

That Mysterious Holy Spirit

John 1:19-34

Introduction

I want to approach a subject that is perhaps among the most misunderstood subjects in all the Bible – the Holy Spirit. Very few Christians are perfectly comfortable with this third person of the Godhead, primarily because of a lack of understanding.

We are like a child that has been away from his mother for fifteen years. Upon reuniting with her, he is awkward; he does not know whether he should hug her or hide from her. He knows he is to love her, but he is not quite sure how to go about expressing his love.

In the same way, we are uncertain about how to relate to the Holy Spirit. We know that He came along with the whole package of redemption, yet we are a little afraid to unwrap this part of the package.

For that reason I want to pause long enough to deal with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And this study will be something like pulling a thread – it will lead us all over several other areas – it will answer some questions, while probably raising even more. Turn to the gospel by John, chapter 1.

The Baptism of John

Now, John the Baptist spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as he preached to the people of his day. Look at verses 19 through 25.

And this is the witness of John, when the Jews sent to him priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?”

And he confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed, “I am not the Christ.”

And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.”

They said then to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?”

He said, “I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.

And they asked him, and said to him, “Why then are you baptizing, if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

To the Jewish mind, “baptism,” or “baptizo” in the Greek, was a common term that meant immersion. It was related to the dipping of cloth into dye. Wool was first dipped into bleach, which made it clean and white, and then dipped into other liquids to achieve the desired color. To the Jew, baptism encompassed both the idea of cleansing and of consecration to a new identity or a new relationship.

Also, water was extensively used in the Old Testament in connection with ceremonial cleansing. According to Leviticus, the unclean person had to wash himself with water to remove his uncleanness before he could be restored to fellowship.

So, John comes along and demands repentance and baptism – ceremonial cleansing with water. You could not follow John without believing his message and being baptized – both were important! Just as a person under Mosaic Law could not believe the message of that dispensation without circumcision.

Notice Mark, chapter 1, verses 4 and 5.

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

And what was this prophet's message? Skip to verse 8.

I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Now, you need to recognize that John's baptism is not the same as a believer's baptism. Even though we are reading from the New Testament book of Mark, remember, we are still in the Old Testament economy and John is an Old Testament prophet.

In fact, those who followed John and later believed in Christ were re-baptized. Look at Acts, chapter 19, verses 3 through 5.

"Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now, back in John, chapter 1, notice that John's baptism created confusion. If John was not Christ or Elijah, why was *he* baptizing?

In the Old Testament, there was something called "proselyte baptism". A Gentile who wished to convert to Judaism would be given a proselyte baptism. And that is where John's baptism got confusing!

Two Problems With John's Baptism

The Pharisees had two problems with John's baptism:

1. The first problem was that, in proselyte baptism, the candidates baptized themselves. With John's baptisms, he was assuming authority and actually doing the baptizing.
2. The second problem was that, John was requiring the Jews to be baptized! The Jews were prepared to accept the view that Gentiles were defiled and needed cleansing, but to put

Jews in the same class was horrifying. They believed they were God's people already!

Two Reasons For John's Baptism

Remember, there were two reasons for John's baptism:

1. It was a symbol of repentance.
2. It was a sign of preparedness.

Four Different Baptisms

Now, just for the record, you may have noticed that we have already identified four different baptisms:

1. The baptizing by John – identification with an Old Covenant prophet;
2. The baptism of Jesus by John – identification with the Nation Israel;
3. The baptism of the believer – identification with the New Covenant Messiah;
4. The baptism of the Holy Spirit – immersion into the New Covenant body of Christ.

There are two other baptisms that I will refer to later on.

The Baptism of Jesus

Let us take a closer look at the baptism of John, especially as it relates to Jesus Christ. Look at John, chapter 1, verses 29 through 30.

The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" This is He on behalf of whom I said, "After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me."

Take note of this verse, all who are theologians, for John gives clear reference to the pre-existence of Christ. If Christ did not exist before He was born in the flesh, then how could John say, ". . . He existed before me," since John was born six months before Jesus?

Continue to verses 31 and 32.

And I did not recognize Him, but in order that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water. And John bore witness saying, "I have beheld the Spirit"

descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.”

Let us fill in the gaps with a reference from Mark, chapter 1, verses 9 through 11.

And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: “Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.”

Five Reasons That Jesus Was Baptized

Why was Jesus Baptized? Let us look at five reasons.

1. The first reason was to identify with the message of John the Baptist. In effect, Jesus was saying, “The kingdom of God is indeed at hand.”
2. Secondly, so that John would know, without a doubt, who to introduce as Israel’s Messiah!

