

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

by Charles Ewing Brown

The sermon explores the significance and biblical basis of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a distinct and essential experience for believers following their conversion.

Scripture: Matthew 9:2, Luke 7:47, John 1:11, John 14:16, John 15:3, Acts 2:3, Acts 8:17, Acts 9:17, Acts 10:44, Acts 19:6, Romans 8:1

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Sanctification"

Description

Charles Ewing Brown preaches on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the experiences of believers in the ancient church who were baptized and received the Holy Ghost through the laying on of hands. The sermon delves into various instances in the New Testament where believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit, highlighting the evidence of their prior conversion and regeneration. Brown discusses the significance of the disciples' journey towards sanctification and the need for believers to experience the second crisis of Spirit baptism for a deeper connection with God.

Transcript

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In the ancient church believers were baptized, and after baptism hands were laid upon them for the reception of the Holy Ghost. In New Testament times, they were taught that the sinner was regenerated, justified, converted, or saved before his baptism, and his baptism was a symbol of that conversion. Later, hands were laid upon him, in order that he might experience the second crisis. "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:17).

At Ephesus, "when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them" (Acts 19:6). At Damascus, "Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 9:17).

Sometimes the Holy Ghost fell without the laying on of hands, but subsequent to conversion: "And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:3-4). The household of Cornelius received the same blessing in the same way: "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the

Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 10:44).

In every one of these instances there is reasonable evidence that the persons thus baptized with the Holy Ghost were previously converted -- were truly regenerated believers. The evidence of this is tedious to gather and present, but is obvious to any candid reader. Concerning the disciples before the day of Pentecost, no man would need fear to go to judgment with even less assurance of justification than they enjoyed. They were sons of God. "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). One of these disciples, the Apostle John, said: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:11-13). "For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you" (Matt. 10:20).

Even at that time, Christ had power to forgive sin: "And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy: Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" (Matt. 9:2). Of the woman who washed his feet, Christ said: "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. . . . And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?" (Luke 7:47-49). "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

The disciples were acknowledged as saved by Christ: "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:3, 5).

If they were in Christ they had no condemnation: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1); "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17); "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not" (I John 3:6).

Christ had called the apostles to preach before they were baptized by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother . . . and he said unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:18-19). "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16). "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them. . . . And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils" (Matt. 10:5, 7-8).

It is certainly straining a point to say that men called and sent by Christ to preach and cast out devils were not even converted themselves. These God-called men "went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:12-13).

To these converted men Christ said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth WHOM THE WORLD CANNOT RECEIVE" (John 14:16-17). Notice this is an experience that sinners cannot obtain. The world cannot receive the Spirit, although the world can receive salvation, or justification, by faith. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (14:26). "For if I go not away,

the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (16:7).

Long before these men received the baptism of the Holy Ghost Jesus said of them: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19); "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (17:14).

Although the disciples were regenerated men before Pentecost, they were not yet perfected in love. They had tormenting fear. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matt. 8:26). In the hour of Christ's passion "they all forsook him, and fled" (Mark 14:50). They were afraid when they saw Christ walking on the sea (John 6:19). Frivolous people will regard these references as trivial, but it must be remembered that the New Testament is a very brief book and every one of these historical notes was put in for a special purpose. In this case they seem to connect with the words of the Apostle John after he had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost and spent a long life in the serenity of that "perfect love," when he wrote: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18).

These regenerated men personally called by Christ to preach the gospel were not yet wholly sanctified, and for these Christ prayed: "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:9, 17). The Apostle John often uses the word truth as a synonym for reality. The meaning of the passage is: Make them holy in reality, as they are already holy in name, or ceremonially.

Some people have stumbled over the fact that some of the modern versions read "consecrate" instead of sanctify." This, however, is due to a common misunderstanding of the word consecrate. Here it is synonymous with the word sanctify. The first definition which Webster gives of consecrate is: "To make, or declare, sacred or holy." Notice that in the modern texts it is not said that the apostles should consecrate themselves, an expression conformable to the popular meaning of consecrate. On the contrary, the modern versions generally read "consecrate them" (imperative mood). That is, God is asked to consecrate them, and that is exactly the same meaning as that of the versions which say "sanctify them."

