

# BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

“...He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” [John 1:33](#)

In the previous session, we looked at the person of the Holy Spirit and saw some of the ways in which He has worked in the lives of people from creation onwards. In this session, we are going to look at what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in a way that empowers us for life, enables us to be effective in sharing the gospel with others, and equips us with the gifts God gives us to glorify Him.

## THE PROMISED GIFT

The Book of Acts begins by telling us of Jesus’ interaction with His disciples over the forty-day period between His resurrection and His ascension. His disciples, having been confused and discouraged at the time of His death, were no doubt more enthusiastic than ever at this point, and eager to spread the good news and see the Kingdom of God established. However, Jesus gives them this instruction:

“...he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses...”

[Acts 1:4-5, 8](#)

They probably had little or no idea what Jesus meant or what to expect, but we can see in [Acts 2](#) how they began to experience the fulfillment of this promise at Pentecost. Peter went on to speak boldly of this as something that was part of the total gift of salvation:

“...Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” [Acts 2:38](#)



## WHAT IS BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Christians refer to this experience in several different ways, for example, “receiving the Spirit,” “being empowered by the Spirit,” “being filled with the Spirit,” and “being baptized in/with the Spirit.” There’s biblical justification for all of these terms, but in this session, we’ll use the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” to speak of a Christian’s first, tangibly empowering experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

As we’ve seen when looking at the subject of baptism in water, to be “baptized” means to be fully immersed, with no part of us left untouched by the experience. What’s more, it is something we do in wholehearted obedience and faith. It’s helpful for us to bear this in mind as we consider what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Whatever one calls the experience, it is important to understand how essential a part of the purpose and intention of Jesus it is to pour out His Spirit in this way ([John 1:32-33](#)). We should want for ourselves what He wants for us, and it’s to Him that we look as we seek to come into the fullness of this promise.

## IS BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR ALL BELIEVERS?

Yes. It isn’t just for a select few. God promised: “**I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh**” ([Acts 2:17](#)). Concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter clearly proclaimed:

“**For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.**” [Acts 2:39](#)

This means that if you’re a Christian, the promise is for you! Besides, if all God’s children are to be His witnesses, and if they cannot be effective witnesses without the baptism in the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:8](#)), then all God’s children should expect to receive it. To send a new believer to face a sinful world without the power received in this way is like sending out a new recruit into battle with no weapons. By the baptism in the Holy Spirit, God equips His soldiers.

## DON’T ALL CHRISTIANS HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Yes, in one sense they do. As we’ve seen in previous sessions, no one can become a Christian without the work of the Spirit. We know that we are “**born of the Spirit**” ([John 3:5](#)), and Paul tells us that “**Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him**” ([Romans 8:9b](#)).

But Scripture speaks of an impartation of the Holy Spirit that goes beyond even this. The idea that we can and should receive more of the Holy Spirit shouldn’t be surprising to us. Jesus was, of course, conceived by the Holy Spirit. However, as we have seen, before He embarked on His public ministry, He had a distinct experience when the Holy Spirit came upon Him in a special way, empowering Him for the work the Father had for Him to do (see [Luke 3:21-22, 4:1,14](#) and [Acts 10:38](#)).

It was the same with Jesus’ disciples. There can be much speculation and theological debate over when they actually became Christians, but it is probably safe to assume that by the time we see them in [Acts 1](#), being addressed by the risen Lord Jesus, they were born again! Nevertheless, they were told to wait in Jerusalem until they received and were empowered by the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, that happened on the day of Pentecost, and from that point forward they were launched into the mission God had for them.

What was true for Jesus and his disciples is true also for us. Born again though we may be, we need to receive the empowering fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Ideally, being born again, being baptized in water, and being baptized in the Holy Spirit belong together, part and parcel of the single business of becoming a Christian. Unfortunately, incomplete teaching has meant that many people enter into their full inheritance in bits and pieces. But better late than never!

## HOW DOES A PERSON RECEIVE THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Sometimes, people are baptized in the Spirit without the involvement of anyone else, as happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-4](#)) and to the household of Cornelius ([Acts 10:44-47](#)). Others are baptized in the Spirit as people lay hands on them and pray with them, as in Samaria ([Acts 8:14-17](#)) and Ephesus:

“And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.” [Acts 19:6](#)

The most important thing to bear in mind is that we are baptized in the Holy Spirit in the same way that we receive all the blessings of God—by faith, i.e., we believe that God is willing and able to do what He has promised to do, and we act accordingly. Sometimes our faith can be hindered by our conscience because of sin issues. If that is the case, we should simply repent and receive the forgiveness of God.

There is no formula to being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and people’s experiences vary greatly, but the following steps may be helpful:

1. **Ask God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Jesus said: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” ([Luke 11:13](#)). And if we look at the promise in [John 7:37-39](#), we see that our motivation should far exceed a mere willingness to receive and should, in fact, come from a recognition of need and an earnest desire:

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

2. **In asking, be actively reaching out to receive.** Where the Bible speaks of “receiving” the Holy Spirit and His power (e.g., in [Acts 1:8](#), [2:38](#), [19:2](#)), it’s an active word, not a passive one (it could be translated as “take hold of”). Expect to know a positive touch from God. When people in the Bible were baptized in the Spirit, they knew it—and so did the people around them!
3. **Knowing that God has heard and is answering your prayer, begin to praise God and worship Him with thanksgiving.**

## WHAT ABOUT THE GIFT OF TONGUES?

When the subject of baptism in the Spirit is discussed, “speaking in tongues” is usually part of the discussion. This shouldn’t be a surprise since, as we’ve seen, the gift of tongues is closely connected in Scripture with instances where people were filled with the Holy Spirit (e.g., [Acts 2:4](#), [10:44-46](#), [19:6](#)). *Tongues*, as used in these instances in Scripture, means “languages.” The gift of tongues is the God-given ability to speak in languages that you have not learned and do not (naturally) understand.

