

FOUR VIEWS OF BEING BAPTISED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The question of baptism in the Spirit has been a controversial one for a long time. Part of the problem lies in the different ways we use the term. It can easily mean different things to different people. It is this different usage which generally distinguishes Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics and Third Wavers from one another.¹

Surprisingly enough, the phrase ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ doesn’t actually occur in Scripture. This may seem like splitting hairs, because the verbal form ‘baptise in the Spirit’ does. But actually, realising this fact ought to set a red light or two flashing. Nouns tend to result in theological definitions. Verbs tend to speak of a dynamic experience. The biblical emphasis is clearly on the latter, not the former.

The Evangelical view

The Evangelical view is that we are baptised in the Holy Spirit at the moment of regeneration, or, as an integral element of conversion.

Key texts are Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:13. Gordon Fee describes the Evangelical position like this—

- Paul frequently refers to conversion in terms of the Spirit (Romans 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:21; Titus 3:6; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 6:17)
- The Spirit plays a leading role in describing what happens to the believer (Galatians 3:2-5; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:13)
- Believers and non-believers are described in terms of having or not having the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 12:3; Romans 8:9)²

Romans 8:9 is a foundational text — ‘Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to him’. On the basis of this, Evangelicals argue that every believer has the Spirit and therefore, given that there is but one Spirit, there is no possibility of any additional or subsequent receiving of the Spirit. Hence, it is plain that we are baptised in the Spirit at the moment of believing.

Similarly, 1 Corinthians 12:13 is seen as plainly teaching that it is by baptism in the Spirit that we become members of the body of Christ. ‘For in one Spirit, we were all baptised into one body.’ This is seen as indisputable evidence that there is no such thing as a baptism in the Spirit subsequent to conversion. James Dunn says—

...1 Cor 12:13, where the initiatory character is clear beyond any serious dispute: ...that is, membership in the body of Christ is what baptism in the Spirit brings about. The conclusion is irresistible, that if a theology of ‘baptism in the Spirit’ is to be based on the NT teaching on the subject, it must refer to the beginning of the Christian experience, the action by which God draws the individual into the sphere of the Spirit, into the community of those ‘being saved’, and thus makes a decisive beginning of the work of

¹ Within each of these groups there is a variety of views about the work of the Holy Spirit, but nevertheless, there is a general perspective which characterises each one.

² Fee, 1994:854ff.

saving grace in that individual.’³

Writers like John Stott, Geoffrey Bingham and Ken Smith agree. For Evangelicals, the whole purpose of God is that men and women should be indwelt by the Spirit. All of salvation history was geared towards this great phenomenon—that human beings would become dwelling places for the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22; 3:11).⁴ Internationally renowned evangelist Billy Graham puts it like this—

The biblical truth, it seems to me, is that we are baptised into the body of Christ by the Spirit at conversion. This is the only Spirit baptism. At this time, we can and should be filled with the Holy Spirit, and afterward, be refilled, and even filled into all fullness. As has often been said, ‘One baptism, but many fillings.’⁵

The perceived evidence of the indwelling Spirit is this promise of Scripture together with a deep, ongoing sense of assurance in the heart of the believer. Paul declares that it is the Spirit himself who testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children (Romans 8:16). The apostle John points out that we know we live in God and that God lives in us because he has given us his Spirit (1 John 4:13).

Passages in Acts which seem to indicate a subsequent experience of the Spirit are generally explained as being a-typical or as actually describing a conversion experience. So it is argued that the records of Acts 2, 8 and 19 described ‘ethnic’ Pentecosts which are never to be repeated. Smith even goes so far as to argue that even though the Samaritans had received the Word of God with great joy and been baptised in water (Acts 8:8, 12, 14), they were not actually converted until Peter and John came to pray with them for the Holy Spirit to come upon them.