Look further in John, chapter 1, at verses 33 and 34.

And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, “He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.” And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.

God had evidently, told John at an earlier time, that the sign would be the dove-like Spirit descending at his baptism of the Messiah.

3. The third reason was to signal the beginning of the Messiah’s ministry.

In the Old Testament, a prophet, priest, or king were all anointed before assuming their task. In Leviticus, chapter 8, we have the three-fold anointing of a priest: first with water, then with oil (represented by the Spirit’s indwelling and empowerment), then finally, with blood (that baptism would occur through the bloody sacrifice of Jesus’ own body on the cross).

4. Fourthly, to reveal Jesus’ approval and His cooperation with the other two persons of the Trinity.

Did you notice, in Mark, that the Son is standing in the water, the Spirit is descending, and the Father is speaking from heaven – representing the Triune God?

5. And, finally, the fifth reason was to symbolically picture another, future baptism.

Look again at John, chapter 1, verse 33b again.

. . . this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

Also look again at Mark, chapter 1, verse 8, again.

I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

And, look as well, at Matthew, chapter 3, verse 11.

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Now, in the book of Acts, chapter 1, verses 4 and 5, Jesus repeats this theme of a future baptism, as He directs His apostles.

And gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Did the apostles know what Jesus was talking about? *No!* Did they understand that the dispensation of the church was about to begin? *No!* Did they understand the offer of the kingdom had been postponed? *No!* Did they understand their mission? *No!* That is why Jesus said, “I’m leaving, and after I’m gone, I’ll send another Person to instruct and teach you.”

Now, let me change directions for a moment, and refer to a translation problem concerning a scripture about Jesus.

Now there are movements; such as, the Holiness movements, the Vineyard movement, the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, the Latter Rains, the Apostolic movement, and the Second Blessing movements who misunderstand the meaning of Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 8,

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, yes and forever.

They believe this verse means that, because Jesus did certain things in the past, He is certainly doing them in the present, and will do them in the future.

Is Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever? In essence, yes. In function, no!

Four Changes, or Transitions, Concerning Jesus

Let me give you four important changes, or transitions, concerning Jesus.

1. There is a change in Jesus’ commission.

Look at Matthew, chapter 10, verses 5 and 6.

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them, and commanded them, saying, “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

What a biased command – but, not if you understand that Jesus will later change his commission; not if you understand that Jesus’ original intention was to offer a literal kingdom to the nation Israel. That offer was rejected, and Israel would be set aside. The gospel would ultimately, go to Gentile and Jew alike.

2. There is a change in Jesus’ location.

Turn to John, chapter 16. Look first, at verse 28.

I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again, and going to the Father.

Then, look at verse 7.

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

And, finally, look at verse 13a.

But when He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth . . .

3. There is a change in Jesus’ ministry and focus:

In the Old Testament	He is the angel of the Lord
In the Gospels	He is the searching, dying Savior
In the book of Acts	He is the commissioning, ascending Son
In the Epistles	He is the interceding Shepherd
In the book of Revelation	He is the conquering Lamb

4. Finally, there is a change in Christ’s revelation – what we call, progressive revelation, because it expands.

Perhaps the diagram below will help in understanding Jesus’ progressive, or expanding, revelation about Himself to mankind.

	The Gospels	The Acts	The Epistles	Revelation
Position	His life is revealed	His power is revealed	His leadership is revealed	His supremacy is revealed
Activity	He is crucified and raised from the dead	He ascended	He intercedes	He returns
Church	We have a model of Christianity	We have an example	We have an explanation	We have a conclusion

Is Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever? As to His deity, yes! That is what we call the immutability of Christ. But, as to His function and ministry, *no!* And the changes in God's revelation to us, changes our response to Him. This is terribly important!

There are religious movements today, that want to take the church backwards into the Old Testament. I am confident, however, that the church is not found in the book of Leviticus. Therefore, this past week, I enjoyed a delicious ham sandwich. That is also the reason I worship the Lord on Sunday, instead of Saturday, and why I am wearing a suit made of blended materials without fear of disobedience. When was the last time you sacrificed a turtle dove?

You happen to be a dispensationalist whether you know what the word means or not. By the way, a dispensation is a period in history in which God introduces something of Himself to those who follow Him, and whereby He also requires certain responses.

There are other religious movements that want to take the church forward into the book of Revelation – particularly into chapters 4 through 18, when God's wrath is revealed from heaven on the world. If that were the case, then I would be a fool if I were not preparing an underground cellar stocked with dry foods to feed my family during the time of tribulation.