“...YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU, AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES...”

[Acts 1:8](#)



## WHAT IS THE POINT OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

One thing that's worth noting is that we're told in [James 3:7-8](#) (and most of us know from experience) that the tongue is the hardest part of the body to tame. Perhaps God wants to demonstrate the mighty power of His Spirit in us by tackling the toughest part first. Or perhaps God is deliberately challenging the reluctance we can have to obey Him in things that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable and that seem foolish. The issue of tongues can reveal whether we are really willing to submit to His Lordship by trusting and obeying Him despite our natural inclinations.

What is clear from Scripture, however, is that God intends this gift to be a help and blessing for Christians. As we'll see in the next session, there is an aspect of the gift of tongues that is for the building up of the whole church. Not all believers will minister to the body in this way, but every Spirit-filled Christian can benefit from the personal use of the gift of tongues. In fact, every Christian should seek this gift as something that is intended to be a great blessing. For example:

- In [1 Corinthians 14:4](#), we see that **“one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself”** (see also [Jude 20](#)). Who wouldn't want that—and for which of His children would God not want that?
- Whether we are praying or praising God, we can sometimes feel limited by our lack of knowledge or our inability to find the right words. Thankfully, the gift of tongues releases us from these constraints, enabling us to express what is deep within, beyond what we can articulate—or perhaps even perceive—ourselves (see also [1 Corinthians 2:10b-13](#)).

In [1 Corinthians 14:14-15](#), the apostle Paul says, **“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.”** When we pray (or sing) in tongues, it's not produced by our minds, but is instead the Holy Spirit enabling our spirit to pray. This doesn't mean, however, that we should “switch off” our minds. Instead, we allow the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the areas on which our spirit is focusing as we pray or praise. It's both assuring and exciting to be led by the Spirit in this way:

**“...the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”** [Romans 8:6 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Paul makes it clear in [1 Corinthians 14:18](#) how important the use of the gift of tongues was to him personally (**“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you”**). His exhortation at the beginning of that chapter is to **“eagerly desire...spiritual gifts,”** ([1 Corinthians 14:1 - 1984](#)) and though his main goal is to encourage prophecy, he implicitly affirms the gift of tongues, expecting that believers will be progressing from just using this self-edifying gift to moving in gifts that build up the church.

## MUST I SPEAK IN TONGUES?

Some Christians are nervous about the gifts of the Holy Spirit because they are uncomfortable with the supernatural in general. This can especially be the case with the gift of tongues as, even more than other gifts, it is so obviously outside of natural, rational experience.

Although speaking in tongues is the most common initial evidence (in Scripture and experience) of having been baptized in the Spirit, it is possible to have been filled with the Spirit but not yet have spoken in tongues. This is because, despite the fact that we now have the ability to speak in tongues, we must (as with every God-given gift) step out in faith to do it.

[Romans 5:5](#) tell us that **“God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us,”** and Jesus tells us that **“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”** ([Matthew 12:34](#)). It is, therefore, not surprising that the tangible experience of God's Spirit being poured upon us, and the further assurance this brings us of His love, results in a bubbling up in praise and thanksgiving to God that our natural words can't express.

## HOW DO I SPEAK IN TONGUES?

It is at this point that, as mentioned above, we must do our part. Without the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we can't speak in tongues, but He won't make us do it or do it through us without our willing participation. Prejudice, fear, or a lack of confidence can be hindrances at this point, but if we are open and expectant, we will find ourselves prompted and enabled to form syllables or words that are not in our natural language. We should step out by giving voice to them.

**“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:4**

We will not understand the words we are saying, nor should we expect to do so. However, once we begin, we should expect the language to start flowing naturally.

And when you've received this wonderful gift, use it! Knowing how it benefits us in our communion with God and builds us up, we should be intentional about praying and singing in tongues every day. What's more, this shows God that we appreciate and value His gracious gift.

## CONTINUALLY BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the gateway to a life of being continually filled with the Spirit. In [Ephesians 5:18](#), Paul exhorts:

**“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,”**

A fuller way to translate this from the original Greek would be to say, “Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.” Receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit is to be a way of life for us, not just a one-off experience to look back on.

It's interesting that the lifestyle we are to adopt is contrasted with drunkenness. A drunkard stays drunk by continually turning to alcohol. We, however, are to stay filled with the Spirit by continually asking for and receiving more of Him:

**“...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:13**

We'll look more in the next session at what it means to live a Spirit-filled life. In doing so, we will see the transforming effect the fruit of the Holy Spirit has on our lives individually, and the transforming effect the gifts of the Spirit have on the Church and the world.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Joy Unspeakable: Power & Renewal in the Holy Spirit* by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
2. *You Shall Receive Power: Receiving the Presence of the Holy Spirit into Your Life* by Derek Prince
3. Supplemental Reading: “Baptism in the Spirit” by Arthur Wallis