It needs to be noted that the Evangelical position does not *necessarily* exclude the experience and exercise of the gifts of Christ. Evangelical and cessationist views are not the same. Nevertheless, the Evangelical position raises some interesting questions. If it is right, how do we explain Pentecostal experiences of the Spirit? If it is wrong, have most Evangelicals not been baptised in the Holy Spirit at all? Or are there other options?

The Pentecostal view

Pentecostals believe that baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience discrete from conversion with the normal initial sign of speaking in tongues.

The Pentecostal concept derives from the Wesleyan idea of ‘entire sanctification’ (or ‘Christian perfection’). According to Wesley, it was not enough to be converted. It was also necessary to be sanctified. This ‘entire sanctification’ was an identifiable experience which followed conversion—a so-called ‘second blessing’. Among Pentecostals, it came to be called baptism in the Holy Spirit with the immediate sign of tongues.⁶

J. R. Williams writes—

Pentecostals view baptism in the Holy Spirit as an experience that presupposes conversion... Pentecostals often speak of baptism in the Spirit as being both distinct from

³ Dunn, 1998:224. For other Evangelical works on this subject see M. Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975; J. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit* Leicester: IVP, 1984; J. Stott, *Baptism & Fullness: The Work of the Spirit Today* IVP, 1964.

⁴ See I. Pennicook, *Jesus, the Man of the Spirit*, study paper, 14 July 2002.

⁵ B. Graham, *The Holy Spirit* London: Collins, 1979:64

⁶ For a discussion of this development of ideas see Chant, *Spirit of Pentecost*; V. Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans (1979), 1989; S. Burgess, E. van der Maas (eds), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002:726ff.

and subsequent to salvation... The distinctive event of Spirit baptism is primarily exhibited through speaking in tongues.⁷

An undated pioneer leaflet distributed in Parramatta, New South Wales, in the 1920s declared—

In all of these outpourings of the Spirit, the same evidence was manifested, the speaking in tongues. The Holy Ghost gave us the three incidents of companies receiving the Holy Ghost to establish the fact that the Spirit always speaks in tongues through a baptised believer.

The Statement of Faith for Good News Hall, Australia's first Pentecostal assembly, declared, 'We believe that a definite physical manifestation accompanies the reception of the Holy Spirit.'

The Assemblies of God Statement of Faith was even more plain—

(We believe) in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit for all believers with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance.⁸

This has continued to be the Pentecostal position. Some would argue that glossolalia is not an *essential* initial sign, but a *normative* one, but in practice, it is expected that it will occur.

The Pentecostal position is based on the view that in the Gospels and Acts there is a clear pattern of people being converted without having been baptised in the Spirit. Given that the phrase 'receive the Holy Spirit' is used in Acts about a discrete experience of the Spirit (eg Acts 8:15; 10:47), Pentecostals also use this phrase in this way.

So does this mean that those who are not so baptised in the Holy Spirit, are not part of the body of Christ?⁹ For all sorts of reasons, this is unacceptable. If we take a Pentecostal view, this would mean that only those who speak in tongues are members of the Church. If we take an Evangelical view, it would mean that millions of Pentecostal believers have been deceived.

A better understanding of the Pentecostal position can be found by taking up the image used by both John the Baptist and Jesus. Just as John baptised in water, so Jesus would baptise in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11,12; Acts 1:5). John immersed people in water 'for' or 'with respect to' repentance. But this repentance had *already occurred prior to the baptism*. So Jesus immerses us in the Spirit 'for' or 'with respect to' an incorporation into the body of Christ that has already occurred. It is not through being baptised in the Spirit that we are brought into Christ's body; it is because we are already members of that body, by faith, that we are baptised in the Spirit.

Overall, however, the Pentecostal view is simply based on the historical record of the book of Acts, which is the only New Testament book that provides us with any details of the nature of the original experience of being baptised in the Spirit.

First, there is a clear distinction between having the Spirit *in* us and having the Spirit come *upon* us (for example Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 8:16; 10:44),

⁷ J. R. Williams in Burgess et al, 2002:354ff.

