

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

We must agree that Scripture is our final authority in settling questions of faith and practice. But when born-again, Spirit-filled Christians, following proper biblical principles, come to reasonable but differing interpretations; we do well not to become dogmatic in support of one position. We affirm the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and we desire to know for certain what God expects of us. When we come to a sure understanding of His divine Word, we are committed to declaring and obeying those clear instructions.

In the following position paper we address one of many topics that have raised a fair degree of discussion, and, at times, arguments among the brethren. It is not our intention to fuel these arguments but rather to state our position based on our earnest understanding of the Scriptures. With this said, we also exercise caution in not stirring unnecessary strife or division among the brethren, and have made every reasonable effort to base our positions on Scripture, not personal opinion or conjecture. We respect and love our brothers and sisters who hold alternative interpretations on issues that are not critical to our salvation or standing before God.

BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

On the Day of Pentecost visitors to Jerusalem witnessed the unbelievable sight of Spirit-filled believers declaring the glory of God in languages they had never learned. Their response to the supernatural was natural: "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12). Twenty centuries later the same question is being asked as the Holy Spirit is doing spectacular things all around the world, not just in one location.

BIBLICAL PRECEDENCE

The emphasis on the person and work of the Holy Spirit is not new to the Church. The outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was the logical culmination of revealed truth about the Holy Spirit as found throughout Old Testament Scriptures.

The usual reference in the Old Testament to the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of God" or "his Spirit." At creation, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2). Artisans at the building of the tabernacle were "filled with the Spirit of God" (Exodus 31 and 35). Prophets and national leaders ministered supernaturally when prompted by the Spirit of God (Numbers 24:2; 1 Samuel 10:10; 11:6; 2 Chronicles 15:1; 24:20; Isaiah 48:16; Ezekiel 11:24; Zechariah 7:12).

Prophecy, or speaking in behalf of God, is evident throughout the Old Testament. Sometimes the message came almost silently, in thoughts, dreams, or visions. At other times it came with significant emotion (cf. Numbers 11:24—29). In each case, however, prophetic speech is the unique sign of the Spirit's coming to anoint particular persons for divinely given ministries.

In Acts 2:17 Peter decisively connects the Pentecost event with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28,29). In fact, lest we miss the point, Peter repeats Joel's prophecy in a way not found in the Hebrew text, saying a second time, "I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy" (v. 18). The viewpoint of both the Old and New Testaments is that the coming of the Spirit is indicated by prophetic speech. The initial prophetic speech in Acts is speaking in tongues.

**WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER**

Topic: Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

The Israelites were unaccustomed to such a universal move of the Spirit in the lives of sons and daughters, old and young, men and women. Only a select few prophets, kings, and judges were moved by the Holy Spirit to minister supernaturally and experience the presence of the Spirit, as David demonstrates in the Psalms. Peter put the Day of Pentecost visitation into perspective as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and a divinely ordered gift of the Spirit for all believers, not just for leadership offices.

EMPOWERED TO BE A WITNESS

Modern evangelical Christians place great stress on being "born again" (John 3:3,5—8; 1 Peter 1:3), which is rightly understood to be the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration (John 3:6; Titus 3:5). As He comes in regenerating power, the Spirit makes His presence known as an inner witness to the believer's new status as a child of God. The new believer can now pray "Abba, Father," expressing the intimate and confident relationship of children to their Heavenly Father (Romans 8:15,16). Having taken up residence within, the Spirit also guides and enables the new believer in a transforming life of progressive sanctification and spiritual maturity (Romans 8:13; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 5:16,22—24).

The work of the Spirit, however, is not just an inner transformation of new birth and sanctification; it is also a work of empowering believers as witnesses for Christ, thus fulfilling the mission of the Church (Matthew 28:18—20; Acts 1:8). Peter presented the initial descent of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as a mighty inauguration of the last days in which all of God's people will be baptized, or filled, with the Spirit (Joel 2:28,29; Acts 2:17,18). The final words of his sermon are, "Repent, and be baptized. . . . And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38,39). Far from being a one-time event on the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit is noted to have baptized, or filled, believer after believer. Both the Book of Acts and the Pauline epistles show repeated and continuing empowerment by the Holy Spirit and the impartation of powerful gifts for ministry (Acts 8:17; 9:17; 10:44—46; 19:4—7; Romans 1:11; 1 Corinthians 12—14; Ephesians 5:18—21; 1 Thessalonians 5:19,20; Hebrews 2:4).

