

The Holy Spirit Before Pentecost

by David Shelby Corlett

The sermon explores the work and place of the Holy Spirit before His official advent on the day of Pentecost, highlighting the significance of Pentecost in the Christian dispensation.

Scripture: Genesis 1:2, Luke 1:15, John 20:22, Acts 2:33, Acts 4:31, Acts 8:17, Acts 9:17, Acts 10:44, Acts 19:6

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Pentecost Experience"

Description

David Shelby Corlett delves into the work and place of the Holy Spirit before and after His official advent on the day of Pentecost. He explains how the Holy Spirit has always been active in the world, from creation to the Old Testament period, preparing special messengers and working in the life and ministry of Jesus. Corlett emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit's manifestation and indwelling following Pentecost, highlighting the transformation and empowerment experienced by the disciples and early believers. He discusses various instances in the Acts of the Apostles where different groups received the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the importance of this second crisis experience for regenerated believers.

Transcript

We may better comprehend our privileges as Christian believers if we briefly consider the work and place of the Holy Spirit before His official advent on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has always been in the world, for He is God. He was active in the work of God throughout the Old Testament. It was the Spirit of God who moved upon the face of the waters bringing order out of chaos, hence in creation He was the Spirit of life. He strove with the hearts of people of the antediluvian period. In Israel His work is manifested through fitting and inspiring men to fill special places of leadership such as judges, kings, prophets or special messengers. The statement is often made, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him." He was the source of inspiration by which holy men spake and wrote the Scriptures which are "given by inspiration of God."

The people of the Old Testament period and even in the days of John the Baptist enjoyed some visitation of the Holy Spirit, but not in any manner comparable to His manifestation and indwelling following Pentecost. He strove with and convicted men of sin in the former dispensation, but it was not as deep and pungent as today. "The Old Testament conversion was a moral change wrought by the will of the penitent, influenced by the Spirit of God, rather than a new creation or a new birth. . . . To assert that John's (the Baptist) converts were spiritually changed is to declare that John lost in a few months more regenerated

probationers for Jesus than Methodism ever lost in her entire history ... There was no assurance of acceptance with God certified to the penitent soul, no witness of the Spirit ... Old Testament piety was characterized by bondage, the New by freedom ... There was no permanent state of reconciliation, because there was no permanent basis for it in an atonement made once for all and all-sufficient during all time ... There was no conscious indwelling of the Spirit in Old Testament saints because there was no new spiritual man in which to abide ... Entire sanctification except in a ceremonial sense was not enjoyed by the Old Testament saints. This could not be in the absence of the indwelling Sanctifier ... It will be easy to find an exception to each point which I have made, as Enoch, who had assurance; David, the joy of forgiveness; and Isaiah, who was sanctified by the symbolic coal of fire laid upon his lips. But the exception proves the rule" (Steele, Gospel of the Comforter, pages 32-34).

In the early history of the New Testament the Spirit prepared special messengers; John the Baptist, Elisabeth and Zacharias were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:15, 41, 67).

The Holy Spirit had a large place in the life and ministry of Jesus. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18), was anointed by the Spirit following His baptism (Luke 3:22), was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (Luke 4:1), wrought miracles by the Spirit (Matt. 12:28). Through the Spirit He offered Himself to God (Heb. 9:14), by the power of the Spirit He was raised from the dead (Rom. 8:11).

John the Baptist gave positive testimony to the work of Jesus in baptizing people with the Holy Spirit. Jesus made some very significant statements concerning the work of the Spirit, definitely stating that the Spirit would be an inner well of water, rivers of living water flowing from within believers. His statements concerning the coming of the Comforter were prophetic and were all fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples on the day of Pentecost.

