

The complementarity of Water and Spirit baptisms according to Luke

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Introduction: both water and Spirit baptisms complement each other

In this paper I will attempt to explain how the water baptism, that is the Christian ordinance by which one is immersed in the death and the resurrection of Christ, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit are strongly completing each other. I will even dare to show how my own understanding of those 2 baptisms harmoniously explains every single passage in the book of Acts. The primary reason for having chosen such a specific topic is that most theologians tend to be entrenched in two irreconcilable positions:

On one hand, we have the “Water Baptism camp” which includes for instance the Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans, and Churches of Christ/Christian churches. They see a strong connection between water baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit but they will interpret every mention of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts in a symbolic or spiritualized way since they completely reject the relevance of a Spirit baptism for today.

On the other hand, we have the “Holy Spirit baptism camp” (mostly Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations) who tends to either reject or at least strongly minimize the role and purpose that the Holy Spirit has in connection with water baptism.

My position is a third option, one in which I see the role and the power of the Holy Spirit in *both* baptisms. Because of this I have a unique theological blueprint that consistently explain the book of Acts by showing that the Holy Spirit comes first as an indwelling¹ at water baptism, and then He follows later as a supernatural² empowerment which is called “baptism of the Holy Spirit”. Before I present this third view, I need first to define my hermeneutical convictions:

¹ By indwelling I mean when the Holy Spirit simply comes to permanently indwell in the body of a believer at salvation so he can have a relationship with God and not be controlled by sin. My only argument for this indwelling in Luke comes from possibly Acts 2:38 but certainly 19:3

² Throughout this paper, I use the term of “supernatural” empowerment (that is expressed in tongues, prophecies, healings, etc..), so as to distinguish it from other activities of the Spirit which we would not necessarily consider as miraculous in themselves.

Luke's baptism of the Holy Spirit must be interpreted according to Luke and not according to Paul

Only Luke presents a view that the Holy Spirit comes as a supernatural empowerment, as Paul never teaches this from this angle. It is therefore crucial to clarify our hermeneutic on Luke because it will radically and influences our perspective on the subject. In other words, we must interpret and define the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts according to Luke and not according to Paul. Here is how I interpret the hermeneutic of Luke and of the Bible:

First of all, I believe that any narrative text has as much theological authority as any other text that we call “doctrinal”. In other words, the book of Acts, as well as the Gospel of Luke, even if they are formulated through stories, leaves us as many “doctrinal” statements as any of the letters of Paul. This is important because some theologians would want to denigrate the authority of some doctrines that Luke present in Acts, simply because they are presented in a narrative form. This approach is as unfounded as saying for instance that the book of Genesis has little theological credibility because it is mostly made of stories. Luke has just as much authority through his own stories than Paul has with his theological formulations.

Secondly, one needs to understand Luke within his own thoughts and intentions, and not through the theological lens of Paul. Any book of the Bible needs to be interpreted through the purpose of his own author, and not through the purposes of another author. For instance, Paul has only one verse that mentions a baptism in one Spirit³, and in relationship with it, he shows absolutely no need of a being endowed with power from above. He has only one verse about being filled with the Holy Spirit, and it has nothing to do with power, as it talks about singing to one another⁴. Luke, in contrast, has three references of being baptized in the Holy Spirit and nine

³ 1 Cor.12:13

⁴ Eph.5:18

about being filled with the Holy Spirit, and they are ALL connected with supernatural gifting and power. Paul approaches the third person of the Trinity mostly in terms of what He does *within us* to purify and consecrate us as believers, whereas Luke has most of his emphasis on His supernatural power and what He can do *through us*. These two different approaches, one mostly on holiness and the other one mostly on empowerment, are not in contradiction with each other, but the difficulty comes when we try to merge them together in ONE theological block. This is what most secessionist⁵ theologians do, and the usual result is that Luke always gets interpreted through Paul! Any doctrines of the baptism of the Holy Spirit where theologians try to amalgamate or fuse together Paul and Luke is doomed to fail, for the simple reason that each biblical author has its own language and its own purpose.

Finally, we must explain every linguistic term in its context, instead of merging all the same words into one doctrinal concept. In the Bible the very word “baptism” has usually the linguistic meaning of an immersion, but it has very different meanings according to the context in which it is given. For instance, the baptism of repentance from John, the baptism in Christ, the baptism in Moses, the baptism in the cloud, the baptism in the sea, the baptism in fire, the baptism in the body of Christ, the baptism in the death of the cross or the baptism in the Spirit all have different meanings because each one has its own context. In other words, we cannot merge all of them into one unifying doctrine simply because they all have in common the word “baptism”. For instance, no one would merge the baptism of fire and the baptism that Christ experienced in going to the cross on the basis that both of them include the element of suffering and purification. They are both different even if one could find some similitude. In the same way no one would merge the baptism in Moses with the baptism in the cloud or the baptism on the

⁵ By secessionist I define theologians that do not believe that supernatural gifts and miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit are to be expected by Christians today

sea because they are all mentioned in one verse. Again this would not be a proper hermeneutical approach. Now, everyone understand that we cannot do this kind of merging, and yet this is exactly what some theologians do when they merge the baptisms in one Spirit of Paul and Luke together, on the basis that both of them mention the words “ baptism” and “Holy Spirit!”. Luke has a baptism that includes power for evangelism, whereas Paul’s mention of baptism is about the “oneness” of all things, whether it is one body, one Christ or ... one Spirit⁶. In other words, Paul is not using the term according to Acts 2 or according the one baptism of Ephesians 4:5. He simply uses the term in its primary sense of an immersion just like he did it before for a baptism in Moses.

