

The Baptism of the Spirit  
Acts and 1 Corinthians

1 Cor 12. This sermon jumps around a bit. Perhaps worse than usual. But through it all, I hope to give you perspective on the Holy Spirit and especially on the baptism of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Poured Out

Picture the Holy Spirit behind flood gates in heaven. Like an ocean, or a great river, behind big gates, waiting for someone to pull the pin and open the gates, so the Holy Spirit can pour out and out and pour forever on God's people, Christ's followers.

Long before Christ, the prophet Ezekiel predicted that those floodgates would open, and the Spirit would pour out (Ezek. 36, 37, 39). The prophet Joel also foretold this. John the Baptist predicted this too, and Jesus also promised it quite a few times. (The Spirit did work in people before this, in the OT, and that's a bit confusing to everyone. Nevertheless, the promise is clear.)

On one particular day, on this earth, Jesus was born of Mary in the town of Bethlehem. That day will never happen again, it does not need to.

On one particular day, on this earth, a Friday afternoon, Jesus died by crucifixion outside Jerusalem, and was buried. That will not happen again, doesn't need to. The Spirit was still waiting behind the gates.

Three days later, early Sunday morning, God raised Jesus from the dead with all authority in heaven and earth. His resurrection happened on one day, on this earth. Now Jesus lives forever.

On one day, on this earth, about 40 days later, Jesus was taken up in front of the disciples, and disappeared into the clouds of God's presence. That will never happen again.

About 10 days after that, on this earth, in Jerusalem, Jesus pulled the pin, the flood gates opened, and from then on the Holy Spirit pours and pours on Christ's followers. That was the day of Pentecost. The particular things that the Spirit did that day can happen again as often as the Spirit wishes. The pouring will never stop, not for eternity.

But the day Jesus opened the gates and the Spirit began to pour, the day of Pentecost, that day will never happen again, does not need to, for the Spirit will never stop pouring on God's people.

On one particular day in the future, Jesus will come back in power to this earth. He will gather all his people to himself, and so we will all be with the Lord forever. That will happen on one day, never to happen again. (That's six days. Then we all rest!)

Jesus is Lord, Many Differences, For the Common Good (1 Cor 12:1-7)

So, the Spirit is here and pouring out. What does the Spirit do? We cannot see the Holy Spirit. How do we know the Spirit is here and working? There was confusion about that in Corinth, as there is today, and Paul summarizes his answer in 1 Cor 12:1-7. (This reviews last week.)

1 Cor 12:3. *No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.* That is to say: *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, I bow only to Jesus, and Jesus has full rights to my life. Jesus is Lord.* If you can say that and mean it, the Holy Spirit is present and working powerfully in you.

The Corinthians don't actually believe this. They think the dramatic, emotional work of the Spirit is the real sign of his presence. Paul wants to change how they measure this, to give them a more informed way of discerning the working of the Spirit. *Jesus is Lord* is the ultimate test.

These days, many believe in God, and many believe in loving everyone. But *Jesus is Lord* is quite different, and often offensive. This is not a new development. There has never been a time in Canada's history when *Jesus is Lord* was not awkward.

*Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and Jesus has full rights to my life. Jesus is Lord.* In the New Testament, saying this more than anything else was the signal for baptism. When you could say that, they did not delay, they baptized you. If you could not say that, no baptism for you.

If you can say this, and you are 12 years old or older, and you are interested in baptism, talk to me or one of the other elders. If you are not comfortable being baptized, that's fine, I have no interest in coaxing anyone. But, in the NT, baptism and this confession go together.

Differences. *No one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.* That's 1 Cor 12:3. Then the Spirit goes in every direction. The next three verses, 4-6, all begin with the word *differences*. *Differences of gifts there are, but the same Spirit. Differences of service there are, but the same Lord. Differences of working there are, but the same God. Each one shows the Spirit working, for the common good.*

The Holy Spirit brings us all together on this: *Jesus is Lord, Jesus has full rights to my life.* This, more than anything else, is what binds us in this room together. The Holy Spirit brought us together around that, we live that out together. That's what a church is. After that, just variety. Different gifts, different service, different working. Difference, difference, difference.

The Common Good. Verses 4-6 announce differences. Verse 7: *Each one shows the Spirit working, for the common good.* The Holy Spirit works differently in each person, for the common good. We often enjoy the Spirit's work in us, but that's not why he gives it. He gives it for the common good. That is, to build up and encourage the rest of the congregation.