The disciples were with Jesus during His public ministry. This was a period of transition from the Old to the New Dispensation. No doubt they enjoyed a better state of grace or relationship with Christ than they themselves realized. Jesus emphasized that they were branches of the true Vine, that their names were written in heaven, and that they were not of the world even as He was not of the world. In all of their earthly relationships with Jesus they were contacting the Holy Spirit, "but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." "How the Spirit was with the disciples and not in them may be explained by the fact that Christ, whose infinite capacity monopolized the Spirit, was with them, and so the Spirit was with them in His person. But this monopoly Christ did not carry to heaven in His ascension. 'He breathed on his disciples, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost' (John 20:22). This they needed to sustain their faith in the interval between His resurrection and the full outpouring of the Spirit at the coming Pentecost ... We cannot accept the theory that the breath of Christ did not in any sense communicate the Spirit, but rather that it was a symbol and prophecy of the future Pentecostal gift. We prefer to say that something real was imparted, but far less than the fullness of the Spirit ... Christ's presence in that hour was a slight fulfillment, an earnest, of His manifest coming and permanent abiding in them in His representative, the Paraclete. This corresponds to the witness of adoption as stated in Paul's epistles, especially Romans 8:16 and Galatians 4:6. It is quite evident that the apostles were previous to this hour in a state of salvation, but as servants rather than sons crying, 'Abba Father.' ... They were manifestly in a state of acceptance with God, but like the Old Testament saints, destitute of the gospel blessing of the direct witness of the Spirit to divine adoption, the special prerogative of the New Testament believers ... Bengel well says that this bestowment of the Spirit is 'the earnest of Pentecost' " (Steele, Gospel of the Comforter, pages 155 to 158). And Doctor Steele further gives this significant statement concerning this initial impartation of the Holy Spirit: "As God finished the first creation by breathing the life-giving Spirit into

Adam's body, so Christ finished the new creation of His disciples when 'He breathed on them and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost' " (Jesus Exultant, page 223).

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come" all that had been prophesied concerning the coming of the Comforter and the fullness of His presence was fulfilled. The disciples were then "Baptized with the Holy Ghost," "endued with power from on high" and had their reception of "power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." And this was indeed a memorable occasion, not only for the disciples who were among the one hundred and twenty, but for the entire Christian church. It was a time in which Christ invested all His power and authority over the church into the hands of the Holy Spirit. It signified the completion of Christ's atoning work, when He "received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost" and "shed forth this which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Hence Pentecost was the manifestation of the complete victory of Christ over sin and the powers of evil, and the shedding forth of the fullness of the Holy Spirit was Christ's gift to the church enabling them to share in His victory.

The one hundred and twenty who had tarried for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were on the day of Pentecost "filled with the Holy Ghost." This great experience was both personal and collective. The whole group was filled with the Spirit and the influence of that collective experience was felt throughout the city of Jerusalem and because of the many visitors in the city attending the feast the influence was carried to many parts of the known world. But it was a personal experience as well. Each of this group received a personal fullness of the Spirit which settled many of their personal spiritual problems. It transformed these disciples from weak, fearful, hesitant believers into powerful leaders and positive exponents of the gospel of Christ. It took from them their seeking for positions and their concern for self-interest and gave them a passion for the world, and an enthusiasm to spread the gospel to others that persecution could not stop, and threatenings could not still. It brought them into a clear understanding of Christ and His relationship to their hearts and of their individual responsibility to witness to Him as the world's only Savior. Pentecost, or the experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, "purified their hearts by faith." It was the fulfillment of that "earnest of Pentecost" which was theirs when the Lord breathed upon them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost"; for to the disciples this baptism with the Spirit was not the first bestowal of the Spirit for regeneration, it was the definite communication of the Holy Spirit in His fullness and power by the glorified Lord. The "first experience with the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22) "is connected with the assurance of pardon and sonship. The disciples needed this after the checkered actions and feelings which surrounded the arrest, trial and crucifixion. But the experience described in the second chapter of Acts is the fullness of the gospel blessing, the sanctifying and energizing baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire which is the heritage of all believers, but which is bestowed subsequent to regeneration" (J. B. Chapman, Herald of Holiness, June 15, 1934).