⁸ *Australian Evangel*, May 1984, Supplement. For validation of this position, see Chant, *Guide*, 1981; K. Chant, *Clothed with Power*, 1993; H. Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit* Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, (1934), 1975; Pawson, *Jesus Baptises in One Holy Spirit*, 1997.

⁹ [Regarding 1 Corinthians 12:13, some Pentecostals have argued that there are actually three baptisms—one baptism into Christ, one in water and one in the Spirit.⁹ This argument is based on a misreading of the Greek text and cannot be sustained. Some Bible translations have not helped here by using the phrase 'by one Spirit'. In reality, may be is better to translate the text, 'For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body...' \(ESV\). The phraseology is identical to that used in the Gospels and Acts to describe being baptised in the Spirit.⁹](#)

Next, in every recorded case of people receiving the Spirit initially, there are four indisputable facts. The experience was *identifiable* as having occurred at a given time and place. There is no such thing as a gradual baptism in the Spirit in Acts. Second, it was *observable*. Not only did the subjects of Spirit-baptism know that it had happened, but others witnessed it as well. There is no such thing as a secret or hidden baptism in the Spirit in Acts. Third it was *distinctive*, in the sense that observers immediately identified what happened as receiving the Holy Spirit. Fourth, it was *supranatural*, clearly marked by the *dunamis* of the Spirit. And whenever the nature of this *dunamis* is defined, while prophesying and praising God are noted in some cases (e.g. Acts 10:46; 19:6), it is almost universally either stated or implied as being speaking with tongues (Acts 2:1-4; 8:14-19; 9:17-19; 10:44-48; 19:1-7).

That Luke uses several metaphors, rather than carefully crafted theological definitions, to describe the same experience indicates that his focus is clearly on the experiential side of having the Spirit come upon us.¹⁰

The Pentecostal movement began in several places around the world at the beginning of the 20th century. Because of its radical emphasis on being baptised in the Spirit—and especially glossolalia—its early adherents usually found themselves cut off from mainline denominations. The result was a new movement embracing a large number of denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Apostolic Church, the Church of God, the Elim Pentecostal Church, the Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Christian Revival Churches and numerous others.

The Charismatic view

The charismatic view is that baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience discrete from conversion but not necessarily accompanied by the initial sign of tongues. It is sometimes called a ‘release’ or a ‘realisation’ of the Spirit.

The movement began in the 1960s in the US and Great Britain and in the 1970s in Australia. It was fundamentally Pentecostal but there was less insistence on ‘tongues’—or as this new movement began to call it, ‘glossolalia’. This time, its adherents were usually not evicted from their churches and remained as active members. Often denominational charismatic fellowships were formed.¹¹

Australian writer Geoff Waugh, a former Methodist, writes—

What about tongues? Some groups over-emphasise this evidence of the Spirit's filling. When we pray for the fullness of the Spirit, we may experience this release, and some people in your group may have a prayer language, which is very meaningful to them. That's beautiful and biblical... However, we ought to avoid pressing our experience on to others. The gift of tongues is one evidence of the Spirit's release. There are others.¹²

American Lutheran pastor Larry Christenson puts it like this—

Lutheran Charismatics have generally steered clear of this Pentecostal position... (they) would recognize it (i.e. tongues) as AN evidence of being filled with the Spirit, but stop short of calling it THE evidence.¹³

¹⁰ A comparative study, especially of chapters ten and eleven, shows the synonymous meaning of these metaphors.

¹¹ For the history of the Charismatic Movement see Burgess et al (eds), 2002:477ff.

¹² G. Waugh, *Living in the Spirit* Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1987:32f.

