is not satisfied with our conversion alone; He has promised us power to be His witnesses. So, a second time we are confronted with the power of God; this time in the baptism in the Holy Spirit through which the Christian is brought into a deeper relationship with Christ and the Holy Spirit for the purpose of making him -- not an object, but an instrument of redemption" (Jorstad, The Holy Spirit in Today's Church, 60). Baptism of the Holy Spirit is that which empowers Christians to be witnesses and disciples of God.

Speaking in tongues is considered proof of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, but it is not necessarily the only proof. Interpretations of tongues or a new power to be a witness are also proofs of Spirit baptism. However, in some church groups, a person who fails to speak in tongues is not considered Christian. Referring to the people in Acts 19 at Ephesus who spoke in tongues, one pamphlet asks, "What if some had not spoken in tongues?...Paul would not have accepted their experience [conversion] if they had failed to exhibit the uniform evidence [tongues]" ("Why Did God Choose Tongues?", 5). Whether they require tongues or not, the Pentecostals do require some kind of proof after baptism in order to make someone a Spirit-filled, complete Christian. It is this teaching that is so detrimental to the sacrament of Baptism.

What passages do the Charismatics point to for proof of their teachings? In Acts, chapter 1, Jesus tells his disciples not to leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift from his Father. He states, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

This, the Pentecostals say, is the commission and the promise of Spirit Baptism. And actually there are six passages that mention specifically the baptism of the Holy Spirit: Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5, and Acts 11:16. The Acts 1:5 passage is probably the most important passage for Charismatic teachings. First of all, the aforementioned claim this is a promise of Jesus intended for all Christians including those who come after the disciples.

Therefore, this baptism is to be sought by all Christians. In verse 8, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit would give them power when the Holy Spirit comes - power to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. This promise was fulfilled on Pentecost.

The most obvious passages the Charismatics say support the baptism of the Holy Spirit are those surrounding the events on Pentecost. They consider Pentecost the birth of the Pentecostal church. Acts 2:4 says, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." The gift of speaking in tongues was given as proof of their Spirit baptism and as power to aid their witness to the people (Acts 2:6-8, 14). This Spirit baptism was given to many, many others as well. Acts 2:38; 19:6; I Cor 12:4-13 list gifts from the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, wisdom, knowledge, healing powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits. The Pentecostals claim that for a Christian to appropriate these gifts he needs to be baptized with water followed by diligent prayer and study

Let's take a closer look at how the Charismatics interpret Acts 2:38. Here Peter says to the crowd, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." First, Peter exhorts the crowd to be baptized with water and the Word to show their "acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior which brings salvation. He (the repentant sinner) gives testimony to his response to the gospel and his acceptance of Christ by receiving baptism in water for the remission of sins" (Jorstad, The Holy Spirit in Today's Church, 60). This person is now a redeemed Christian. Because "the Lord is not satisfied with our conversion" and redemption, Peter encourages the crowd further to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, i.e. to be baptized by the

Holy Spirit as Jesus mentioned upon his ascension. Just as Peter called the people to be baptized with Holy Spirit, so the Charismatics call on people to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Having “experienced” that latter, they will be blessed with gifts and unique powers.

Read carefully Acts 2:38. Note Peter first asks them to be baptized with water and instructs them carefully through his sermon. Then he asks them to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8, Philip goes to Samaria and preaches there. They were baptized with water and instructed by Philip. Subsequently, Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and prayed for the Holy Spirit. The Samaritans received the Holy Spirit when the disciples placed their hands on them. And in Acts 10:44-48, we see that Peter taught the household of Cornelius, and then they received the Holy Spirit. These are the proof passages that the Charismatics point to in order to support their teaching of Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We can credit the Charismatics with searching the Scriptures, but we cannot credit them with good exegesis, a good understanding of context, nor holding finite reason captive to the Word of the Infinite. The passages above do deal with a baptism of the Holy Spirit, but not in the way the Charismatics claim. There are some very important distinctions to be made. In fact, some of these passages they use to support their doctrine actually collapses it. Let us start with the phrase “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” and similar phrases Charismatics cite as proof of baptism beyond “water” baptism.

Above I listed six passages that use the phrase (or at least slight variants of it) “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” I do not deny that these refer to a baptism of the Holy Spirit where the Holy Spirit gives power to do the Lord's work and live a new life for him. This is a gift to God's kingdom for all believers of all time. When Jesus ascended, he gave the church his Holy Spirit in a new and powerful way to help them be witnesses for him. Certainly the disciples had the Holy Spirit before Pentecost because they had faith in Jesus which only comes through the Holy Spirit and his tools, the Means of Grace. Now, on and after Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would work powerfully in them to witness for Christ.

