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course, when it is part of a fuller phrase.So in summary, as Peter explained (Acts 2:33), Christ sent the Spirit at Pentecost, thus making Christ the one who performs this baptism in the Spirit.Consistent in each instance then, Jesus is the baptizer and the Spirit is the medium (or element) with which believers are baptized.MeaningBut what exactly is baptism with the Spirit? What exactly are we talking about when we speak of baptism in the Spirit?The language of baptism provides an analogy, Graham Cole explains,But what is meant by baptize in the expression baptizes with the Holy Spirit? The term has a range of possible meanings including, to dip, to bathe, or to wash (by immersing), or metaphorically, to deluge with or to overwhelm. [T]he expression is metaphorical. [John] the Baptist sees some analogy between his rite and the work of the coming one. His medium is water but the coming ones medium will be the Holy Spirit.In other words, as John baptized people with water, so now Christ baptizes, but the element with which he baptizes is the Holy Spirit. And as we follow the book of Acts, this baptism with the Spirit is equated with receiving the Holy Spirit (see Peters description in Acts 2:38, You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit). The baptism with the Holy Spirit then is, quite simply, that initial reception of the Spirit from Christ.I suspect the language of baptism intentionally corresponds to descriptions elsewhere of Christ pouring out the Spirit (e.g., Acts 2:33; 10:45). Both terms employ water metaphorically to refer to the distribution and reception of the Spirit.Elsewhere in the New Testament, we learn that Spirit baptism is the means by which believers are incorporated into Christ and made part of his body (1 Cor 12:1213). Via the presence of his Spirit, we are united to Christ and experience all the saving benefits found in him (e.g., 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9).Christ's gift of the Spirit to permanently indwell his followers marks a significant redemptive-historical shift (Acts 2:33; John 7:39). As Susanne Calhoun explains,[John] the Baptists prophecy signals a profound transition from the Spirit occasionally anointing and filling rare individuals under the old covenant to the widespread gift of the Spirit for Gods people under the new covenant.FulfillmentDispensationalism holds that God has two distinct redemptive programs for Israel and the church, respectively, consisting of certain promises for Israel and others for the church. To preserve this distinction, more traditional and classical dispensationalists maintain that the baptism of the Spirit is uniquely a possession of the church (in distinction from Israel), and thus nowhere promised to Israel in the Old Testament. For instance, the late dispensational theologian, Charles Ryrie, states,No Old Testament prediction of the baptism [of the Spirit] exists, and our Lord said it would happen for the first time when the Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5).Again, the underlying rationale (or hermeneutic) is the Israel/church distinction. He explains,[Spirit Baptism] was first predicted not in any Old Testament passage but by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11 and parallels). This distinctive ministry served a particular purposeadding people to the body of Christand since the body of Christ is distinctive to this age, then the baptizing work of the Spirit also would be.But this directly contradicts Peters explanation of the events of Pentecost (Acts 2). Having ascended into heaven as the reigning Davidic king (Acts 2:2236), Christ pours out the Holy Spirit on his people (Acts 2:33, cf. 2:14). This outpouring of the Spirit manifests in the recipients speaking various unlearned languages (often translated tongues; Acts 2:413). Elsewhere in Acts, this reception of the Spirit at Pentecost is explicitly referred to as a baptism with the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:45; 11:1517). And, as Peter explains (contrary to Ryrie and other dispensationalists), this Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit fulfills Old Testament expectations.In answer to the crowds question, What does this mean? (Acts 2:12)that is, what just happened; and why are these folks speaking all sorts of languages they dont know?Peter quotes Joel 2:2832 (Acts 2:1421). He concludes, this outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost is what Joel prophesied (Acts 2:16). In other words, the church, this new community of Jesus followers, is the eschatological (end-time) Israel on whom God has now poured out his end-time Spirit, as predicted by prophets like Joel and others (e.g., Ezek 36:2627; 37:114).And this Spirit-filled, end-time Israel will not be confined to Jews only. As the narrative of Acts progresses and the gospel spreads to new regions, this same outpouring of the Spirit occurs among Samaritans (Acts 8:125) and Gentiles as well (Acts 10:111:18; cf. Eph 2:1122; Gal 3:1314, 