I suggest we adopt a hermeneutical approach that took each baptism for itself, with the explanation and purpose each author gives them, or else we may draw the wrong conclusions. For this reason, we should view 1 Cor.12:13 as the Spirit immersing us into one body, and nothing more. We should view Acts 1:8 as being a supernatural empowerment for mission, and nothing more. Finally, as I will show below, we should view water baptism as an immersion in Christ’s death and resurrection which seals the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and nothing more. Those thee baptisms may have things in parallel, but merging them together can only bring confusion, which is why I suggest we took each baptism according to its own explanation. Before we do this, I would want to present briefly my own understanding of each, for the sake of clarity.

My brief view of the Spirit baptism (a complementary empowerment for evangelism)

I believe that Luke describes the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a distinct experience that

⁶ Paul could have written “και γαρ εν ενι πνευματι ημεις παντες εις εν σωμα εβαπτισθημεν” without the preposition “one” (ενι or εν), if his desire was to emphasise two kinds of baptisms, one in the Spirit and one in the body, but the precise use of “ONE” eliminates this. His emphasis is oneness.

can happen soon or long after our conversion and in some cases almost at the same time⁷. It is a supernatural experience from the Holy Spirit that finds its visible expressions in tongues, prophecies, healings or other miraculous manifestations, such that some theologians do not always make a clear separation between this experience and the reception of supernatural gifts. Luke usually describes it as a gift (“filled”, “received”, “give”, “gift”) which is mostly revealed in terms of an *external* and therefore *visible* influence (“sat upon”, “pour out”, “fell upon”). Its primary purpose is to fill its recipients with an authority and a supernatural power to become more effective evangelistic witnesses. Accessorily and consequently, it can shape our character in as much as we learn to proclaim Christ with greater power, but internal change or holiness is not the goal of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It can be obtained while we purposely wait in prayer to receive it⁸; it can come as a complete surprise as the Spirit directly falls on us⁹, or it can be transmitted through Christians who want to pray for us, by laying their hands.¹⁰ This experience is theologically and experimentally different from our conversion, even if it can chronologically happen at the same time, because its main purpose is not to save us or make us more holy, but to empower us for evangelism. It can be “renewed” many times afterwards, as for instance in Acts 4 where Peter and others prayed to be empowered with miraculous manifestations¹¹, such that it can be viewed either as one of the many infillings of the Spirit, or as a baptism of the Holy Spirit that repeats itself in different forms.

My brief view of water baptism (a burial with Jesus to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit)

⁷ Acts 10:47 is before and Acts 8:39 is at the same time, according to the fifth century Codex Alexandrinus (see explanations later on that passage)

⁸ Acts 1:14

⁹ Acts 10:44-45

¹⁰ Acts 8:17-19, 19:6; 1 Tim.4:14

¹¹ Acts 4:31

I believe that water baptism, in the way that Luke and mostly Paul describes it, is a full immersion in water of people who have repented and believed in Jesus, which places them in Christ's death and resurrection. It is more than the answer of a good conscience before Him¹², or the visible expression that we have become disciples of Jesus¹³. It is more than having our sins forgiven¹⁴ or washed away¹⁵, and more than the symbolic expression of having buried our former life through Christ' death; it is a resurrection with Him so that we can walk in a newness of life with Him¹⁶. In this regard, as we clothe ourselves with Christ¹⁷, we automatically receive therefore the indwelling gift of His Spirit¹⁸. The primary argument that supports the connection between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and water baptism is Romans 6. According to that passage, when we are resurrected with Christ through water baptism, we are starting a newness of life. I do not see how this new life can start without receiving some measure of the Holy Spirit. We might debate "how much" of the Holy Spirit might be in us before water baptism, but what we cannot argue is that the new life of Rom.6 is impossible without the Holy Spirit. In many ways, getting out of the baptismal waters is like God putting his final seal on our lives¹⁹. This goes in harmony with the illustration of new birth that Jesus gave²⁰: A baby has a life of its own long before his birth, and yet he must still go until the final stage to be called a newborn. In and of itself, water baptism is therefore not a "regenerational" ritual, as it is our very faith in His grace that saves us during every step of the salvation process. Nevertheless, for the early Church there was no separation between the symbol and its reality, because making Jesus Lord and being

¹² 1 Pet. 3:21

¹³ Matt. 28:19-20

¹⁴ Acts 2:38

¹⁵ Acts 22:16

¹⁶ Rom. 6:3-5

¹⁷ Col.2:12; Gal.3:26-27

¹⁸ Acts 2:38

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 1:22

²⁰ John 3: 5

baptized were mutually inclusive. Faith cannot ever be separated from its tangible expression, and this is why so many passages regarding salvation and receiving the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are directly associated with water baptism²¹. In other words, as we shall see in the book of Acts, this is the reason why this symbolic expression of faith is fully integrated in the overall larger process of conversion and salvation.