What does the Spirit do? First, he leads us to say, *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and Jesus has full rights to my life*. Then, the Spirit goes in every possible direction, showing himself differently through each person. BUT, ALWAYS, for the common good.

### The Azusa Street Revival

In 1906 to 1908, 110 years ago, there was a remarkable revival in Los Angeles, California. It began in a Black Methodist church on Azusa Street. It changed many people's lives powerfully. The Holy Spirit worked powerfully. It also disillusioned many people, put them off.

Many of those who repented and turned to the Lord had been believers for quite a while, but were not really living it. When they turned to the Lord, the Holy Spirit gave them the gift of tongues. They nearly always spoke in tongues.

Besides the gift of tongues, there was quite a bit of other confusion and peculiar behavior. So, on the one hand there was noisy confusion and bizarre drama, and on the other hand the Holy Spirit changed many people's lives and gave them energy to follow the Lord.

People built a theology around this revival, and a certain way of reading the book of Acts to support the theology. In particular, the theology had three parts.

**One**, every Christian needs a *second experience* of the Holy Spirit. Faith and conversion are the first experience, but we don't have the Holy Spirit fully at that point.

**Two**, the unmistakable *sign* of this second experience of the Spirit was the gift of tongues.

**Three**, this experience of the Spirit, signaled by tongues, was called "the baptism of the Spirit."

### The Pentecostal Church

The Pentecostal churches, and there are several, all started at the Azusa Street Revival. There were no Pentecostal churches before that. The revival faded eventually, and Pentecostal churches developed in order to keep that going.

This sermon is called "the baptism of the Spirit." I am referring to classical Pentecostal teaching on that topic. Pentecostals believe that in order to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, a believer needs to have a second experience. Just becoming a Christian and following the Lord is not enough. The second experience is when we receive the fullness of the Spirit.

The evidence is that we speak in tongues. And this experience is called the baptism of the Spirit. Based on the Azusa Street Revival, you can see why Pentecostals believe these things. That really is what the Holy Spirit did at that time. It was a second experience, and they did speak in tongues. The Spirit is free to do this, and did it. But we cannot build doctrine on it, or require it.

There are Pentecostal scholars who read the NT carefully, and I've read their work, and they would not disagree with anything I am saying today. I know three or four such people personally, and they would not disagree with anything I am saying today. I do not know of one Pentecostal NT scholar who supports traditional Pentecostal "baptism of the Spirit" without reservation.

Even from what we read in 1 Cor 12:1-7, it does not make any sense to make any one spiritual gift the final evidence of ANYTHING about the Holy Spirit. The evidence of the Spirit is: When people say *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus has full rights to my life.*

And once that's covered, and we get to spiritual gifts, it is: difference, difference, difference. The Spirit wants every single believer to confess Jesus as Lord. The Spirit wants to produce the fruit of the Spirit in every single believer. The rest is variety, each one different.

The second experience is not taught in Acts, and neither does Acts teach tongues as the reliable evidence of the Spirit. And the rest of the NT does not support either one of those at all. We'll talk more about the second experience next week. Next week we'll look at all the conversion stories in Acts, and pay attention to two things: the Holy Spirit, and baptism.

#### Instruction about Tongues and Other Gifts in 1 Corinthians 14

By reading 1 Cor 14 we can pick up a few things that happened when that church met as a congregation. There were many spiritual gifts. Tongues and prophecy were most prominent. Of those, the Corinthians preferred the gift of tongues, and they seem to have seen it as the ultimate sign of the Spirit's work.

In that chapter, Paul gives those believers two priorities for the use of gifts in the church congregation. One, the use of gifts shall always be for the common good. When God's people are together, the only valid reason for a gift is to build up the body of Christ. Tongues builds up the tongues speaker, but no one else. So don't use it in the gathering, unless with interpretation.

Prophecy shows love for others, because the prophet speaks to strengthen and encourage and comfort *other* believers. 1 Cor 13, the love chapter, occurs in the middle of the spiritual gifts chapters, 12 and 14, because love needs to guide how we use the spiritual gifts.

The first priority is that in the congregation, gifts shall be used for the common good, to build up others. The second priority is: no confusion or disorder. In Corinth, there was confusion and disorder when the Spirit was working in these ways, and the Spirit does not want that.

Believers can manage what they do with the Spirit. The Spirit does NOT just take over. Paul could speak in tongues in the congregation, he had the gift, but would not use it, because it did not build up others. He tells them, if there are tongues but no interpreter, let the tongues speaker *be silent*. If you are prophesying, and someone else starts, let the first *be silent*.

