

The Basics of the Baptism of the Spirit

Answering the most frequently asked questions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit

My life is filled with amazing people. Recently, a widow I know pointed to a midnight intruder and boldly commanded him to leave her house. He did! Another friend refused to panic when her teenage daughter ran away. As she was calling the police, the Holy Spirit revealed the girl's exact location to her. Another woman—a shy single mom—overcame a 12-year battle with bulimia. Today she teaches a weekly Bible study to women with addictions. Are these people superheroes? No, they're just ordinary Christians who have received the extraordinary baptism of the Holy Spirit.

When people are baptized in the Holy Spirit, they are filled with God's ability. Natural people do supernatural things. Lives of chaos find serenity and purpose. Shy people become bold, and selfish people experience radical changes in their priorities. Sadly, many Christians today don't seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit because they don't understand it. They don't know what they're missing! Here are some of the questions I hear most frequently.

What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not salvation; it's a secondary experience to salvation. God's gift to sinners is Jesus the Savior. God's gift to believers is Jesus the Baptizer.

When Jesus became your Savior, He cleansed your sin by His blood; but when Jesus becomes your baptizer, He fills you with His Spirit. The result of salvation is forgiveness; the result of the baptism is power.

I like to compare the baptism of the Holy Spirit to fuel for a car. Your car may be paid for, but you won't get very far in it without a full tank of gas. Yes, through salvation, your sins have been paid for; but your journey in life will be easier and more productive if your "tank" is full. The fuller your tank, the further you can go with God.

What is the evidence of it?

The evidence of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit is, first of all, supernatural power. Power over what? Fear. Anger. Disease. Doubt. Discouragement (and more). This *dunamis* power helps you overcome anything that hinders you from experiencing God's abundant life. It also helps you do things you never could have done in your own strength. Take Peter, for example. Before he received the Holy Spirit's power, he denied the Lord Jesus three times. Afterward he healed the sick, raised the dead and won 3,000 souls with his first sermon!

The second evidence of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a glorious prayer language, also known as "speaking in tongues." Now, I understand that many wonderful Christians may disagree with me on this point. But my personal belief—and I think Scripture bears me out—is that speaking in tongues is a wonderful gift that every believer can embrace.

People ask me, "Do I *have* to speak in tongues?" My reply is: "You don't *have* to. You *get* to." Speaking in tongues is the Holy Spirit praying through you, speaking mysteries to God. How wonderful!

Why speak in tongues?

By my count, the Bible gives 31 reasons for speaking in tongues. Since I don't have room to list them all here, I'll just share with you my favorite five.

- **Experiencing spiritual refreshment**

Do you ever feel overwhelmed? Do you get bored with the routines of life? Speaking in tongues is a spiritual “refreshing” that causes “the weary to rest” (Is. 28:11-12, NKJV). Often the Holy Spirit has prompted me to get alone and worship God in other tongues. In minutes, I feel as if I’ve enjoyed a two-week vacation.

▪ **Overcoming weakness**

According to Romans 8:26, speaking in tongues helps strengthen you in areas of personal weakness. Are you tempted with lust? Tormented with worry? Do you struggle with discouragement? Need help with your eating habits? Pray in the Holy Spirit often, because He is your Helper.

▪ **Praying God’s perfect will**

Speaking in tongues helps you to always pray the perfect will of God (see Rom. 8:27). When you pray in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit prays God’s will *through you*, addressing issues and circumstances that are often too complicated for you to understand.

Here’s a personal example: When my beautiful friend Ava was killed by a drunk driver, I wanted that irresponsible drunk locked up forever. But as I continued to pray in tongues, I became aware of the man’s path toward hell. I prayed for his soul and gave the legal outcome to God. Praying in the Spirit caused my desire for revenge to yield to the wisdom of God.

▪ **Having the mind of Christ**

According to 1 Corinthians 2:16, having “the mind of Christ” is synonymous with knowing the will of God. That means that when you pray in the Spirit, you not only pray God’s will, you actually have the mind of Christ.

The question often arises, “Did Jesus speak in tongues?” No, I don’t believe He did. He didn’t have to—He already *had* the mind of Christ! He knew the Father’s will because He and the

Father were one.

▪ **Building up your “inner man”**

Speaking or praying in tongues edifies and strengthens your “inner man” (see Jude 20; 1 Cor. 14:4). It builds you up and makes you strong in God. How much praying in the Spirit do you need to do? Well, how strong do you want to be?

Must tongues be interpreted?