The term "filled with the Holy Spirit" is used in this connection. Some have suggested that since this term is used repeatedly in the Acts of the Apostles as a more or less permanent state of fullness it is therefore not to be considered a crisis in experience, rather it is a condition of life to be recognized and appropriated without a definite crisis. Let us briefly consider a few of the occasions where the term "filled or full of the Spirit" is used. Peter was "filled with the Holy Ghost," when he presented his defense before the Sanhedrin (ch. 4:8). The seven deacons were men "full of the Holy Ghost" (ch. 6:5). Stephen, the first martyr was "full of the Holy Ghost" at the time of his death (ch. 7:55). Each of these statements, to which several others might be added, indicate a state of life in which these people were living. It was a state of fullness which they enjoyed because of their having been filled in a crisis experience such as at Pentecost and as a result of their continued obedience to God. One may live in the fullness of the Spirit, or to use a

commonly accepted term, may live a Spirit-filled life. But it is certain that there first must be a crisis in experience wherein the child of God is filled with the Spirit as definitely as the disciples and others were filled on the day of Pentecost, before he can live the Spirit-filled life.

This term "filled with the Spirit" is used also to designate a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit to undergird and prepare the newly formed church to meet the emergency of the first outstanding persecution. A study of the events of the fourth chapter of Acts, and especially of the group of praying believers (vs. 23-31) will reveal the fact that at least some of the disciples were present as were also others who had been filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, yet "when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." There perhaps were some here who had not enjoyed the Pentecostal outpouring, to them this may have been their second crisis; but to the disciples and others who had been filled with the Spirit, this was a special filling or outpouring of the Spirit to equip them to meet the emergency now before them. This was not a repetition of Pentecost. It was a special endowment for a special occasion.

The term "filled with the Spirit" is used to designate that second crisis of experience whereby the Christian believer is sanctified wholly, and for "the permanent gracious presence in the soul of the Holy Spirit, in His fullness, not as an extraordinary gift, but as a person having the right of way through the soul and body, having the keys to even the inmost rooms, illuminating every closet and pervading every crevice of the nature, filling the entire being with holy love" (Steele, A Defense of Christian Perfection, page 110).

There are several incidents recorded in the Acts of the Apostles in which different groups received the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. It may be interesting and helpful for us to give some passing consideration to these events and by so doing we may be enabled more clearly to understand the work of the Spirit throughout this Christian dispensation.

Note first, the experience of the converts at Samaria (ch. 8:5-25). The evangelist on this occasion was Philip, who had been appointed as one of the seven deacons and as such he was -- a man "full of the Holy Ghost" (ch. 6:3-5). Under the preaching of this Spirit-filled evangelist the Lord wrought a mighty revival. Many were baptized by Philip in the name of Jesus. It is evident from Philip's dealing with the eunuch of Ethiopia that he baptized only those who gave clear testimony concerning their faith in Christ. And from the statement of Peter to Simon it is evident that only those whose hearts were right in the sight of God had part or lot in receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (vs.18-21). So these Samaritan believers were genuinely regenerated, that is, their hearts were right in the sight of God, and as Christian believers they had been baptized. The apostles were anxious that these Samaritan converts should receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and as it appears they thought it necessary to have this fullness of the Spirit imparted by direct apostolic contact, so they went to Samaria, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost, laid their hands on them, and as a result the Holy Ghost fell on these Samaritans. Since all New Testament regeneration must be the same, these Samaritan Christians must have been regenerated by the Spirit and enjoyed His presence in adoption and as the Spirit of life before He fell on them as a result of the prayer of the apostles and the laying on of their hands.

Note second, the conversion of Saul (ch. 9:1-18). While there has been some dispute as to where Saul was converted, it seems quite clear that a radical change took place as he was stricken to the ground on the road near to Damascus. He was changed from an ardent opposer of the Christian faith to a believer, obedient to the Lord (v. 6). The second crisis came when because of the direction of the Lord Ananias was sent to this praying believer, that Saul might receive his sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost (vs. 11,