The Baptism of Jesus perfectly represents the complementarity of both baptisms (Luke 3:21- 22; 4:1)

Jesus' baptism includes both a water baptism and a spirit baptism with its correlating themes, and this is the reason I see it as being so paradigmatic. As Jesus came out the waters, the heavens were "torn open", which is the very same verb used of the temple curtain being torn at Jesus' death, indicating by this that all separations between heaven and earth had been taken away. Furthermore, crowds heard a voice declaring the loving affiliation of the Son with his Father. The symbolic between Jesus' baptism and our own baptism should be obvious: when we get out of the waters the heavens are wide open to us because we are God's beloved children.

Now, another aspect is mentioned: the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus. In this regard, Luke points out three specific elements that none of the other evangelists mentioned, which reveal Luke's specific theology on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. First, he writes that the Holy Spirit came in a *bodily form*, revealing by this detail that the descent of the Holy Spirit was *visible* to all²². Secondly, he writes that it happened while Jesus was *praying*, and thirdly that it led Jesus to be *full* of the Holy Spirit. Those three mentions are certainly intentional, as Luke draws a clear parallel with Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit came in a visible way on the disciples while they were praying, which resulted in them being filled with Holy Spirit. John himself

²¹ Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 22:16; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21

²² In John 1:32, The evangelist John records the testimony that John the Baptist himself *saw* the Spirit descend on Jesus

explained the symbolic meaning of Jesus' baptism by saying that the one on whom the Spirit descends will Himself baptize in the Holy Spirit²³. There is an obvious parallel between Jesus' baptism and Acts 2. In other words, in this very episode we have the essence of both baptisms: one in water, which allows us to receive our complete affiliation with the Father, and another one in the Spirit, which endues us with a visible empowerment from above.

The apostles received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in John 20 and His empowering in Acts 2

Some theologians interpret Acts as the “the birth of the Church”, as they believed that the disciples received the Holy Spirit for the *first* time in Jerusalem. My conviction, according to John 20:22, is that they received the Holy Spirit for the first time in Galilee. If Jesus breathed indeed on his disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” I do not see absolutely no reason why they did not receive the Spirit at that very moment. Until then, the Holy Spirit was with them, but at that moment He comes in them. (“But you know him, for he lives with you and will be IN you”²⁴). The text does not indicate that anything “visibly miraculous” (as in Acts 2) happened after he blew on them, and this leads me to the conclusion that they went through the very same parallel experience that happens to most people when they become Christians: they received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a simple and “non-dramatic” way. In other words, we have two instances when the disciples received the Holy Spirit: one as a simple indwelling (John 20) and another one as a supernatural empowerment (Acts 2). This seems again to fit the dual model, which I advocate throughout this paper.

The immediate question that may come to the minds of some readers is why Jesus did not baptize his disciples to show a connection between baptism and the indwelling of the Holy

²³ John 1:33

²⁴ John 14:17

Spirit? Why did he only blow on them? We do not have any answer from the Scriptures except that Jesus never baptized anyone. His disciples did, but John tells us that He never did it himself²⁵. Maybe the Lord needed to rise to heaven and sit at the right hand of the Father so that the Christian baptism would have its fullest meaning for us as people who rule with Him. Maybe he did this so that no one on earth could brag about having been directly baptized by him. We do not know. All we know is that immediately after the disciples received that “blowing-indwelling” of the Spirit, they were told to wait for another “blowing” from above. This proximity between that experience and the order to wait for another one seems to indicate that both were deeply connected with each other.

The purpose of being empowered is primarily for evangelism (Acts 1 and 2)

This call to “be endued with power from on high”²⁶ is described by Jesus himself as being a baptism in or with²⁷ the Holy Spirit. This is an expression that John the Baptist had used, which apparently was so important that all four evangelist quoted it.²⁸ Luke clearly associates this power with our mission to preach to all nations²⁹, in such a way that we can become the most effective witnesses to all the end of the earth³⁰. Matthew hints at this power by writing that all the delegated authority of Jesus would be with us, and Mark clearly shows that such authority is supernatural³¹. It is strictly bound to the task of preaching the Gospel, and contrary to the useless debates that have abounded around this doctrine, it is not meant to be a work of “second grace” as if it had anything to do with Wesleyan holiness. In other words, there is absolutely nothing in

²⁵ John 3:22, 4:1

²⁶ Luke 24:49

²⁷ βαπτισθησεσθε εν πνευματι

²⁸ Matt.3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33

²⁹ Luke 24:47

³⁰ Acts 1:8

³¹ Mark 16:15-18

this power that is for ourselves of even to improve our characters, as some teach it³². It is never presented as some means to acquire more holiness or more intimacy with God.