The answer is, sometimes. The Bible mentions two different gifts of tongues. The first one, which is associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, is your personal prayer language. This is a language only God understands.

The language in Japan is Japanese, and the language in France is French. But personal prayer language is what I like to call *Heavenese*—the language of heaven.

The second gift of tongues is one of the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12:10. It needs interpretation so that everyone who hears it can be encouraged (see 1 Cor. 14:26-28).

You might say that your personal prayer language is man talking to God; it doesn't need interpretation because God understands. The gift of tongues, on the other hand, is God talking to man. Other people can't be edified unless someone interprets the message.

Is the baptism for everyone?

I believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for everyone. Jesus Himself said the Father would give the Holy Spirit to everyone who asks Him (see Luke 11:13). Later, Peter said the gift of the Holy Spirit “is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off” (Acts 2:39).

I once ministered to a dear woman who desperately wanted to

receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. She had been told the Holy Spirit wouldn't fill her until she quit smoking cigarettes. She tried for 14 years to quit, with no success. She felt condemned and hopeless.

"God doesn't fill you with His Spirit because *you* are so good, but because *He* is so good," I told her. She left that service speaking in tongues and with supernatural power to break her addiction. She quit smoking within one month!

In 1980 I was invited to minister the baptism of the Holy Spirit at a convention in Belize. Most of the 300 women attending were Catholics who recently had come to Christ. As I preached, I sensed great resistance toward the baptism. I wondered if the "brick wall" was a cultural response or a reaction to the mention of my Methodist upbringing.

I whispered a quick prayer for direction, and a flash of wisdom came. "How many of you want everything that the blessed Virgin Mary had?" I asked. Those devoted Catholic women perked up, and everyone raised a hand.

"Our precious Mary was one of the original 120 who received the Spirit's power and spoke in her own prayer language," I said. "Lift your other hand and receive the Holy Spirit, just as Mary did." In minutes they were speaking in tongues.

Can I be Spirit-filled and not speak in tongues?

I personally know many precious believers who don't speak in tongues yet lead godly lives filled with the fruit of the Spirit. Are they Spirit-filled? Yes, I believe they are Spirit-filled—just not Spirit-full. They are wonderful, God-fearing people who have learned to yield to and depend upon the Holy Spirit, but they have stopped just short of fullness.

In his classic book *Bible Doctrines*, the late P.C. Nelson put it this way: "You may heat water to 150 degrees, then 175, then 200, then 210, but it still does not boil. But, if it

reaches 212 degrees, there is no doubt the water will begin to boil.

“Many believers have mighty anointings with the Holy Spirit who have not received the fullness of the Baptism. So you may be anointed almost to the fullness, but until you speak in tongues, there’s still more to receive.”

How can I be baptized in the Holy Spirit?

The book of Acts shows believers receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit in many different ways. Personally, I received the baptism all alone while in my bedroom in 1972. I’ve known people who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit over the telephone.

The key is to be thirsty for all that God wants to give you. Since the Holy Spirit moved into your Spirit when you received Jesus as your Savior, He is already in you.

Simply ask Jesus for the fullness of His gift to you. Then, in faith, begin to magnify God in your new prayer language. It might seem awkward at first, but keep going. Don’t give up!

Just as a baby starts with a few words, begin with a few syllables, saying them aloud. God will honor your faith. He is the baptizer—and He will fill you to overflowing.

The Holy Spirit will not come down from heaven. Rather, He will bubble up from within your spirit. Remember—because you received Jesus as Savior, the Holy Spirit is in you already.

Many people make the mistake of praying to be filled—then waiting. I’ve watched thousands of sincere believers reverently waiting at the altar for God to “do something.” They don’t need to wait for God; He is waiting for them!

Will I need a ‘refilling’?

I believe all of us should frequently receive a refilling of

the Holy Spirit. In the often-quoted verse, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), the Greek word for *filled* means “a frequent, repetitive infilling.” In Acts 2:4, the disciples were filled; later, in Acts 4:31, the same disciples were *refilled*.

Why do you need a refilling? Because we dare not depend on our human logic or natural abilities to reach a hurting world. Instead, we must remember Zechariah 4:6:

“‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

Determine today to know Jesus, not only as your Savior, but also as your baptizer. Ask Him to fill you and refill you with His Holy Spirit. You and I may be ordinary people, but with God’s *dunamis* power working in us and through us, we can do extraordinary things.

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Want to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit? We’ll join you in prayer at