¹³ Christenson, 1987:272f

Lederle sees several categories of opinion about the place of glossolalia.¹⁴ He himself tries hard, but unconvincingly, to dismiss the idea of ‘subsequence’ (i.e. that baptism in the Spirit normally succeeds conversion), although virtually all the people he cites hold to this position including leading charismatics such as Dennis Bennett (Anglican), Larry Christenson (Lutheran), Peter Hocken (Catholic), Steve Clark (Catholic), Rodman Williams (Presbyterian) and Howard Ervin (Baptist).

As Lederle points out, there have been various attempts to re-phrase the doctrine. Catholics, for example, tend to stress a sacramental approach. Hence, they may avoid the phrase ‘baptism in the Spirit’ and use other alternatives such as the ‘release of the Spirit’ they received at baptism. A charismatic Catholic document puts it like this—

Whatever the terminological decisions of each country it is important that all be saying the same thing, namely that the power of the Holy Spirit, given in Christian initiation but hitherto unexperienced, becomes a matter of personal experience.¹⁵

To Catholics, this ‘actualisation’ of the reality of the Spirit given in baptism thus satisfies both Catholic and Pentecostal theology. In practice, most charismatics come back to the simple Wesleyan concept, usually accompanied by tongues. However, perhaps because of a laudable desire for unity, there is often a reluctance to claim that tongues ought to be the expected sign.

Larry Christenson argues persuasively for a serious appraisal of the Pentecostal approach, even if they have ‘over systematized their own perception and experience of the Holy Spirit.’

Given the worldwide spread and witness of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements... the church as a whole must consider questions not only of exegesis and systematic theology but also of the Spirit's strategy. The emphasis on a personal Pentecost—an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in one's life, a baptism with the Holy Spirit—how are we to understand it? Its key role in the amazing spread of Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity is well documented, but what are we to make of it?...

Whether one understands this as an appropriation of something already received (Sacramental, Evangelical) or a reception of something promised (Pentecostal), the strategy of the Spirit will be served: the Spirit will be poured out; believers will talk about the Holy Spirit with a new sense of reality; they will walk in a new dimension of reality and power; and the Lord's people will register gains against the powers that oppose the gospel.¹⁶

So the charismatic view is less narrowly defined than the Pentecostal position, but nevertheless, it also strongly teaches that being converted and being baptised in the Spirit are not necessarily the same thing.

The Third Wave view

The so-called Third Wave view is that baptism in the Holy Spirit may occur either at regeneration or as a discrete experience, with or without signs. Spiritual gifts are an expression of this experience.

The Third Wave position is best represented by the Vineyard movement, founded by John Wimber. In *Power Evangelism*, Wimber argues that both Paul and Luke use the phrase ‘baptise in the Spirit’ differently. He tries to choose the best of both worlds—

Following this line of reasoning, which most conservative evangelicals agree with, the

¹⁴ H.Lederle, *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of ‘Spirit-Baptism’ in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1988

¹⁵The Malines Document, quoted in Lederle, 1988:108f.

¹⁶ Christenson, 1987:83f

born-again experience is the consummate charismatic experience—what Paul would refer to as being baptised in the Holy Spirit. Any ensuing interaction between the individual and the Holy Spirit would come under the heading of ‘fillings,’ as taught by Paul. Further these fillings may happen again and again—they are both initiatory and repeatable.

So, following Paul, it is probably best to speak of ‘being filled with the Holy Spirit.’ But in Luke we find warrant in using ‘being baptised with the Holy Spirit.’ Both terms convey the fact that it is urgent for Christians to seek sincerely the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

In his attempt to avoid taking a position one way or the other, Wimber actually finishes up with what looked like an ambiguous theology. In practice, he taught that every believer had the Spirit from the time of regeneration. This being so, every believer could use any spiritual gift at any time it is needed—

When I talk with evangelicals about the Holy Spirit, I ask if when they were born again they received the Spirit. If they answer yes (and they should), I tell them all that remains is to actualise what the Spirit has, all that is required is to release the gifts. I then lay hands on them and say, ‘Be filled with the Spirit’—and they are.¹⁸

A 1994 conference organised by Wimber was described as being ‘for anyone who desires to minister with increasing effectiveness in the power of the Holy Spirit.’