Fidelity to Scripture, therefore, indicates that men and women ought to seek not only the transformational work of the Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, but also the empowering work of the Spirit in the Baptism promised by Jesus and repeatedly witnessed in the Book of Acts and the Epistles. Lives are to be changed by the Spirit in regeneration and then set ablaze and gifted by the same Spirit for a lifetime of service. Seeking the baptism in the Spirit is strategic for effective Christian living and ministry.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN SALVATION AND THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The baptism in the Spirit is subsequent to and distinct from the new birth. Scripture clearly describes a conversion experience in which the Holy Spirit baptizes believers into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Scripture just as clearly describes an experience in which Christ baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11). These cannot refer to the same experience

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

since the agent who does the baptizing and the element into which the candidate is baptized are different in each case.

Luke, author of both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, generally presents the baptism or infilling of the Spirit as something which occurs to disciples, or believers, his characteristic terms for those who have already been converted or saved. For Luke, baptism in the Holy Spirit is an experience distinct from and logically subsequent to personal salvation. Moreover, Luke presents baptism in the Spirit and its accompanying power as the normal expectation of believers.

Subsequent usually means a time separation, but not always. The Gentiles who had gathered at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10) seemingly experienced both regeneration and baptism in the Holy Spirit at the same time. While a theological description of what happened would require regeneration as a prerequisite for baptism in the Spirit, everything happened so quickly that two separate works of God were experienced as one event. In this case, Spirit baptism was logically subsequent to regeneration, although it may not have been subsequent in time to any perceptible degree.

Every believer has the privilege of being baptized in the Spirit and should then expect to speak in tongues. The obvious starting point for such a declaration is the account of the initial outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). On that day all the believers were gathered together in one place (Acts 2:1); their number was apparently about 120 (Acts 1:15). For roughly 10 days they had been waiting for "the promise of the Father," as Jesus had charged them to do prior to His ascension (Acts 1:4). Then according to Acts 2:4, "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." As Peter explained to the crowd witnessing the marvelous event, this outpouring of the Spirit fulfilled the ancient prophecy of Joel for the last days (Acts 2:17). No longer would God's Spirit be restricted to a few prophets, but in the new age initiated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the work of the Spirit would now be available to all (cf. also Acts 2:39).

Acts 8:4—13 describes Philip's effective ministry in Samaria. Verse 12 summarizes, "But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Acts 8:14—24 then reports about additional ministry among the Samaritans by the apostles Peter and John. In particular, verses 15—17 say: When they [Peter and John] arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15—17).

The dramatic account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus is recounted in Acts 9. Saul is knocked down and blinded by the light of Christ's presence. After being led on to Damascus, still without sight, Saul is visited by a believer named Ananias, who says to him, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Ananias regards Saul's conversion as having already occurred, apparently at the time of his encounter with the risen Christ. Nevertheless, Saul still needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit and Ananias prayed for him to that end. Clearly Saul (also called Paul) was filled with the Spirit some 3 days after his conversion.

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

Years later Paul came to the great city of Ephesus on his third missionary journey. According to Acts 19:7 there were about 12 believers, described as "disciples" in Acts 19:1. The dialogue recorded between Paul and the Ephesus disciples is instructive: and [Paul] asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (Acts 19:2—4).

Clearly, at the time of this conversation these believers had not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit, for they had not heard of the experience. The context presumes that something was lacking. They also had not been instructed about Christian water baptism; although, once Paul explained it to them, they were quickly baptized (19:5). Following their water baptism, "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied" (19:6). The narrative could not be clearer in its emphasis that the fullness of the Spirit was received following both the Christian belief of the Ephesian "disciples" and their Christian water baptism (19:5).

In the Acts 2, Acts 9, and Acts 19 accounts, the reception of the Spirit occurs following conversion. According to Luke's inspired record, baptism in the Spirit is not an aspect of conversion but rather a separate and distinct experience. It is also logically subsequent to conversion, although as the experience of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius makes clear, conversion and baptism in the Spirit can occur in such swift succession that they seem to take place simultaneously.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

The Holy Spirit can inspire people to speak in languages which they have not learned, as was demonstrated conclusively on the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2) when people from all over the world heard Galileans speaking foreign languages which they could not have known. In the modern era similar episodes have occurred many times.

