

Robert Morris: The Truth About the Holy Spirit

The truth about the baptism in the Holy Spirit that most believers don't know.

Many people think Jesus' final words of instruction to His disciples are found in the final two verses of the book of Matthew, when He said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

However, these words were not the last Jesus spoke to His disciples. His final word of instruction to His followers was not "go." It was "wait."

We find this command recorded in the final chapter of Luke and again in Acts 1: "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to *wait for the Promise* of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but *you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit* not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4-5, emphasis added).

Jesus' final instruction was to wait. Wait for what? The promise. What promise? The baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus told His disciples to "wait" before they "go" change the world. He knew if they went without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, nothing would happen. He was telling them, "Don't try to do anything I've instructed and called you to do until you've received this additional baptism. You'll only be striving in your own natural ability, and nothing of lasting spiritual value will be accomplished. Wait! Wait for what I promised you—a Helper."

If you've been born again, the Holy Spirit baptized you into

Jesus at the moment you were saved. But let me ask you: Have you asked Jesus to baptize you in the Holy Spirit? If not, in whose power are you attempting to live the Christian life?

The Three Baptisms

Many Christians are unfamiliar with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In fact, most believers only know about water baptism. We can easily deal with this baptism because the Bible depicts it clearly—take John the Baptist’s activity in the Jordan River, for example. If you attend a church that practices water baptism, you see it with your own eyes all the time.

Still, the Bible mentions two baptisms you can’t see with your physical eyes; you can only see the after-effects of them in a person’s life. Let’s explore all three to understand the differences.

1. Baptism of the Holy Spirit. You probably already know about this baptism, but you might know it by a different name: salvation. First Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free.

Who is doing the baptizing in this verse? The Holy Spirit. When you and I experienced salvation, we were both baptized into the same body—the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the agent who did the baptizing. This is the baptism *of* the Holy Spirit, but it’s not the baptism *in* the Holy Spirit.

2. Water baptism. If we are obedient to the commands of Scripture, we choose to experience a second baptism, this one in water. This type of baptism is what Jesus had in mind when He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). This baptism symbolizes our new life in Christ.

3. Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 3:11, John the

Baptist refers to Jesus, saying, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

John's statement here is one of just a handful of statements or accounts present in all four Gospels—you can find the other three versions of this verse in Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16 and John 1:33. You'll also find accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus in all four Gospels, as these events are obviously central to the gospel story and explain vital truths believers need to understand. I believe it's significant that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is in all four as well.

Scripture clearly shows us Jesus is the one who performs this baptism, immersing us in the Holy Spirit. Yet because this baptism has been harmfully misrepresented, countless Christians avoid it. How could Jesus baptizing us in the Holy Spirit possibly be a bad thing, though—especially when it's so plainly present in the Bible?

Peter's Pentecost Sermon

This promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit came powerfully to the disciples in Acts 2. Peter delivers a sermon immediately after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In response to Peter's preaching, a number of his Jewish listeners fall under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:37 tells us, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"

"What shall we do?" That's a pretty broad question. How does Peter respond?

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are

afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call'" (vv. 38-39).

Notice that in the active verbs in these verses, Peter outlines three baptisms. He says:

1. *Repent*. This is the vital primary step in the baptism of salvation.
2. *Be baptized*. Peter urges his listeners to follow Jesus' example by submitting themselves to water baptism.
3. *Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. This is the third baptism. As Peter indicates here, the Holy Spirit will not force Himself upon anyone. He must be "received."

From here on out, the third baptism continually follows the first two as an essential, critical part of the Christian life.

Great Joy in Samaria

For example, in Acts 8 we find the evangelist Philip preaching and teaching in Samaria. After a revival breaks out, many people are healed, delivered from demonic oppression and saved. Then, verse 12 tells us, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized."

Two of the three baptisms are found in this verse. "They believed" means the people received the baptism of salvation. Then they were baptized in water—that's two. What about the third baptism—immersion in the Holy Spirit? Let's keep reading:

"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (vv. 14-16).

Notice what this passage *doesn't* say. It doesn't tell us that when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John, who gave these new believers the right hand of Christian fellowship because they had everything they needed.

In the early years of my Christian walk, this is precisely what I was taught. I was told that once I was saved and water-baptized, I had everything I needed to live the Christian life.

Of course now I know that without receiving the Holy Spirit, I was living a powerless and defeated life of minimal effectiveness in God's kingdom.