I consider this an important remark because if we understand the evangelistic purpose of this experience, not only we will avoid the theological trap of merging it with conversion, but it will also define our very aspirations in seeking it. Acts 1 is a model of what our aspirations should be regarding this experience: when the disciples waited prayerfully in the upper room, they were not in agony to receive “something more” that would improve their own spirituality. They had courage and faith as they had seen the resurrected Lord. They had received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when he blew on them. They had an exact understanding of what would happen, and they knew that it would not be for the political purpose of restoring Israel. When Peter gives an interpretation of the event, he does not define it as a conversion, a step of salvation or as some kind of improvement in his relationship with God, but as a demonstration of God’s miraculous power to those who did not know him. In the same pattern, when later the disciples pray in Acts 4, they ask for an empowerment with healings, signs and wonders so that they can preach the Word to unbelievers with boldness. This is always the purpose and the outcome of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Any other goal disqualifies it as being the biblical definition of baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The accompanying signs of the baptism of the Holy Spirit were all evangelistic signs

The best proof that this baptism is meant to be evangelistic is that in Acts, it is *always* accompanied by tongues. The second chapter of Acts clearly reveals the connection of tongues with the evangelistic success that followed. Now, in the context of early Judaism, tongues were

³² Compare this with the official web site statement of prominent charismatic teacher Joyce Meyer: “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. He helps empower the believer to develop the character of Christ and live every day in God's will”

not a sign for believers, contrary to what most people teach today, but a sign for unbelievers³³. It was a powerful demonstration that God had opened the door of His kingdom to the Non-Jews. When people explain the manifestation of tongues primarily as a self-edifying experience, they not only misrepresent tongues, but the very nature and purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as well. When theologians debate whether tongues should be qualified as an “evidence” of this baptism or not, they miss the whole missional purpose of this experience! According to 1 Cor. 14 it is very clear that tongues is not a sign of how much God loves the insiders, but how much he wants to reach the outsiders! Another “sign” of that baptism are prophecies (Acts 19:6). Now, for Luke, prophecy always has a dimension of proclaiming God’s rule and good news, and this is why it always has an “evangelistic” dimension³⁴. In other words, both tongues and prophecies clearly demonstrate the overall evangelistic finality of the Spirit’s baptism, and this is why we could be open to more signs as Acts 4 suggests. If we indeed consider this passage in Acts 4 as somehow normative for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, then we can even expect miraculous signs, wonders, healings or even earthquakes to accompany our Spirit’s baptism! Such an evangelistic perspective would not get us bogged down whether we have received some “evidence” of our baptism or not. When we have received power from high, we know we have it! For the early Church, tongues were certainly the “best” evangelistic tool, and this is why it occupies such a central position, and in some contexts they might still have the same validity today (think for instance of an American Christian who, because of this supernatural empowerment, starts speaking perfect Arabic in the middle of Cairo!). But other means could be

³³ 1 Cor. 14:22

³⁴ See the excellent notes on this in Roger Stronstad’s landmark book on the baptism of the Holy Spirit within a Lukan perspective. (Roger Stronstad. *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*. Peabody, MA. Hendrickson Publishers, 1984)

Paul on the contrary seems to have a more “introverted” perspective on prophecies, but he nevertheless does not eliminate the evangelistic aspect that prophecies can have to outsiders (1 Cor.14:24-25)

just as powerful and this is why we must let God decide of His means for His purposes. Power is the key, and “amazing works of God” (Acts 2:11) are the evangelistic results. For this reason, we should not limit the empowerment to tongues alone, and therefore we cannot make it the only evidence of this enduing from above.

The Samaritans had “only” been baptized in water, therefore they needed “more” (Acts 8: 12-19)

By now, the model of duality should easily explain what happened to the Samaritans. They had obviously become Christians, a fact evidenced by their baptism in water in the name of Jesus (v.12 and 16). In other words, they had already received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but not its supernatural empowerment. This is the reason why Luke writes that they had “only” been baptized in the name of the Lord. If they had received all they needed from the Holy Spirit, the text would obviously not present their water baptism in such a reductive way.

The difficulty when Luke mentions 4 times in this passage³⁵ about a giving and a receiving of the Holy Spirit is that we may think that the Samaritans had not received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We have the same expressions with Cornelius or the disciples of Ephesus³⁶. Things are very simple: every single time when Luke uses the terminology of gift, giving or receiving of the Holy Spirit, it is always in connection with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In other words, committed disciples in Samaria, Caesarea or Ephesus all had an “internal” experience of the Holy Spirit since they believed in Jesus, but they needed an “external” experience of empowerment from above to be more effective missionaries.

In fact, since the very same expression of “*receiving* the Holy Spirit” is used as well in

³⁵ “They may receive the Holy Spirit” (v.15), “they received” (v.17), “the Holy Spirit was given” (v.18), “may receive the Holy Spirit” (v.19).

³⁶ “They received the Holy Spirit” (10:47) “gave the same gift” (11:17) or “have you received the Holy Spirit?” (Acts 19:2).