Prior to the Day of Pentecost, many within Israel had concluded that after God spoke to and through the last of the Old Testament prophets, He was speaking directly to Israel no more. Only after Messiah was to arrive, along with the anticipated Age to Come, would God again speak to His people through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Suddenly, in this spiritually lifeless context, the Spirit is poured out, not just on selected individuals as in the Old Testament, but upon masses of people, essentially everyone in the fledgling Church. It was as if the cry of Moses' heart had been fulfilled: "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29). In some marvelous sense the Age to Come had begun, and a church filled with people who spoke in tongues was a sign signifying the dawn of a new period in God's eternal plan for humankind.

Luke understands speaking in tongues to demonstrate the infilling presence of the Holy Spirit; this is clearly indicated by an examination of Acts 10:44—48. "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God" (Acts 10:44—46).

The conclusion is clear: If someone, even someone unexpected, hears the Word and speaks in divinely inspired tongues, that person has received the Holy Spirit. This was the reasoning of Peter and the other Jewish Christians present. Speaking in tongues is clear evidence someone has received the gift of the Holy Spirit (or been baptized in the Holy Spirit). The evidence was so clear for Peter he insisted Cornelius and his Gentile friends be baptized in water (10:48).

Later, as Peter discussed the Cornelius incident with the apostles and believers in Jerusalem, he again referred to the phenomenon he had witnessed: "So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17). The next verse confirms the apostles and believers accepted tongues as convincing evidence of the baptism in the Spirit: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God" (11:18).

While Acts 10:45,46 establishes that speaking in tongues is clear evidence of Spirit baptism, evidence supporting this doctrine is also provided by the overall pattern of Acts associating speaking in tongues with baptism in the Spirit. Acts describes five occasions on which people received an empowering of the Spirit for the first time (i.e., baptism in the Spirit). In none of these accounts are all of the details given, but four of these occasions include significant detail. (For Paul's reception of the Spirit recorded in Acts 9:17,19, hardly any detail is recorded.) As previously noted, supernatural phenomena are a sign of the coming of the Spirit. The New Testament simply picks up on a very important Old Testament motif.

In Acts 2, 10, and 19 various phenomena are indicated, such as the sound of wind, tongues of fire, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. The only phenomenon occurring in each case, however, is speaking in tongues. In the Acts 8 account of Peter and John's ministry among the Samaritans, speaking in tongues is not specifically mentioned but it is strongly implied. After the apostles had laid their hands on the Samaritans, some visible and extraordinary manifestation accompanied the reception of the Spirit. This is evident for, after seeing something remarkable, the magician Simon wanted to buy the ability to confer the Holy Spirit. Acts 8:18 notes explicitly, "When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money." Based on the pattern found in Acts 2, 10, and 19 it seems most likely that what Simon saw was the Samaritan believers speaking in tongues. Had the experience been only by faith without any accompanying sign, Simon would not have known whether the Samaritan believers actually received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 9:17—19 suggests that Saul of Tarsus (i.e., the apostle Paul) was filled with the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Ananias. Though no details of this filling are given, we know from 1 Corinthians 14:18 that Paul prayed in tongues regularly and often. It would hardly be surprising if that pattern was begun at the time he was filled with the Spirit.

A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is just the open door leading into a Spirit-filled life. Though we believe speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we do not

WORD OF CHRIST INTERNATIONAL CHURCH
POSITION PAPER

Topic: Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

believe it signifies instant maturity. There are many other evidences that a life continues to be filled with the Spirit and is growing and maturing spiritually.

Having spoken in tongues upon being baptized in the Spirit, the believer must continue to respond to the supernatural promptings of the Holy Spirit. For example, praying in the Spirit (intercessory and worship expressions in tongues) should be a continuing part of the new Spirit-filled life. Though not all Spirit-filled believers are given the gift of tongues which through interpretation edifies the church congregation (1 Corinthians 12:30), they all have the privilege of praying in the Spirit, especially at times when the human intellect does not know how to pray. Likewise, every Spirit-filled believer can and should expect to be used in supernatural ways in some, though not necessarily all, of the gifts of the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Receiving eternal life does not depend on being baptized in the Holy Spirit; for salvation is by grace through faith alone. It is a gift purchased for us by Christ when He was crucified. All we have to do is accept the gift. At the same time, the Bible does tell us that Christ commanded His first followers to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Subsequently, the Bible commands all believers to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). This personal encounter with the Holy Spirit should be sought and cherished by every believer. With it comes a new and fuller dimension of spiritual understanding and a flow of spiritual gifts.

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