17). The fact that one portion of this mission was fulfilled, namely that Saul's sight was restored, is evidence that he also was filled with the Holy Spirit. Saul was evidently regenerated by the Spirit and changed from an opposer to a praying, obedient believer before he was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Third, note the experience of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (ch. 10:1-48). Cornelius was a devout Roman who through contact with the Jews had been brought to know God. There are evidences that he was at least an Old Testament saint who was a devout man, giving much alms and praying to God, and that he was accepted with God. But there seems to be evidence also that he had received some New Testament light as is indicated in Peter's statement in verses 36 and 37. "This word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ ... this word, I say, ye know." So Cornelius was not totally ignorant of Jesus Christ and the message of peace through Jesus. Some have insisted that Cornelius was only an Old Testament saint and not a New Testament Christian basing their argument on the words of Peter: "Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (ch. 11:14). They therefore insist that Cornelius was not saved before the preaching of Peter. Perhaps one cannot be dogmatic here, but it seems that we should certainly limit the meaning of the word "saved" if it were confined to the work of regeneration or even to include the baptism with the Holy Spirit. For in reality to be saved includes more than the forgiveness of sins and the fullness of the Holy Spirit, it includes the entire process of salvation from the time one is regenerated until he is safely settled within the gates of pearl. So Peter's message was not limited to one experience of being saved, but rather he emphasized the message of salvation which would not only deliver a person from sin and sinning here but bring him safely to glory. So we believe that Cornelius was not only an Old Testament saint and an expectant believer, rather he knew something of the message of peace through Jesus Christ and however dimly he was conscious of the work of the Spirit in His regenerating power, nevertheless Cornelius was a New Testament Christian, a candidate for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Note the manner in which the Holy Spirit came on these Gentiles. It was not through the method used with the Samaritans, the laying on of the hands of the apostles, but He fell on them as Peter was speaking. This pouring out of the gift of the Holy Ghost was the same kind of baptism as occurred at Pentecost. Just as surely as the baptism with the Holy Spirit was something additional to the regeneration of the disciples, so in the house of Cornelius "the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning" (ch. 11:15). And according to Peter's testimony (ch. 15:8, 9) the same work of heart purity accompanied the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles as on the disciples at Pentecost. We therefore conclude that the baptism with the Holy Spirit was a second spiritual crisis in the life of Cornelius in which his heart was purified by faith.

It is interesting to note that the term "baptism with the Holy Ghost" is used for the last time in the scripture in connection with this account of His being poured out on the Gentiles (ch. 11:16). Some have therefore argued that the term is not to be used in this dispensation. But note the many terms used to describe what actually occurred at the house of Cornelius: "fell on," "poured out," "received" (ch. 15:44-47), "baptized" and "gift" (ch. 16:16, 17). In view of these facts it is as scriptural to use the term "baptism" as any other term here used. However it is well always to state again that we are emphasizing an experience, not a word, and any scriptural term should be acceptable to us.

Fourth, note the experience of the Ephesian believers (Acts 19:1-6). There has been considerable dispute concerning whether these Ephesian disciples were converted before the visit of Paul, or whether they were regenerated by the experience here related. Much emphasis by certain teachers has been placed upon the scriptural statement, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" While others have emphasized the translation of the American Revised version, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye

believed?" The translation of the Revised Version seems to be more acceptable to the larger number of teachers. Two interpretations may be given to this account. One is that Paul's question, "Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed?" was prompted because of an apparent lack of spiritual life which should be manifested by all Christians. Upon investigation he found that they were not New Testament Christians, but were Old Testament believers, looking forward to Him who should come, that is, to Christ Jesus. When they heard the message concerning Christ they accepted it and were baptized in the name of Jesus, which presupposes the work of the Spirit in regeneration. And subsequent to the act of baptism Paul laid his hands on them and "the Holy Ghost came on them." The other interpretation is that they were Christian believers when Paul found them and that he led them on to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, somewhat through the process stated above. It matters little which interpretation is accepted, the fact remains that they were regenerated believers before the Holy Ghost came on them. And here again the fact is emphasized that the baptism with the Holy Spirit is a crisis experience for the regenerated child of God.

Some have taught that all of these experiences may properly be included in the original promise of Jesus and that as a whole they constitute the fulfillment of the promise, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." While there seems to be little scriptural foundation to this theory it is interesting to note the different groups represented in the accounts just considered. The original day of Pentecost brought the fulfillment of the promise to the Jews, the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit brought the fulfillment to the Samaritans, at the house of Cornelius the Roman Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit, while at Ephesus the Grecian believers received this mighty baptism. In all of the experiences there is this similarity; they were all regenerated believers before they received the baptism with the Holy Spirit as a second crisis experience; and in two instances at least the positive statement is made that this baptism brought purity of heart or entire sanctification. Hence if two groups of believers were purified in heart by the baptism with the Holy Spirit, all who receive Him thus are purified.

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