There are also religious movements that want to keep the church from moving beyond the experiences in the early chapters of the book of Acts. They overlook simple facts such as, until chapter 20, the church was still worshipping on the Sabbath. But more tragically, they teach the experiences of the apostles and certain expressions from God as permanent, when they are clearly temporary. There are people today, who claim to have apostolic power to heal diseases, if the diseased has enough faith, and to raise the dead, but instead, they deceive millions and often get rich in the process. In the meantime, hospital beds remain full and cemetery plots undisturbed.

Two Basic Doctrinal Principles of Biblical Interpretation

We need to have an understanding of basic doctrinal principles of biblical interpretation. Without it, we will be like a rowboat in a stormy sea without a

rudder or oars – tossed about with every wind of doctrine.

All of the Bible is inspired and was written to us – but not all of it was written for us

1. The first basic principle is that all of the Bible is inspired and was written to us, but not all of it was written for us!

In the Old Testament, God commanded certain things that no longer apply to us today:

To Adam, in Genesis, chapter 1, verse 28, God commanded, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth . . .”. Now, my wife and I have no sense of urgency to fill the earth – contrary to present opinion, after having two boys and two girls!

God also commanded, “. . . and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky . . .”. My family recently bought a little parakeet. She cost about six dollars, which is about all she is worth. We named her “Runaway,” because that is about all she does. I put some food in her cage and she reached out and bit my finger. I cannot rule over the birds of the air – I cannot even control my little parakeet!

My experience with children and animals is vastly different than Adam's. There must have been a change.

The experiences of one believer are not normative for every believer

2. The second basic doctrinal principle is that the experiences of one believer are not the normative for every believer.

Can you imagine some Old Testament saint watching Elijah call down fire from heaven and saying, “Hey, if he can do that, so can I!”

Take your Bibles and turn to the title page of Acts. What is the full title of the book? “The Acts of the Apostles”! Is it, “The Acts of All Believers”? No. In fact, if you tuck the title of that book in your memory as you read the book, you will be saved from a great deal of confusion. You will be able to look at Peter and Paul in the same way that an Old Testament saint looked at Elijah and Elisha.

Let us break this principle down even further. If we take just the New Testament alone, we discover several transitions in it as well:

- In the Gospels – the church was predicted.
- In Acts – the church is created.
- In the Epistles – the church is instructed.

The book of Acts serves as a bridge between the Gospels and Epistles. This table aids in understanding the transitions between the two.

Gospels	Epistles
Synagogue	Church
Circumcision & dietary laws	Freedom of choice
Nationalism	Globalism
Prophecy & word of knowledge	Written word
Animal sacrifices	No more sacrifices
Rabbis	Pastors & teachers

The book of Acts was never intended to be a basis for church doctrine or experience. Otherwise, we would sell all our possessions and live as one community with one communal pot for survival. Otherwise, we would follow Acts, chapter 1, and select church leadership by casting lots. Every church would need offering plates, communion plates, and a pair of dice! The miracles of Acts would be the normal expression for God servants.

Notice what Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, says,

how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit . . .

What were these confirming, past tense miracles and gifts? I believe that Mark’s gospel spells it out.

Mark, chapter 16, verse 20, refers to the apostolic community,

And they went out, and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.

Mark, chapter 16, verse 17b through 18, gives a list of past tense confirming signs.

in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues, they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

Notice that there were five signs (gifts or wonders), used during this period of transition to confirm the message that these apostles preached.

You cannot pick and choose – either they all are operative today, or none are. They were past tense confirming signs.

In the absence of the written Word of God, these signs confirmed the message of God. Now, there is a new message, a new function, a new dispensation called the dispensation of the church - or the age of grace.

Joseph Dillow wrote, “We must not make the tragic mistake of teaching the experience of the apostles, but rather we must experience the teaching of the apostles.”

It is interesting that we can piece together, from later passages, that even the apostles changed in their use of signs and wonders. For example, Paul healed in his early ministry. Later, however, he left Timothy sick and tells him to take medicine for his “frequent ailments,” in I Timothy, chapter 5, verse 23. And Epaphroditus, who worked with Paul, nearly died of some sickness, according to Paul’s letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 25 through 27. And, in the last book that Paul wrote, II Timothy, in chapter 4, verse 20, he says, “. . . Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.”

To apply these miraculous signs to the permanent ministry of the apostles is wrong. Surely, to apply these signs to all believers is not only wrong, but dangerous! Why? Because every year, people who handle snakes are bitten; there have even been deaths by those drinking poison; Christians have cancer, heart disease, and other serious illnesses – you can understand the frustration of misapplying this passage.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Now, just what began this period of miraculous transition? It is the creation of the church in the book of Acts, chapter 2. It happened on the day of Pentecost, literally the fiftieth day after the Jewish Passover. This is the event that John the Baptist was referring to and that Jesus had promised.