Further, while Wimber was an enthusiast for spiritual gifts, in his writings, he does not give any special priority to tongues. ‘Tongues are not the focus of the Spirit’s filling.’ Yet, on the other hand, ‘too many evangelicals want the Spirit but not the Spirit’s gifts, an attitude that violates scriptural teaching.’¹⁹

An official Vineyard publication, largely quoting Wimber, declares—

When a person is converted, he or she receives the Holy Spirit, although the Holy Spirit may not be experienced at that time. Conversion and the initial filling experience of the Holy Spirit can happen simultaneously (i.e. actualising His power and gifts). Anyone born again has the potential of experiencing the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We should expect this experience—Scripture teaches it is apart [sic] of the normal Christian life... Many evangelicals do want the Spirit but not the gifts (especially tongues), an attitude that violates scriptural teaching...²⁰

Wimber is said to have described his position as evangelical in theology but charismatic in experience. This is helpful, although it could be argued that the same could be said of Pentecostals and Charismatics.

While Australian theologian Geoffrey Bingham would deny that he belonged to the Third Wave movement—or to any such movement, for that matter—his theology is similar. He argues plainly that we are baptised in the Spirit at conversion and that we then have a need to be continually filled with the Spirit.²¹ Spiritual gifts are ‘part of Christ’s fullness’ and hence available to every believer.²² In pastoral practice, Bingham does encourage people to seek a specific infilling of the Holy Spirit. He both believes in and practises glossolalia.²³

¹⁷ J. Wimber, *Power Evangelism* London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986:146.

¹⁸ Wimber, 1986:147f. See also See ‘Doin’ the Stuff: Equipping the Saints’ brochure for Australian conference, April 1994.

¹⁹ Wimber, 1986:149.

²⁰ *Vineyard Christian Fellowship* no publisher, no date: 66f.

²¹ Bingham, 1978:148ff.

²² Bingham, 1978:260.

²³ Personal knowledge.

In recent times, C. Peter Wagner has become the best-known spokesman for the Third Wave movement, with basically a similar stance to that of Wimber.

A proposed synthesis

A dominant and profound teaching of the New Testament is that from the moment we become Christians, everything spiritual is ours. We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). We have come to fullness of life in Christ (Colossians 2:9, 10). We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:10). His divine promises have given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3, 4). We lack nothing (1 Corinthians 1:7). Everything is in Christ and if we have him we have all we can possibly need (Ephesians 1:1-23; Colossians 1:1-23). This includes the Holy Spirit. Having received Christ, we are indwelt by the Spirit (Romans 8:9).

However, the problem is that often we do not claim or take possession of those blessings that are already ours. So we have peace in Christ but we do not live in a state of peace. We have joy but we do not rejoice. We are forgiven, but we are still beset by shame and guilt.

Similarly, we have the Spirit but we may not be living in the power of the Spirit. It is necessary for us to claim by faith this blessing that is *already ours*. 'Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?' asks Paul (Galatians 3:5). The truth is that the experience of immersion or empowerment by the Spirit is potentially ours from the moment of conversion. And for some it is a reality from that very point. For others, it comes later. Either way, the same evidence of being baptised in the Spirit can normally be expected, namely glossolalia.

It is not enough to say, 'I have received the Spirit by faith' if nothing in fact happens. What would we think of someone who testified to being filled with peace and joy but was still living in turmoil and misery? Or to another who rejoiced in being healed but was still in fact sick? By all means, let us thank God for these blessings and declare our expectation that they are already ours (as Jesus tells us to do in Mark 11:24). But this is not the same as actually experiencing them. We need to go on claiming them until they become a reality.