Acts 2:38, we cannot even exclude the fact that Peter might have had the idea of supernatural empowerment in mind. The promise could include the concept of “one package”, where an indwelling is closely followed by an empowerment, similar to the experience of the Eunuch in 8:39, but both the usual Lukan language of “receiving the Spirit” and the immediate context favor more the idea of a baptism of the Holy Spirit. It would indeed make more sense to the crowds of Acts 2 that “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was a miraculous demonstration since it was the only visible reference they had.

As said before, the Samaritans themselves had received the Holy Spirit in a sense of becoming Christians, because they “believed”, “received the word of God” and “were baptized”, but this was not enough: they needed more. This why the apostles came down and laid their hands on them, so that the Spirit would *come down* on them. This is another expression of the empowerment from *above*, as we see elsewhere being described as “sat upon”, “pour out” or “fell upon”. It was a visible experience as well, since Simon the magician *saw* it being given through the hands of the apostles (v.18)

The Ethiopian was, like Jesus, baptized in water and in the Spirit within the same time (Acts 8: 39)

In Acts 8:39 we have the unique and fascinating example of someone who had his Spirit baptism immediately following his water baptism. The fifth century Codex Alexandrinus, supported by several minuscule manuscripts, has indeed this very unusual textual variant: “*the Holy Spirit fell upon the eunuch*”³⁷, after he came out of the baptismal water. All the Bible translations of eastern Christian traditions have kept this inclusion, expressing their belief that the Holy Spirit can come down on Christians in the same visible way as He came down on the

³⁷ “πνεῦμα ἅγιον ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν εὐνοῦχον”

Samaritans. This may better explain why Orthodox believers are generally more open to a mystical or charismatic dimension of the Holy Spirit. Anyway, we have here again the same duality: the Eunuch received the Holy Spirit as he walks in a newness of life with Christ as soon as he comes out of the baptismal waters, and at the same time he receives an immediate supernatural empowerment from above. His example is unique in the sense that it is the only one that follows the model left in Jesus' baptism, one of a double package all received within the shortest amount of time.

The two baptisms have a strong proximity in time (Acts 9)

We could be inclined to believe that when Ananias said to Paul that he would be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17) that it was more in connection with a spirit baptism than his water baptism. Luke's terminology of being filled with the Holy Spirit is indeed always connected with a spirit baptism, such that it favors more a view of a Spirit baptism. Acts 2:38, which is the only mention that Luke makes between being baptized in water and receiving the Holy Spirit does indeed not exclude a baptism of the Holy Spirit. In fact, it could have well been the case that both for Peter or Ananias an empowerment would immediately follow the water baptism, such that both baptisms were hard to separate. This view would be in harmony with the baptism of the Eunuch or the one of Jesus where we see both a water baptism and a Spirit baptism working all within the same time. It could be that the early church was not making a big separation of time between the receiving the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and experiencing its immediate empowerment. Every single passage in Acts indeed shows a strong proximity of both events. Whether it was the Samaritans, Cornelius, the disciples in Ephesus or the ones in Jerusalem, they all experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and His baptism within a very short amount of days. The same pattern is therefore not to be excluded with Paul, and this may

explain what Ananias said regarding him being filled.

Cornelius' household received a baptism in the Spirit just before one in water (Acts 10)

The case of Cornelius is unique in the sense that the usual pattern of Acts is inverted. Here the baptism of the Holy Spirit precedes the water baptism. The reason for this inversion of order is very simple: God is putting Peter in a public situation where he is completely legitimized to baptize Non-Jews. The demonstration of supernatural power is forcing him to do so; he cannot refuse to immerse those pagans in water. In fact, he has the authorisation to do so. (Notice that he is not asking: “should we baptize those people?”, but “can anyone *forbid* them to be baptized”?) If Peter had baptized them right after he preached, he would have been forced to give a very good explanation of why he did make such a serious decision on his own. He still had to justify himself even after the baptism of the Holy Spirit, so you can imagine what would have happened without it! This is why God intervened in a spectacular way just one minute before the end of his sermon by showing that it was OK for Non-Jews to become Christians.

In this situation, we have people who receive a supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit *before* they are buried with Christ in baptism. In other words, they have the Holy Spirit coming on them before He fully comes in them. This should not trouble us because we have many instances where the Holy Spirit came on people who did not even know Christ. For instance, we have seventy elders of Moses, Balaam, Saul, Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Elijah or Elisha, to mention just a few³⁸. The same can be said in the Infancy Narratives of Luke with people like Elizabeth, Zacharias or Simeon who had prophetic utterances as the Holy Spirit “empowered” them. In other words, the Holy Spirit had already done many supernatural and

³⁸ Numbers 11:25-26, 23:5, 24:2; Judges 3:10, 6:34, 11:29, 13:25, 14:6,19, 15:14, 1 Samuel 10:1-10, 11:6, 16:13, 19:20-23, 2 Kings 2: 9,16, etc...

even spectacular workings on them and through them, and none of them were Christians!

The example of Cornelius, backed up by all the others of the Old Testament leaves us a clear example that God can literally work *on* unbelievers before they even get baptized.

The disciples in Ephesus needed a baptism in water in order to receive a baptism in the Spirit (Acts 19)

This passage, which seems to be one the most misinterpreted texts of Acts, is the clearest demonstration of the model of duality presented until now. It is the ultimate and perfect example that every single person needs to be both baptized in water and in the Spirit.