2829).The case of Cornelius (Acts 10:111:18) is particularly insightful in demonstrating this. In Gods providence, once again its Peter who witnesses these events and provides an explanation. This time the Spirit comes upon Cornelius, a Gentile and God-fearing centurion (Acts 10:4447). The narrativeboth Lukes description of the event (Acts 10:4447) and Peters report of it (Acts 11:1518)intentionally uses language that connects and compares this incident to the initial outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). For instance, identical language is used to describe the Spirits arrival: outpouring (Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 10:45); in both accounts, the Spirits reception is referred to as a baptism (Acts 1:5; 11:16) or gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 10:45); in both cases, the Spirits newly arrived presence manifests in the recipients speaking unlearned languages (Acts 2:113; 10:46). Peters commentary makes the connection explicit (all emphasis is added): Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have (Acts 10:47); the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning, i.e., at Pentecost (Acts 11:15); God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17; see also Peters speech in Acts 15:711).Peters point is that the same gift of the Spirit that was given at Pentecostfulfilling Old Testament prophecies like Joel 2has now been extended to Gentiles as well (and Samaritans too, we might add; Acts 8:125). Pentecost, we might say, has hit the road; its gone mobile, with Acts 8 and Acts 10 being something like a Samaritan Pentecost and Gentile Pentecost, respectively. These events signal the entry of the gospel into Samaritan and Gentile worlds, reflecting the books programmatic statement in Acts 1:8.Second Blessing?Pentecostal theology asserts that the baptism of the Spirit is a second work of grace, distinguished from regeneration and the indwelling of the Spirit, that enables believers to experience increased holiness and endues them with power for Christian service. As the statement of faith of the Assemblies of God, the largest Pentecostal denomination, states, the baptism of the Spirit is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth. In other words, in Pentecostal theology, the baptism of the Spirit is not something that all believers necessarily possess, but is something they must ardently expect and earnestly seek. Furthermore, for most Pentecostals, speaking in other tongues (or languages) serves as the necessary evidence that the baptism of the Spirit has occurred.However, in 1 Corinthians, Paul asserts that every believer has been baptized in the Spirit: For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13). In fact, Pauls entire argument depends on this fact, for he argues for the unity of believers as one body based on their unity in all sharing in the same Spirit. So commentator Anthony Thisleton explains,Any theology that might imply that this one baptism in 13a in which believers were baptized by [or in] one Spirit might mark off some postconversion experience or status enjoyed only by some Christians attacks and undermines Pauls entire argument and emphasis.As Paul says elsewhere, believers all have the one same Spirit (Eph 2:18; 4:4). His presence characterizes every believer without exception, for anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him (Rom 8:9). The Spirit is the believers seal, firstfruits, and guarantee of salvation (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:1314). Moreover, Spirit baptism cannot occur subsequent to conversion and union with Christ since, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:1213, baptism in the Spirit is the means by which we are incorporated into Christ and his body.Thus, nowhere does the New Testament command believers to seek or receive the baptism of the Spirit. Nor can tongues-speaking be its necessary evidence, for as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, not all speak in tongues (1 Cor 12:30; see also vv. 411) despite all having been baptized in the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). As Craig Blomberg aptly concludes,[N]othing is said about the Corinthians having any two-stage experience. If the entire church had been baptized in the Spirit, including the large number of carnal Christians Paul elsewhere rebukes (1 Cor. 3:14), then clearly Spirit-baptism cannot guarantee a certain level of Christian maturity or holiness. And if no one spiritual gift was held by all Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 12:2930), then neither may Spirit-baptism be uniformly equated with the reception of any particular gift of the Spirit.What then of passages like Acts 2:14, 8:1417, and 19:17 in which the Holy Spirit is received by those who are already believers or disciples?Regarding Acts 19:17, most likely these disciples of John the Baptist were not yet believers in Jesus, as indicated by the fact that Paul proceeds to tell them about Jesus and then baptizes them in his