Peter and John didn't dare do that kind of disservice to the new believers of Samaria. They were happy these folks had received the first two baptisms. But the first thing the disciples asked was whether or not the new believers had received the third one.

When the answer came back no, the apostles immediately addressed the situation: "They laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (v. 17).

Only then were these new Christians fully equipped to be all God called them to be.

I've heard people argue that the baptism in the Holy Spirit only occurred on the day of Pentecost, yet these events in Samaria occurred months or even years after those of Acts 2—and this isn't the last time we see people experiencing three baptisms in the Scriptures, either.

The Pattern Continues in Ephesus

Many years after the Pentecost outpouring, we hear about the apostle Paul's ministry in Ephesus, recorded in Acts 19: "And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having

passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some *disciples* he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you *believed*?' So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit'" (vv. 1-2, emphasis added).

Interestingly, the people Paul encountered were "disciples" who already "believed," meaning they were followers of Jesus Christ. Now notice Paul's question: "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" Paul doesn't seem to have any doubt in his mind that someone can come to saving faith in Jesus Christ yet not receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. In other words, Paul knows that a person can be baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ (salvation) yet not be baptized by Jesus into the Holy Spirit.

By the way, I love the response of the believers: "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." Maybe these people went to the same church I attended as a boy! Someone told them enough about Jesus so they could be saved, but they hadn't even heard of the Holy Spirit.

Paul found this so puzzling that he decided to check and make sure these people were actually saved: "And he said to them, 'Into what then were you baptized?'" (v. 3).

When they said, "Into John's baptism," Paul explained what they were missing: "Then Paul said, 'John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after Him, that is, on Christ Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" (vv. 4-6).

Notice what happens when the Ephesian believers receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit: they spoke with tongues and prophesied. We see this pattern again and again throughout the

book of Acts.

Three Witnesses in Heaven and on Earth

Now let's look at 1 John 5:7: "There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one." Of course, "the Word" is a reference to Jesus. But do you believe what this verse says—that the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit "are one"? In other words, do you believe in the Trinity? I suspect you do.

This verse says that these three all "bear witness in heaven." Of course, we aren't in heaven right now. We're on earth. So who or what is bearing witness here on earth?

The next verse tells us: "And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one" (v. 8).

Here we have the three baptisms in reverse order! The three "witnesses" on earth are the Holy Spirit baptism, water baptism and salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Each one of these baptisms represents a distinct work of grace God wants to do in our hearts and lives. Salvation is a miraculous work of grace upon the heart. Water baptism is a work of grace in and upon the heart of man. And a believer's baptism in the Holy Spirit releases within us the supernatural empowerment to do all that God calls us to do.

As we've seen, Jesus commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the promised Holy Spirit came. Why? Because in Jesus' own words, they would be clothed in heavenly power (Luke 24:49), receive empowerment to be witnesses for Him all over the world (Acts 1:8) and do even greater things than He had done (John 14:12).

Let me condense and summarize these three "witnesses" in a personal way. When I was saved, I became a new person. When I

was baptized in water, the old person was cut off. And when I was baptized in the Holy Spirit, I received the power to walk in the new. That third baptism makes a huge difference! For years, I tried to live in victory, power and purity. However, I experienced little but failure and frustration. After I received that third baptism, everything changed. The wonderful intimacy with the Holy Spirit that I began to enjoy became so precious to me that I would shrink back at the thought of doing anything that would grieve Him. Because God's Word was now alive to me in new ways, I suddenly found Scriptures coming to mind at critical times of need or temptation. That sense of anointing I had frequently experienced in the pulpit quickly came to be a part of my daily life—at the grocery store, on the golf course and, most important, inside the walls of my home.

What About You?

I want you to ask yourself an important question: "Have I experienced only two baptisms?"

Have you ever experienced an immersion in the Holy Spirit that brought supernatural power and help into your life? Jesus wants to baptize you with power from on high. Why in the world would anyone say "Thanks, but no thanks" to that?

Many Christians are living lives of defeat, frustration and failure, as I did before I opened my heart and mind to this third baptism. I've tried living without the Holy Spirit's power, but I wouldn't go back to that way of living for all the money in the world. It's too wonderful to have God the Holy Spirit as a best friend.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). That's the biblical truth that can transform your life. Will you pray and receive the Holy Spirit today?

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