When Paul first asks the question “have you received the Holy Spirit”, he is not wondering whether those disciples had the Spirit in them, or if they were Christians, since they were called “disciples”. His question is therefore not “Are you Christian?” but “Have you received the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit as Christians?” Have you experienced an empowerment from above ever since you started to believe?” Again, it is important to remember that for Luke the formulation “*receiving* the Holy Spirit” is never equated with a conversion to Christ, but as an empowerment from above.

As soon as Paul asks his question, he makes a surprising discovery: they had not even heard there is a Holy Spirit! At this point, Paul wonders if those men were even Christians since they had not even heard about the Holy Spirit! So his immediate question is: “What kind of baptism did you *then* receive?” In Paul’s mind if those men did not even know anything about the Holy Spirit, they either had gone through a Non-Christian baptism because they knew nothing about the Holy Spirit, or they had gone through a very bizarre Christian baptism since it did not include some teaching about the Holy Spirit. The connection between the Holy Spirit and a Christian water baptism is very obvious from this verse. They say it was the baptism of John:

Paul understands that those men did not have the full picture of Christ and so he proceeds to teach them more about him and eventually baptizes them with the correct Christian baptism.

We have a similar example with Apollos: although he knew Jesus, he had not experienced the Christian baptism, as he knew only the baptism of John³⁹. In other words, we do not have with Appolos or the disciples of Ephesus “Christians who needed to be rebaptized”, as some commentators teach. We have disciples of Jesus⁴⁰ who needed to be “explained the way of God more accurately”⁴¹, so that they could take the correct Christian baptism.

As Paul baptizes them, they receive the final indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and he then proceeds with his initial intention of wanting them to “receive” the Holy Spirit: he lays his hands on them, and just like the Samaritans, the Holy Spirit comes down on them and they speak in tongues and prophecy. These 12 men receive the dual blessing of being both water and Spirit baptized.

Those who want more power in evangelism will seek until they receive, those who don't will not (Luke 11, Acts 4)

In the eleventh chapter of his Gospel, Luke starts with the Lord's Prayer, which he illustrates by a story about having a stubborn persistency in asking good things from God, and he concludes by saying: “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven *give the Holy Spirit* to those who keep asking him!”⁴² The Lord's Prayer is in essence a call to everyone to make a radical reorientation of his priorities so that the will of God and his kingdom will come on earth, and its final seal, in that context, is to receive the Holy Spirit. By now it should be clear that Luke's terminology

³⁹ Acts 18:26

⁴⁰ It is possible to be a disciple of Jesus and still be not baptized as those texts indicates. Discipleship already starts before baptism, as Matt.28:18-20 clearly shows (make disciples AND baptize them)

⁴¹ Acts 18:26

⁴² Luke 11:13

“give the Holy Spirit” does not mean receiving the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but receive a supernatural empowerment. In other words, if we truly want to bring the reign of God with the greatest effectiveness, we must continually seek and pray (the Greek for pray is a present active participle, indicating a continuous action) to receive this empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 4:23-31 is a good example of this commandment. The apostles had *already* received a baptism in the Holy Spirit, and yet they asked for more supernatural power and strength to evangelize in the face of opposition, and as an answer they were all filled with boldness and the Spirit. They did not reduce themselves to a one time experience. The baptism of the Holy Spirit can therefore be seen as an ongoing experience that spans over our entire life, which includes in it every possible supernatural experiences, or it can be regarded as a onetime experience that somehow is being renewed in many different ways afterward. Many view it as a onetime experience which has a ripples effect for the rest of our life and they use the expression of “one baptism and many fillings”. However we define it, one reality cannot be avoided: we need power to evangelize. The only possible point where Paul and Luke meet in their mention of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the following: if we have been baptized into one Spirit and into one body, then, together as a church, we have all the miraculous potential to evangelize. Whether we will tap in that potential by seeking it for ourselves as well as for others depends on us. We have a personal responsibility to evangelize, and therefore we have the responsibility to ask and to knock at the door until we have received. It is not in vain that Paul wrote that one of his top priorities and longings in life was to know the power of his resurrection⁴³, a reality which is so obviously at work in the book of Acts.

Accessorily, it must be said as well that since the primary purpose of the baptism of the

⁴³ Phil. 3:10

Holy Spirit is for evangelistic effectiveness, and not for salvation, it defines our motivation in receiving it. Those who do not care about being more effective in their outreach or minimize the need to use miracles in evangelism will not seek such an empowerment. But those who desire greater usefulness from God will eventually be led to ask until they receive more. In other words, there is a direct connection between this supernatural experience and our passion to be used as witnesses.