Look at Acts, chapter 2, verse 1.

And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

Three things happened on the day of Pentecost

Three things happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost:

1. Something audible occurred in Acts, chapter 2, verse 2,

And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Now understand that there was not a rushing, mighty wind; there was a sound like a rushing mighty wind.

2. Something visible happened. Continue to Acts, chapter 2, verse 3,

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

Note again, that this was not literal fire; it was as tongues of fire. Luke is expressing, in his language, something that is impossible to explain – it looked like flickering fire.

3. Something verbal happened. Continue further to Acts, chapter 2, verse 4,

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

What was the result of these occurrences? Acts, chapter 2, verse 41,

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; . . .

(that is by water)

. . . and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

The church was created! Something that had not been in existence before, now exists! And the mark is the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Two Reasons Pentecost Will Not Happen Again

Can Pentecost happen again? No. Let me give two reasons why it will not.

1. Acts, chapter 2, marks the beginning of the church age! To repeat Acts, chapter 2, and the creation of the church would be similar to a church trying to experience their charter Sunday all over again. They cannot. The only thing they can do is remember it!
2. Acts, chapter 2, marks the coming of the Holy Spirit from heaven. Once the Spirit came, He came to stay.

Now remember, Acts represents a transition. In fact, this baptism of the Spirit will be closely tied to the apostles hands, so that several times you have the apostles come to another region and lay on their hands and the believers receive the Spirit. This accomplished a number of things – primarily the unity of the early church to the doctrine and authority of the apostles.

Can the experiences of the early church be re-visited again and again? No. Once the church was created, and the Spirit had descended, you were forever beyond the point of origin.

An Important Distinction

What does Paul say in further instruction to the church? Look at I Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 13.

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

When did you experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit? You experienced it at the same time Paul tells these Corinthian believers they did – when they became part of the body of Christ – at the moment of salvation. In fact, the only direct doctrinal reference to the baptism of the Holy Spirit is in this verse. It happens to us all!

This raises an important question. What then is the difference between the baptism and the filling of the Holy Spirit? We are told in I Corinthians that we *have been (past tense)* baptized, but in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 18, we are told to *be filled (present tense)* by the Spirit.

The important issue to understand is the difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit. The following table, based on the teaching of the apostles in the Epistles, may help:

Baptism of the Holy Spirit	Filling of the Holy Spirit
A past act	A present, ongoing experience
The Holy Spirit belongs to you	You belong to the Holy Spirit
The evidence is internal (adoption, sealing, indwelling, gentleness)	The evidence is internal and external (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control)

The left column of this table should not be called an experience, because that brings to mind something you can feel. At the moment of conversion to Christ, several things happened related to the Spirit:

- You were adopted – did you feel it?
- You were sealed – did you feel it?
- You were baptized into the body of Christ – did you feel it?

No! These things were acts of God, once for all time!

One author writes,

Spirit baptism brings the believer into a vital union with Christ. To be baptized with the Holy Spirit means that Christ immerses us in the Spirit, thereby giving us a common life principle. This spiritual baptism is what connects us with all other believers in Christ and makes us part of Christ's own body. It is a fact, not a feeling.

Two Additional Baptisms

There are two additional baptisms mentioned in the New Testament.

The baptism of sin upon Christ at Calvary

1. The baptism of sin upon Christ at Calvary.

Look at Luke, chapter 12, verse 50, where Jesus, referring to the cross, says,

But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!

Peter wrote, in I Peter, chapter 2, verse 24,

and [Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness . . .

The baptism of God's wrath upon unbelievers

2. The baptism of God's wrath upon unbelievers.

Look at Matthew, chapter 3, verses 11 through 12.

As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

Now Matthew said, in verse 11, that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The charismatic movement applies the first baptism, that of the Holy Spirit, literally and the second, that of fire, metaphorically. I believe that both baptisms are to be understood literally. Matthew further explains, in verse 12, that the second baptism is not related to the tongues of fire at Pentecost, but a fire that never ends – the eternal fire of hell. Verses 11 and 12, read together, clearly explain this.

Compare this with Revelation, chapter 20, verses 14 and 15.

And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus Christ promised that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. That happened at Pentecost and it happens to everyone who believes in His name. He has also promised a coming baptism with fire – judgement for those who have rejected Him.

So, the age of grace, or the church age, is clearly divided into two groups of people:

- Those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and
- Those who will be baptized with eternal fire.

In which category are you?

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