For some this will still seem inadequate. 'The Spirit is more than *potentially* ours at conversion,' they will say. This may be a fair comment. But nevertheless, this attempt at a synthesis of the various views still, I think, has much to commend it.

Pentecostal, Charismatic and Third Wave positions on baptism in the Holy Spirit

Group	Synonymous with conversion	Discrete from conversion	Normal initial evidence	Subsequent evidence
Evangelical	Yes	No	Assurance	Walk in the Spirit
Pentecostal	No	Yes	Speaking in tongues	Use gifts by faith; walk in the Spirit
Charismatic	No	Yes	Probably tongues but could be any gift of the Spirit	Use gifts by faith; walk in the Spirit
Third wave	Possibly	Possibly	Possibly tongues? Or another gift? Or none?	Use gifts by faith; walk in the Spirit

For us or in us?

The different understandings of the work of the Spirit between Evangelicals and Pentecostal/Charismatics finds natural expression in the kinds of songs they sing. The former tend to focus on the objective work of God in Christ *for us*; the latter on what God has done *in us*.

Evangelical songs remind us constantly of the great saving work of Christ on our behalf and the truth that everything depends on him. Charismatic songs remind us of the experiential nature of our salvation—that the work of Christ on the cross is actually of no value unless it is translated into personal experience.

Two current well-known songs illustrate the point very well. *Jesus, Lover of my soul* is widely sung in charismatic churches. It begins—

Jesus, lover of my soul,
Jesus, I will never let you go...²⁴

If this had been written by an Evangelical, the lyrics would probably read—

Jesus, lover of my soul,
Jesus, you will never let me go...

The original version focuses on the redemptive work of Christ *in us*; an Evangelical version would focus on Christ's all-sufficient work *for us*. The original emphasises our dedication to Christ; the other his dedication to us.

Evangelicals see the sentiment in the original song as representing a fragile approach to the faith—that everything depends on us and our ability to hold on to Christ. Pentecostals argue that it is appropriate for us to express our passion for God in such fervent terms.

A second example is Reuben Morgan's haunting and beautiful song, 'What the Lord has done in me.'

Let the weak say, 'I am strong',
Let the poor say, 'I am rich',
Let the blind say, 'I can see',
It's what the Lord has done in me...²⁵

Again, if this had been written by an Evangelical, the last line would almost certainly read—

What the Lord has done *for me*.

For Evangelicals, it is pointless talking about what the Lord has done *in us* unless we understand what the Lord has done *for us*. For Pentecostals, it is pointless talking about that the Lord has done *for us* unless we also know experientially what he has done *in us*. The danger for Evangelicals is that by being so focused on the Word they may miss a God-given experience of the Spirit; the danger for Pentecostals is that being so focused on the work of the Spirit, they may wander from the God-given authority of Scripture.

When Evangelicals depart from the Word, there is nothing else to inspire them. When Pentecostals drift from the Spirit, there is nothing to undergird them. Then, when they feel the loss of the Spirit, they may feel they have lost everything.

Clearly, the ideal and safe position is to focus both on what God has done for us and on what he does in us. This means boldly believing the declarative truths of the gospel and equally

²⁴ Daniel Grul, John Ezzy and Stephen McPherson, 1992, Hillsongs Publishing.

²⁵ Reuben Morgan, 'What the Lord has done in me,' © 1998 Reuben Morgan/Hillsongs Publishing, in *Redeemer, Saviour Friend* #888, Dingley:Resource Christian Music, 2000.

boldly claiming the experiential power of the gospel. It means both standing on the Word and walking in the Spirit.

Basic assumptions

Before consolidating our position too firmly, it is helpful to backtrack and ask ourselves two similar but quite different questions—

- If the Evangelical position is correct, what would we expect the New Testament to teach?
- If the Pentecostal/charismatic position is correct, what would we expect the New Testament to teach?