However, some of the most scholarly of the modern versions read: "Make them holy," e.g., Weymouth, and Ferrar Fenton. Use of the term consecrate here would not disturb a scholar in the least, for he would understand clearly that when God consecrates a man that means he sanctifies him. It is a great pity, however, that the scholarly translators have caused so many readers to stumble by using a common religious word in a way unfamiliar to laymen.

When Christ says that he consecrates himself, it means that he devotes himself to die on the cross and to suffer for the sanctification of believers, as well as the salvation of sinners. These prayers of Christ for his disciples and his accompanying promises to them received their fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost, when they were all filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:4). This Holy Spirit is the sanctifier: "Being sanctified by the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:16).

Regarding Cornelius, we have no doubt that he was like all others on the record -- a saved man before he was baptized with the Holy Spirit. The evidence would completely convince any believer not prejudiced by a dogmatic bias. Briefly we note a few facts about him. He was God-fearing and godly (devout -- eusebes), praying "to God alway" (Acts 10:2). If one should hear a minister speak thus of a dead man at his funeral would not he assume that the minister thought the man to have been saved? Cornelius saw a

vision (Acts 10:3, 30-31) just as did Paul at his conversion (9:3-6). In this vision he asked for guidance, as did Paul. The heavenly visitant assured Cornelius that his prayers had been heard -- he obtained a definite and an unquestioned answer to prayer. How could he still be a sinner? All the evidence indicates that Cornelius was a convert of Hellenic Judaism, and like multitudes of others, had not become an orthodox Pharisaic Jew. Why all this repetitious insistence in Luke's narrative emphasizing the godliness of Cornelius? Is it necessary for a man to be godly in order to repent and become converted? Far from it. Jesus called publicans and sinners. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Cornelius did not repent at this time; he was a devout man. A man does not need to be devout in order to become converted. But it is necessary for a man to be saved in order to be worthy of receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost. And Luke is doing his utmost to prove that Cornelius and his friends were already saved, and thus prepared and worthy to receive the Holy Spirit, "whom the world cannot receive" (John 14:17).

All other examples noted in the Scriptures, except Paul (Acts 9:17-18), were baptized before they received the Holy Spirit. In the case of Cornelius, the baptism of the Spirit came first to convince Jewish Christians that these Gentiles were previously accepted of God, as Peter had expressly stated (10:35). In the case of the others whose experience is recorded, while the total number is few, the fact that in every case they were already Christian believers, as attested by their baptism, is overwhelming evidence that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience reserved for Christians only and is not bestowed upon the world.

The people of Samaria believed in Christ (Acts 8:12), experienced a perfectly amazing revival (vss. 6-8), and were baptized in water (vs. 12). Then in order to emphasize the distinction between the two cases, (vs. 26) two other men came to lead the people into this second crisis of Spirit baptism (vss. 14-17) subsequent to their conversion and water baptism.

The disciples at Ephesus were old believers, who had not -- like many today -- understood their privilege of receiving Spirit baptism. Even here Paul insisted on water baptism first.

These numerous cases where people were first baptized with water present an unbreakable argument for the second crisis of salvation. First, nearly all evangelical Christians, in America at least, believe that water baptism is a symbol of spiritual regeneration and that baptism follows regeneration. Now, if water baptism follows regeneration it stands to reason that people baptized with the Holy Spirit subsequent to their water baptism were necessarily baptized with the Spirit after their conversion. Such were most of the cases in the New Testament (for example, Acts 2:4; 8:16-17; 19:5-6).