The empowerment comes by prayer, by surprise or through the laying of hands

It comes in three ways. First, it can come as a specific answer as we pray and eagerly expect God to directly empower us from above (Acts 2 = The 120s were precisely expecting the promised empowerment. Acts 4 = The believers were in prayer, intensely asking for power). Secondly, it can come as an unexpected surprise as God empowers believers who were not seeking this experience. (Acts 8 with the Eunuch and Acts 10 with Cornelius). Finally, it can come through Christians who lay their hands on us (Acts 8 with the Samaritans, Acts 9 with Paul (although some could argue that the laying of hands was only connected with healing), Acts 19 with the Ephesus disciples and Timothy with Paul (2 Tim. 1:6)). The amount of references as well as the prominence of the laying on of hands in the early Church (quoted in Hebr. 6:2 as one of the elementary foundations) all seem to indicate that it was the most common method of empowering believers. In general, we often see in the Bible that God prefers to use his own human agents rather than directly intervening. Interestingly, the same parallel can be observed in healing. Sometimes people were healed without Jesus laying hands on them (the leper on his way, the centurion's servant, the women with an issue of blood, etc...) but in most cases he healed the many people who came to him by laying hands on each one of them (Luke 4:40)

What is particularly surprising in Acts is that there is only one example of “mature” Christians who experienced it, if we even consider the disciples and the 120 to come in that category (Acts 2 and 4). All the other examples reveal that the experience is available for people who were freshly converted. The Samaritans were probably recent converts of just a few weeks. The Eunuch and the disciples of Ephesus had just had been baptized in the water a few minutes before their Spirit baptism. If we consider that Cornelius was not even baptized in water as he experienced it, we can conclude that God does not require a lot of mature faith to experience this empowerment! This actually even more emphasizes the fact that power for evangelism is needed as soon as possible for people who became Christians. If we see the eagerness that the apostles had in wanting young Christians to have this power as soon as possible, we should follow the same pattern today.

Does the baptism of the Holy Spirit create “second class Christians” for those who have not received it?

A final consideration in regard to what Luke teaches is whether this doctrine creates “second class Christians” or not. This is the accusation which is often pointed against this view, with the argument that many Christians who live strong “Spirit filled” lives did not have this experience. My answer to this is the following:

First of all, I do not believe that every person who spoke in tongues for the first time or had a very strong emotional outburst necessary had a baptism of the Holy Spirit. Not all spiritual manifestations fall under the category of Spirit baptism. In other words, I would be cautious in calling every “visible” and strong experience in the Holy Spirit as a baptism of the Holy Spirit. The way to recognize the difference is simple: this baptism is defined by its evangelistic goal and results. If it is not followed by any kind of supernatural empowerment and results in evangelism,

as we see in Acts 2 and as Jesus said it would be so in Acts 1, then it is probably not a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Again, it is extremely crucial to accept that *the goal defines the very nature of this baptism*, or else we may easily see every supernatural manifestation as a Spirit baptism, when it may not be the case at all.

Secondly, unlike water baptism⁴⁴, Luke never presents Spirit baptism as a command that all believers must obey. This is an important remark to make because even if there are plenty of evidences regarding the reality of this experience in Acts, Luke never describes it in terms of an indispensable order to be fulfilled (“be baptized in the Holy Spirit!” or “you must be baptized in the Holy Spirit!”). Jesus gave his apostles the order to *wait* until the Holy Spirit would come, but He never gave them the order to be baptized in the Spirit or to have them teaching this to others. The practical implication of this distinction is that those who have experienced this cannot compare themselves with any kind of superiority as being obedient and therefore above the others. I am aware that it can still be argued that those who have gone through this baptism are nevertheless creating an involuntary division by the sheer fact that they have experienced this. It is indeed a reality that cannot be avoided and it can be taken in the following two ways: we can either try to redefine it theologically in such a way that those who have not gone through the experience do not feel “second class Christians”, or we can simply accept the fact that we might have strong differences among us, and chose the appropriate attitude for those differences. Luke is not bothered to write an entire book in which he singles out the spectacular actions of some Christians did (after all it is called the Acts of the Apostles!). We can either be inspired by those examples, and imitate them as much as possible, or we can minimize them in such a way that no one will be offended.

⁴⁴ Repent and BE baptized (Acts 2:38), arise and BE baptized (Acts 22:16)

Let me draw the very same parallel by showing what Paul said to the Corinthians. On one hand, he wrote that we are all different in our gifts (“do all have gifts of healings? etc⁴⁵ ...), so that we should be humble and not judge each other in our differences, and yet on the other hand he repeatedly emphasized our absolute need to “eagerly seek the best gifts”⁴⁶. The same principle can be applied in Acts: we can accept the obvious fact that if we want to live up to the supernatural standard of that book, we will always have great differences between us, but at the same time we can eagerly desire to imitate its incredible examples. The great theological lie against the supernatural is the argument that since we are all differently gifted we should not strive to seek the highest gifts, but humbly remain where we are. This thinking goes in the exact opposite direction of what Paul taught in regard to gifts. The truth is that we must be humble toward each other, while at the same time we must eagerly seek the very best from God. The supernatural standard of the book of Acts will always remain an inspiration or a challenge, depending on our deepest aspirations. Those who desperately want to reach the world with a supernatural empowerment will seek this baptism, and those who don’t will not seek this option. This is just a fact of life. We should therefore not compare ourselves in our differences, as it leads nowhere, and at the same time we should be desperately hungry for more of the Holy Spirit’s power, particularly if it is for reaching this world for Christ.