name. If this is the case, then Acts 19:17 does not refer to actual believers who received the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion. But even if these were genuine believers, the circumstances in which these individuals found themselves were without question unique and unrepeatable. The peculiarity of the whole ordeal finds its explanation in the fact that these disciples found themselves caught between the times. Like Washington Irving's fictional character Rip Van Winkle who wakes up from a twenty-year nap having missed the American Revolutionary War, these disciples looked to John but had missed the arrival of Jesus to whom John was pointing.The reason the apostles receive the Spirit in Acts 2:14 following their conversion is that they became believers in Jesus prior to the era in which this new ministry of the Holy Spirit began. As Sinclair Ferguson expounds, we ought not to concludethat the disciples experience is paradigmatic for the church, for the obvious reason that they, uniquely, span the period of transition from old to new covenant faith. Their experience is epoch-crossing, and consequently atypical and non-paradigmatic.The delay of the Spirit in Acts 8:1417 most likely occurs in order to allow delegates from among the apostles to first be present for this outpouring of the Spirit, thus providing indubitable proof to the so-far-largely-Jewish church that the Samaritans are now also included. Even within the book of Acts, such incidences are idiosyncratic and thus not normative. Further conversion accountsthe Ethiopian Eunuch, Saul, Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailermake no mention of such delays, or even at times explicitly indicate otherwise (e.g., Acts 2:38; 10:4448; 11:15). Neither, throughout the book, does tongues-speaking always accompany Spirit baptism. Rather, the phenomenon seems to serve a particular function in the outworking story of Acts. First, these tongues indicate the initial outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:113). And second, as Peter and others experienced, tongues served to make clear the Spirits spread to new people groups like the Gentiles (Acts 10:4547).Importantly, Pentecost must be understood as a unique redemptive-historical event. Richard Gaffin elaborates,Pentecostalong with Christs death, resurrection, and ascensionis an essential part in the once-for-all event-complex in the history of redemption that forms the culmination of his saving work. The events in Luke-Acts related to Pentecost have their primary significance in terms of the once-for-all accomplishment of salvation, not its ongoing application. Pentecost belongs to the historia salutis, not the ordo salutis. The significance of Pentecost, then, is not first of all experiential but epochal. Pentecost, as we have seen, does not provide the model or pattern for Holy Spirit baptism understood as a second blessing in addition to salvation by faith, to be sought by all believers but experienced only by some believers in distinction from others. As a climactic event in the history of redemption, Pentecost is constitutive for the church as a whole and so is the basis and has a bearing on the experience of the Spirit of not just some but everyone in the church, of not only some but everyone united to Christ by faith and in that union baptized with the Spirit.In other words, just as the death and resurrection of Christ were one-time events, never to be repeated, so too was Pentecost. We should therefore no more expect Pentecost to be repeated than we expect Christ to be re-crucified and once again raised from the dead. Thats because Pentecostand I include here its Samaritan (Acts 8) and Gentiles expansions (Acts 10)belongs to that sequence of once-and-for-all events whereby Christ accomplished redemption and ushered in a new era of salvation history. Pentecost is a constitutive element of the saving work of Christ, following his incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension (see Acts 2:33). This side of Pentecost, we partake in what it accomplished. But we should no more think of this along the lines of a repetition of Pentecost any more than we should think of our participation with Christ in his death and resurrection (e.g., Rom 6:114) as the recurring of those events.SummaryThe baptism of the Spirit is Christs bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon every believer at the moment of his or her salvation. By this baptism, we are united to Christ, made members of his body, and thereby experience all the blessings of salvation which are to be found in him. Apart from those uniquely redemptive-historical cases in the book of Acts, baptism in the Spirit is neither separated from conversion nor is tongues-speaking its necessary sign. At Pentecost Christ first pours out the Spirit upon his church, fulfilling the Old Testament hopes that God would pour out his Spirit upon Israel in the latter days.Recommended resources Tagged asbaptismholyspiritministry corner

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