The problem is that the Charismatics see baptism of the Holy Spirit as that which *follows* conversion. "Water" baptism is not thereby a complete filling of the Holy Spirit. It is just the first step to becoming the type of Christian that God would have us be. It is our seal or pledge to God that we will try to be good Christians.

Going back to Acts 2:38, Peter does not make a distinction between baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no proof from the text that one follows the other. They are joined together by the Greek και (English "and"). It does not say "afterwards" or "some time later." Even the Charismatics grant that the first part of verse 38 deals with "water" baptism. No where does the text say there are two separate outpourings of the Spirit. Peter does not tell them to be baptized, then study scripture, pray fervently and *then* receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Ephesians 4:4-6, "There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- one Lord, one faith, ***one*** [emphasis mine] baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." There are not two baptisms, an initial "water" baptism and a separate Spirit baptism, but one baptism.

In addition, every time that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is mentioned it is spoken of as gift. The nature of a gift is that it is free, undeserved, unearned. In Acts 1:4, Jesus clearly says the promised Holy Spirit is a gift. By saying that adequate study and wrestling in prayer are necessary to receive the Holy Spirit in its fullness, they are implying one must earn God's blessing of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is given to all who believe. I Corinthians 12: "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." It is through the Word and through the water and the Word in baptism that the Holy Spirit enters our hearts. It is impossible to be a Christian without the Holy Spirit. The only way that we can confess our faith is by the power of the Holy Spirit. To take that away, as many Charismatics do, is to deny the clear teaching of Scripture (cf. also I Corinthians 12:3, John 3:5, Titus 3:5).

The Holy Spirit is not given to believers in a dose by dose method. When Scripture talks about the Holy Spirit working in us, it doesn't divide him into little packets. It is the Holy Spirit,

not half, not two thirds, but all of him. To say that you are half filled with the Holy Spirit is to say that you are only half a Christian. Such an inevitable conclusion creates doubt in a person's heart about his salvation. To suggest God randomly distributes his Spirit this way destroys the full and free forgiveness that Jesus won for all on the cross. In I Corinthians 12, Paul writes to the Corinthians, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free -- and we were all given one Spirit to drink." If we are one body, baptized by one Spirit, and given one Spirit to drink, there cannot be two levels of Christians.

How, then, are we to understand the gifts that the apostles and the early Christians received from the Holy Spirit? This is a difficult question for me to answer, and I cannot say with certainty that the Holy Spirit no longer gives people the ability to speak in tongues. The gift of tongues is really discussed only in I Corinthians 12. Here Paul isn't really encouraging the use of tongues. He is cautioning against using them incorrectly because pride had entered the church. Instead he encourages other gifts, such as faith, hope and love (cf. I Cor 13), that would better serve the Church (which is the point of all gifts of the Spirit). The Spirit blesses all of his people in different ways to build up the Church. Wherever speaking in tongues is mentioned as a gift of the Spirit, it is always in a long list of other gifts and not given a preeminent position. To elevate it to the level the Charismatics do is to put an emphasis on it that Scripture does not. And really the problem with the Charismatics is not so much a belief in the gift of tongues as it is viewing them as proof of true Christians.

So what does this do to the Sacrament of Baptism? First, it removes completely the Holy Spirit from baptism, and therefore denies baptism's power. Secondly, because they take away the power of baptism, they take away the assurance of salvation given through Word and sacrament. Thirdly, the Charismatics do not emphasize baptism but direct people away from God's Means of Grace to something within themselves. Finally, it denies the unity that we have in Christ through baptism. Instead of being one body we are two, one less than the other. The beautiful simplicity of baptism and the amazing grace given there is destroyed by the Charismatic "Baptism of the Holy Spirit."

So what do I say when I go back to visit those prospects? First of all, I know I cannot be so confrontational, at least at first, when I talk with them about this subject. Also, I will stick to a Law/Gospel presentation and use apologetics only when attacked. I will simply point them to God's Word, especially some of the passages like Ephesians 4, and show them what he says about the Holy Spirit and baptism. Before I depart, I will ask God to bless me with the ability and strength to be a faithful witness to his Word, ultimately deriving comfort from this assurance in Isaiah 55:11: "my word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."