

Spirit-Created Unity

Those who try to associate the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the conversion process run into some first-class confusion. No surprise, for on what subject have we not been confused? First, there is the confusion about who saves us if one believes that the Spirit saves us by a work in our hearts. We wrote about that in our previous essay. Next, there is perplexity in discerning a pattern or sequence, whether the sinner received Holy Spirit baptism before water baptism or after it, or apart from either or both. Then there is the question whether Holy Spirit baptism is essential to salvation. And finally (for this essay; countless other questions arise), how is the Spirit baptism discerned -- by miraculous demonstrations, sight, feelings, or by faith in God's promises?

Several specific functions of the Spirit are mentioned in the scriptures, some of which will be dealt with in later studies, if the Lord wills. In general, the Spirit was to initiate, guide, and bring to maturity the spiritual kingdom as it superseded the fleshly kingdom. The earthly kingdom was limited to Israel; the new kingdom would include "all flesh," a term meaning both the nation of Israel and all other nations. Before the Lord would return in confirmation of the kingdom, the gospel would be preached in all nations. By it, all believing peoples in all nations would be brought into the one spiritual nation of God. Through the direction of the Spirit, all these find unity in Christ. *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free -- and all were made to drink of the same Spirit"* (1 Cor. 12:13). Thus *"the unity of the Spirit"* was to be accomplished. In short, the purpose of the Spirit was not to save but rather to verify that all the saved were in the one body which is the "called out," the "ekklesia," the church. With that in mind let us now look at the outpourings of the Spirit mentioned in the record.

God *"anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power"* (Acts 10:38), not to save him but to identify and empower him as his spokesman (Matt. 3:13-17).

Among men, the first and most dramatic baptism of the Holy Spirit was of the apostles in Jerusalem on Pentecost. It assuredly was not to save them or to testify to their salvation. It was to convince the great crowd of people that the apostles were spokesmen for God, inspired to speak with authority. There was one united source of instruction and direction. Their message would be the one to be preached to all nations. The word from Peter that day was, *"The promise is to you and your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him"* (Acts 2:39). Through the proclamation of their inspired message, the Spirit would create a unified body of believers.

Philip went down to Samaria and proclaimed Christ. *"But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women"* (Acts 8:12; read all the context). With their baptism in water, we can be sure that they also received the gift of the Holy Spirit that Peter promised on Pentecost (Acts 2:38) though the Spirit had not fallen on them in a discernable manner. Samaria was a part of the divided kingdom and the Samaritans were Jews mixed with other ancestry. Would they be forming a division of the spiritual kingdom apart from the Spirit-approved apostles and the Jerusalem church? The

apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria, and upon their laying hands on the Samaritans (whether on all of them or a representative group is not certain) the Holy Spirit fell on them in a visible manner. Did that save them? Was it to give them some sort of second blessing? No, they had already obeyed the gospel and had received the gift of the Spirit. This was to convince all that the Samaritan believers were acceptable and in unity with the apostles and the church in Jerusalem. There were no separate denominations in Jerusalem and Samaria.

At this point the gospel had not been taken to the Gentiles -- the nations. This would be a big step away from Jewish history, law, and social tradition. Peter had included mention of "all flesh" on Pentecost but no practical application had been made so far. To further prepare for the outreach to Gentiles, an apostle to the Gentiles was chosen and verified by the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and filling him with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9), giving him the signs of an apostle including "*wonders and mighty works*" (2 Cor. 12:12). His reception of the Spirit was not to save him or prove his salvation for he had obeyed the inspired direction to "*Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16). It was to identify him as God's authentic spokesman.

The fascinating account of the first Gentile conversion is given in Acts 10 & 11. This was a big step which called for the sending of the Jew, Peter, to the house of a Gentile, Cornelius, contrary to law and his ingrained culture. He would surely be called on the carpet for it by the Jewish disciples. After receiving convincing visions and an invitation from Cornelius, Peter went to the house of this Gentile, but he took some Jewish brethren along as witnesses to back him up. To Cornelius and his gathered household, Peter explained the reason for his visit and then began proclaiming the gospel to them. "*While he was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God.*" Did that outpouring of the Spirit save them or prove that they were already saved? Since it was received before water baptism, does that prove that water baptism is not essential? By no means. All evidence points to the purpose being to convince everyone concerned that Gentiles would be acceptable in the one body. Peter's next response is reminiscent of Pentecost, "*Then Peter declared, 'Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.*" The baptism of the Spirit was no part of Cornelius' conversion except to indicate that God would accept an obedient Gentile. This Gentile household would not be a Gentile denomination distinguished from a Jewish denomination in Jerusalem or a denomination of mixed-race Samaritans. They were added to the same body.

An eloquent and sincere man by the name of Apollos, preaching belief in the Christ who was to come according to John the Baptist's message, had converted some in Ephesus. Were those "pre-gospel" conversions directed by the Holy Spirit so that they were baptized into the one body? They were not. When Paul came to Ephesus, he inquired of them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. They had not. After Paul taught them further, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. "*And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied*" (Acts 18:24 - 19:7). In that manner the Spirit gave assurance that they were in harmony with the apostles and all other disciples of

Jesus. They were neither saved by the Spirit baptism nor told what to do by the Spirit. But through a Spirit-guided apostle, the "unity of the Spirit in one body" was perpetuated.

There were other conversions where mention is made of baptisms but not of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit directed Philip to the Ethiopian treasurer, and Paul was directed into Europe to Philippi where he converted Lydia and the jailor and their households (Acts 8 & 16). Why did not the Spirit save them directly instead of sending men on long journeys to preach to them? Why have evangelists and missionaries? The answer is clear. The Spirit converts and saves through the gospel message instead of a direct operation on the heart of individuals or by giving individual revelations. Yes, the Lord did open Lydia's heart. Was it so she could be saved directly? No, Paul preached to her. Her heart was opened to give HEED to the message the Spirit sent Paul to proclaim to her.

Even though these persons received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism, why was there no evident baptism of the Spirit in these cases? These people were in categories that the Spirit had already approved as eligible for the one body -- Jews, proselytes, mixed breed Jews, and Gentiles who had obeyed the gospel. By physical manifestations, the Spirit had already testified to the acceptance of all these categories in the one body. That testimony still stands today.

This is but a skeleton around which you may add substance by reading those records of conversions and the work of the Spirit in each of them.

It is not our role to create unity in one body. The Spirit does that. It is our responsibility to recognize and "*maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit..*" (Eph. 4:1-6). This unity is not built on agreement on the "seven ones of unity," as some have interpreted Paul's teaching. We can not expect all persons to be fully informed and agree on all facets of those doctrines; neither is that the basis of unity. The basis of unity is Christ. All who are baptized into Christ are in the one body which cannot be divided into two bodies or many bodies. In order to refuse fellowship of those in Christ, one must necessarily separate himself from Christ. But tragically, we have felt free to reject each other as though it were commanded of us. The Spirit has never directed believers to leave one group of disciples to start a "one, true" church. That does not reflect the unity of the Spirit.

When I teach that some activities of the Holy Spirit have served their time and purpose, I am not saying that he no longer works among us. So please stay with me for more on the subject, if the Lord wills. []

(Cecil Hook; March 2004)