However, the argument is fully as strong in the case of Sacramentarian Christians who believe that penitents are regenerated in the very act of baptism and by means of baptism as a sacrament. For if this is true, then the baptism of the Spirit occurs after a lapse of time subsequent to the regeneration in water baptism. And this lapse of time might as well be several years as several minutes. This is exactly what the Catholic church holds; for confirmation is a continuation of the form of laying on hands for the baptism of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts. (See references in *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*, by J. G. Lawson, pp. 46, 50 ff.)

That the interval of time between the water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit may be stretched out for years is the teaching and practice of the Catholic church. In ancient times, when the church baptized adults they proceeded at once to lay hands upon them and to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in obedience to the example of the apostles given in the Book of Acts. Later on, when the baptism

of infants was introduced, it was thought inappropriate to expect an infant to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with all that vast blessing implies of purity and perfection. Consequently, the Catholic church, judging the interval of time between the baptizing with water and the baptism of the Spirit to be unimportant, postpones the spiritual baptism until the child comes to the age of accountability, sometime between its twelfth and fourteenth years.

This ceremony of the reception of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic church is called confirmation, following the statement of Paul in II Corinthians: "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (1:21-22). The Latin version reads confirmat (or stablisheth) us.

In this way it can be demonstrated that the doctrine of two definite crises in the work of salvation has been exactly the same in form in the teaching of the historic Christian church for nineteen hundred years. We believe completely in the doctrine of the Catholic church that salvation consists of two crises; first, regeneration; and, second, an anointing of the Spirit. The only difference is that we believe that these experiences must be more than formal ceremonies and must be guaranteed by something more definite than the ritual of the church, namely, by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the seeker. But we insist that this doctrine of the second crisis has been taught in form throughout the whole history of the church. What we now urge is a recovery of the meaning and spirit of that teaching in living Christian experience.

The accounts given in the Book of Acts concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit have been a source of confusion and bewilderment to the technical theologians from time out of mind. They described a condition of affairs which had not only gone out of existence but had actually been forgotten. They were like the bones of some ancient dinosaur found by an ignorant man in thick layers of heavy rock. How they ever got there would be a source of puzzlement to him as long as he lived. The old-time orthodox theologians invented a clever little theory which relieved them of the necessity of any realistic interpretation of these records. They said that the apostolic age was an age of miracles, when anything might happen; but no one is under an obligation to explain a miracle. "Besides," they said, "it never can happen again." Therefore all these strange fossils in the solid rock of Holy Scripture really required no explanation and admitted no application to our own time.

No one could be more hostile to modern religious liberalism than I am. Nevertheless, common honesty demands that we conservatives concede to the liberal critics an honest willingness to construe the stories in the apostolic records in a completely realistic manner. Anything that could happen then could happen today under similar conditions, so they admit. The tragedy of such liberal interpretation, however, is that they do not believe that the baptism of the Spirit recorded in Acts represents anything more than the hysterical excitement of ignorant men in a superstitious age. Insofar as the liberal critics allow any real operation of the Spirit in the event, they tend to follow the orthodox theory that there was something special about it not applicable to our times.

We refuse to accept either of these interpretations. We cannot believe that these numerous baptisms of the Spirit recorded in the Book of Acts are without meaning. These stories are there for our inspiration and example. Even the early Wesleyan theologians were so far misled by the technical theologians that they failed to put proper emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

They tended to interpret sanctification as a crisis experience, it is true, but found most of their proof texts in other parts of the New Testament. The technical theologians have been inclined to minify the spiritual application of these stories to our own time by pressing the idea that this baptism of the Spirit was something special for that age, in which the people received something unique -- special gifts such as tongues and the like. This argument is largely canceled out by the fact that the scriptural description of that baptism of the Holy Spirit specifically describes it as a purification of the heart. Peter was a better theologian than any modern critic, and that is the way he described the baptism of the Holy Ghost -- as "purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). This expression -- "purifying the heart" -- proves beyond cavil that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is indeed a redemptive work of grace intimately linked with the atonement of Christ. There is a second crisis of salvation.

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