My own experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit

Being from a non-Charismatic denomination (the Church of Christ), I had started many churches all over the world for more than 20 years. In the summer of 2001, my heart at that point in time was eagerly seeking for any better way to be used by God as an evangelist, as I had tried every possible approach there is in being an effective church planter. I was open to the idea that God

⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 12:30

⁴⁶ 1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1; 14:12; 15:39

could do more through His spirit, but I had no idea how this could come, as I had never seen a healing, a miracle or any kind of supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit. In Fort Worth, I had been invited to attend a meeting from the “Restoration Church” in which a prophet was speaking. After he finished his speech, people were coming to him to be prophesied over, while a crowd of more than 700 people were spread out all over the auditorium standing and talking with each other. At one point during that time, I felt the desire to go to the front and pray for his wife, because she gave me the strong impression that she was not feeling good. (I discovered later that she was struggling with very deep insecurities). At first I felt stupid at the idea of doing this since I did not know her at all, so I brushed away the thought and stayed on my seat. Half hour later, the thought came again, but I resisted it as being even more useless. Eventually, I was about to leave the Church sanctuary when I finally decided to go ahead with my intention. I simply asked that woman if it was OK to pray for her, which she said yes. As soon as I started to say a few words and touch her shoulder, I do not know exactly what happened, but I immediately felt an intense current of electricity going through my whole body, as if I had been directly plugged into a socket. I fell on the floor and went into a trance and shaking that people told me lasted for more than two hours. For me, time had completely stopped and I had absolutely no idea how long I had been on the floor. I cannot recall what happened during that time, except that at one point I remember I was shaking my arm in the very same authoritative way like I had seen the prophet doing over the crowd. I was eventually carried by two brothers outside the church building, because I had absolutely no physical strength to stand on my own. What I clearly remember, while I was being transported outside of the church, is that my whole left arm, particularly my hand, was burning with so much heat that it was almost unbearable. At that point, as I felt so much intense heat in my arm, I immediately received a strong desire to pray for the sick with the

conviction that miracles would happen. (I did not have a faith or a theology for healing and miracles before, but somehow at that moment I knew it would be possible). In the few days that immediately followed, I started to pray for unbelievers who were healed, and even started to receive some prophetic words for them (of which, of course, I had no experience before). All this had happened in Fort Worth, just a few days before the famous 11 September. I came back to Russia to the Non-charismatic church I had planted, and from that time on things were never the same again. Because of my new convictions and growing experiences in the supernatural, my American home church cut off my missionary support. I had to leave the precious church I had founded in Russia. Every church I had planted all over the world would never look at me any more in the same way. I lost the entire relational and financial network I had built in being 20 years with the same non-charismatic denomination.

At first, I intensely looked in the States for any Charismatic church to hire me, but no one was interested. After running out of money and experiencing the shame of being forced to be dependent on the financial help of a few believers, we had to return to Switzerland, where for the following 6 years, God kept me in a desert to teach me about the supernatural. Today I see miracles, healings, the prophetic and all sorts of incredible manifestations happening all the time. In other words, I can clearly see an immediate supernatural empowerment that came from that surprising experience which I had not sought at all, and for which I absolutely had no doctrinal explanation or anticipation. I had never seen anyone before falling under the power of the Holy Spirit, so I had no model to follow. I did not even have a desire or a concept to be empowered in a supernatural way. All I had was a strong evangelistic motivation for something more for God, of which I had no idea what that meant. There was definitively a before and a after through that baptism of the Holy Spirit. I lost everything and yet gained a completely new way of doing

evangelism and following the Lord.

Conclusion: it is up to you how you want to evangelize

Luke leaves us with a dual model of how the Holy Spirit works. He clearly shows the crucial importance of water baptism in connection with becoming Christian. The proof of this is that literally *every single* conversion throughout the entire book of Acts is *always* followed by water baptism. There is never an exception to this pattern, as Luke wants to leave no doubt in his readers that water baptism is an integral part of our conversion. He gives only two very brief soteriological explanations to it, (that the rite is bound to the forgiveness of sins⁴⁷ and the washing away of sins⁴⁸), and makes only two pneumatological connections with it (in Acts 2:38 and 19:3), because it is not his main focus. His primary goal is to convince us that we need a subsequent experience to water baptism, in order to better accomplish the mission that God has assigned us.

We can therefore choose to believe that no supernatural activity of the Holy Spirit is needed today, and consequently reduce the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the symbolic image of a spiritual immersion into one body, as Paul wrote it in 1 Cor.12, or we can be open to the truth that the Holy Spirit is still willing to do miracles today, and therefore accept the concept of supernatural empowerment for mission that Luke leaves us throughout his Gospel and Acts. This baptism is an evangelistic empowerment accompanied by evangelistic signs for evangelistic people. It requires therefore no other qualification but an evangelistic motivation. With this in mind, the choice is now yours. You can listen to the passionate call that Luke left you through his Gospel and Acts, or keep on doing evangelism on your own human strength and resources.

⁴⁷ Acts 2:38

⁴⁸ Acts 22:16

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