In this way, rather than beginning with Scripture and trying to read our viewpoint into it, we are beginning with a viewpoint and seeing whether the Scripture can be seen to endorse it. At first glance, this approach may seem like heresy—like a bad case of eisegesis. But in fact, it is quite the opposite. If our position is correct, then the New Testament will plainly teach it. If not, it will not. God's Word is the authority.

So the answer to the first of the two questions above should be that both the historical books and the letters would clearly teach that conversion and baptism in the Spirit are synonymous, or at the very least, contemporaneous. The answer to the second question would be that both historical books and letters teach a distinction between conversion and empowering by the Spirit. And this is, in fact, what we find. While the teaching of the epistles could be debated, the difference between regeneration and baptism in the Holy Spirit is plain in Gospels and Acts.

But even so, the letters in no way contradict this position. The reason is not hard to find. Given that they are writing to Christian believers, looking back, the writers do not necessarily distinguish between being born again and being baptised in the Spirit. In the same way, someone writing to university graduates about mathematics, for example, might refer to basic skills or theorems, but with no particular reference to when they learned them, whether at primary or secondary or tertiary level. Similarly, an apostle might write to Christian believers and refer to something like glossolalia without bothering to note whether this was part of their conversion experience or something separate.

How then will we read Romans 8:9? Or Ephesians 1:13? When people approach them from an Evangelical perspective, they may well assume they were written to those who had never spoken in tongues and therefore apply them in this way. When people approach them from a Pentecostal perspective, they may well assume they were written to those who had spoken in tongues and therefore apply them in this way.

What if these passages *were* written to people who spoke in tongues? The implications for Evangelicals are serious. The Evangelical approach might be like non-Christians reading the New Testament declarations about righteousness and then mistakenly applying them to their own lives. We must fulfil the conditions first.

This is the position taken by David Pawson, for example.²⁶ He clearly sees Romans 8:9 as applying to people who have already had a charismatic experience. And it must be admitted that if we read the New Testament from this perspective, all the references to the Spirit become consistent. Our difficulty today is that there are millions of believers who have not spoken in tongues but who claim to know Christ and to be genuinely born again. There is no need to deny these claims. As we have seen, there *is* a distinction between being born of the Spirit and being empowered by the Spirit.

It is these fundamental assumptions we make when we approach the Bible which determine how we understand it and apply it. If we always wear the wrong tinted glasses, no matter how good they may be, we will always come up with the wrong perspective.

²⁶ Pawson, 1997.

James Dunn's comments on the New Testament church are very apt—

In Acts 19 Paul asks the so-called 'disciples' at Ephesus whether they received the Spirit when they took their step of commitment... As with all who claim to be disciples, he expects that they will know whether they have received the Spirit or not... As Leslie Newbiggin pointed out, Paul's 'modern successors are more inclined to ask either, "Did you believe exactly what we teach?" or "Were the hands that were laid on you our hands?" and—if the answer is satisfactory—to assure the converts that they have received the Holy Spirit even if they don't know it. There is a world of difference between these two attitudes.' There is indeed!

The emptiness, dryness, dullness, superficiality of modern Christianity would have astonished the first Christians...

The outside observer would be pardoned for thinking that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Church; or... God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Scriptures. What Christians today must rediscover is God the Holy *Spirit*—not just the God in whom we believe, not just the God who was one of us, but the God whom we experience.²⁷

Those who hold the Evangelical position have to work hard to find a way around the Acts passages as they clearly portray a church where people first believed and then received the Spirit. Those who hold the Pentecostal/charismatic position have no such problem. The Acts passages clearly endorse it and the letters are consistent with it.

Conclusion

There are good and godly people who hold differing views about being baptised in the Holy Spirit. It is important to put aside all preconceived ideas and, as far as possible, take a position that we can hold in good conscience, regardless of previous experience, either positive or negative.

Whatever stance we take, one thing is clear. We must be Spirit-filled (Ephesians 5:18). Of that there is no doubt. And we dare not rest until we know we are.

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