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The 16 Foundational Truths series

The Holy Spirit can change your life

By Edgar R. Lee

Editor's note: This is the fourth in a series of eight monthly articles on the 16 Foundational Truths of the Assemblies of God, written by faculty of Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. The first three installments appeared in the February 24, March 24 and April 28 issues.

"All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian Church. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service, the bestowment of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry."

"The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance."

"Sanctification is an act of separation from that which is evil, and of dedication unto God."

Baptism in the Holy Spirit makes a difference. Peter, the gifted but often impetuous and sometimes undependable disciple of Jesus, is a good example. Disheartened by the arrest and impending conviction of Jesus, Peter denied the Lord three times (John 18:15-18,25-27). But a few weeks later, Peter was baptized in the Holy Spirit and radically changed (Acts 2:4). Then he courageously stood before a confused and skeptical crowd and preached one of the great sermons of all time, winning 3,000 to Christ (Acts 2:41).

Indeed, the Bible teaches that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a vital experience for all Christians. Mark's Gospel quotes John the Baptist: "I baptize you with water, but he [Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8, NIV). Each of the other three Gospel writers takes up the same promise using similar language (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Just before His ascension, Jesus personally assured His disciples, "For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5), a promise dramatically fulfilled in 120 believers on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). After Pentecost, Peter encouraged the awestruck crowd, "Repent and be baptized And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off" (Acts 2:38,39).

Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Spirit is described in several ways. John the Baptist and Jesus spoke of "baptizing" in the Spirit (Mark 1:8; Acts 1:5). Jesus also described it as "power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Luke referred to being "filled" with the Spirit (Acts 2:4). Peter called it the "gift" of the Spirit (Acts 2:38). In other passages, the Spirit "fell" (Acts 10:44; 11:15, KJV), people "received" the Spirit (Acts 10:47; 19:2), the Spirit was "poured out" (Acts 10:45), and the Spirit "came" (Acts 19:6). The terms are most often verbs that stress the purpose, power and activity of the Spirit.

Since a number of biblical words are used for this overwhelming encounter with the Spirit, it is important to select one for our doctrinal statements that enables us to accurately communicate the biblical reality. The verb "to baptize" (Greek, baptizo) was prominent on the lips of Jesus and His followers. It is an intensive form of the word bapto that meant "to dip in or under," i.e., "to immerse." Bapto was often used for dyeing cloth where it was necessary to totally immerse the fabric in the dye. "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" has rich biblical precedent and a striking sense of immersion to describe a powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit.

The promise of the Father. "I am going to send you what my Father has promised," Jesus told His disciples (Luke 24:49, NIV). Jesus could have referenced any number of Old Testament teachings on the Holy Spirit, who often came to energize people for God's service. For example, God put His Spirit on 70 elders to equip them as leaders under Moses. When the Spirit came on them, they prophesied (Numbers 11:25,26). "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" was Moses' own prophetic response (Numbers 11:29). Through Ezekiel, God promised, "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezekiel 36:27). Still later, Joel prophesied, "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions" (Joel 2:28).

Even in the Old Testament, the coming of the Spirit was expected to be an empowering experience with visible personal and public results. The Old Testament expectation included a powerful inner orientation to

love and obey God. In addition, it especially anticipated a prophetic quickening of the speech of the people of God.

The Day of Pentecost. The immediate fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, as well as those of John the Baptist and Jesus, came on the Day of Pentecost. There suddenly came a sound like wind and the appearance of fire, reminiscent of God's mighty acts of old (Acts 2:1-3; Exodus 19:18). All 120 believers "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). They immediately began to declare "the wonders of God" in the various languages of their hearers that they had never learned (Acts 2:11). It was this mystery of praising God in other tongues that Peter unraveled for the skeptical crowd: "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy'" (Acts 2:16,17). Baptism in the Spirit, with speaking in other tongues either stated or implied, occurred over and over again in the Early Church as the biblical record makes clear (Acts 4:31; 8:17,18; 9:17; 10:44-46; 11:15; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 12:10,28; 13:1; 14:5,18,27; Ephesians 5:18,19).

True to the promises of the Old and New Testaments, these early believers were transformed into powerful witnesses as the Lord had promised (Acts 1:8). Led by the apostles who were personally trained by Jesus, ordinary men and women received not only the baptism in the Spirit but they also began to manifest the gifts of the Spirit required for a powerful witness of word and deed. In one generation, with powerful witness, preaching and "signs following" (Mark 16:20, KJV) they carried the gospel of Christ to the known world.

Our doctrine. We seek to maintain the biblical emphasis on Spirit-baptism. We believe one should be "born again," or "regenerated" by the Spirit (John 3:3,5; Titus 3:5). We also believe one should be baptized in the Spirit. Baptism in the Spirit is distinct from and subsequent to the new birth. Such subsequence may, of course, be momentary and hardly noticeable as in the case of Cornelius' household (Acts 10:44-46), or it may be more obvious as in the case of the Samaritan and Ephesian believers (Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-7).

Initial evidence. The Old Testament makes it clear that the Holy Spirit gives inspired speech, which He often used to signal His presence (Numbers 11:25,26; 1 Samuel 10:10). In the New Testament, when the Spirit baptized believers, they spoke with other tongues (glossolalia), the presence of which was taken to be a sign of their baptism in the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 9:17 [see 1 Corinthians 14:18] 10:46; 19:6) and a sign of God's salvation to all nations (Acts 2:5-11). Peter's Jewish companions recognized that the Spirit had baptized Cornelius' household when "they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God" (Acts 10:46). Thus we have understood that, then and now, speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Obviously, further evidence of the Spirit's fullness must follow in godly living and effective service.

Power to witness. Prominent in God's purposes for Spirit-baptism is the equipping of believers for witness to Christ. Jesus instructed His disciples, "Stay in the city [Jerusalem] until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49) and added, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Power for witness also flows from the Spirit's gifts (charismata) for the work of the ministry (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:7-13; 1 Peter 4:10,11).

Progressive sanctification. While baptism in the Spirit is not primarily for personal sanctification, it is an encounter with the Holy Spirit who has an important role in progressively bringing believers to godliness and maturity through His power to crucify ungodly impulses (Romans 8:13) and cultivate moral virtues, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23).

For early believers, Christian faith without a powerful consciousness of the Spirit's baptizing power would have been incomprehensible. Thus, Assemblies of God founders taught, "All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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