The Spirit of the tongues speaker and the prophet is subject to the control of the tongues speaker and the prophet. The Spirit gives an ability and an urge, and leaves it to us to manage this.

So, in the church, gifts are only for the common good, to build up the congregation. And no disorder or confusion. Noisy and exuberant is fine, but God wants peace and harmony.

Based on 1 Cor 14, here are two things we may NOT say: because the use of gifts is self-centered and disorderly, it is not actually the Holy Spirit at work. Can't say that. It really was the Holy Spirit in Corinth, and the Holy Spirit was also working in the Azusa Street Revival, and in Pentecostal churches. We can NOT say, because it is self-centered and disorderly, not the Spirit.

NOR may we say, because the Holy Spirit is truly at work, whatever the people do is fine. NO, NOT true. The Holy Spirit was genuinely at work in Corinth, there's no doubt that in Paul's mind, their tongues and prophecy and other gifts really were from the Spirit.

But their self-centeredness was NOT fine, and their disorder and confusion was NOT fine. The Spirit does not bypass our mind and choice. He gives an urge and an ability, and lets us steer.

Repeat: we may NOT say, because it's the Holy Spirit, whatever they do is fine. And, we may NOT say, because the use of gifts is self-centered and disorderly, it is not from the Holy Spirit. There are many Christians doing one or the other.

### The Day of Pentecost and the Baptism of the Spirit: What do we Call what Happened?

I would like to correct the idea that the term "baptism of the Spirit" means something special in Acts. It does not. Let's think about what happened on the day of Pentecost: there was a sound of a mighty rushing wind, and something like tongues of fire appeared on the heads of the believers, and the apostles spoke in tongues, spoke the mighty works of God in many languages.

What do we call that? We'll stick to the writings of Luke, the Gospel of Luke, and Acts.

- John the Baptist, in Luke 3, said "he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
- Jesus himself said to the Eleven, in Luke 24, after his resurrection, "wait in Jerusalem, you will be clothed with power from on high." That's the same thing John called "baptism of the Spirit."
- Jesus names John the Baptist in Acts 1:5, says "soon you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit," reminding them of John the Baptist's prediction.
- Jesus says in Ac 1:8 that the Holy Spirit will come upon you.
- Luke himself says in 2:4, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit."
- Joel the prophet, quoted by Peter, says "In those days [God says] I will pour out my Spirit."
- Peter says to the crowd, "be baptized in Jesus name, and you will receive the Holy Spirit."

These terms are all speaking about the same thing. We will be baptized with the Holy Spirit, clothed with power from on high, the Spirit will come upon us, we will be filled with the Holy Spirit, God will pour out his Holy Spirit, we will receive the Holy Spirit. 6 labels, 1 meaning.

No one of these labels is used by Luke with precision. These are all different ways of saying the same thing. They all describe what happened on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit's work on us in mysterious, no single word or phrase describes it completely, so the Scripture uses several different terms to speak of the same coming of the Spirit to us.

Acts mentions the baptism of the Spirit exactly two times, once in Acts 1 and once in Acts 11. That's not much, considering Acts mentions the Holy Spirit about 60 times.

Both times Acts speaks of the baptism of the Spirit, *the speaker names John the Baptist in the same sentence*. That is, twice in Acts, the speaker wants to remind people that John the Baptist predicted the Spirit would come.

When the speaker wants to remind people specifically about *John's* promise, they call the Spirit's coming "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." What the term actually describes is the same as all the other terms, filling and pouring out and receiving, etc.

Next week I plan to look at the conversion stories in Acts, paying attention to two things, the Holy Spirit, especially the need for second experience, and baptism in water.

We began this way: On the day of Pentecost, Jesus opened the floodgates, and from then on the Holy Spirit pours and pours on Christ's followers. The particular things that the Spirit did that day can happen again as often as the Spirit wishes. The pouring will never stop, not for eternity.

But the day Jesus opened the gates and the Spirit began to pour, the day of Pentecost, that day will never happen again, does not need to, for the Spirit will never stop pouring on God's people.

What does the Spirit do? 1 Cor 12:3. *No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.* That is: *Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, Jesus has full rights to my life. Jesus is Lord.* If we can say that and mean it, the Holy Spirit is present and working powerfully in us.

After that, no two people are the same. Differences of gifts, but same Spirit; differences of service, but the same Lord; differences of working, but the same God. Each one shows the Spirit working, for the common good. That's what the Spirit does. Amen.