

**Acts 19:1-7** While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup> Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied -- <sup>7</sup> altogether there were about twelve of them. <sup>NRS</sup>

### **“Life beyond Repentance”**

I spent the summer before university with my grandparents. At the time I was newly discovering Jesus and going to a Nazarene church. This congregation was quite charismatic and they talked a lot about the Holy Spirit. I had never before experienced the presence of the Lord until I went to their worship service which was in an elementary school cafeteria. They were a new church and a small church and there's a lot to be said for churches small that are new.

One of the pitfalls these new, small, Spirit-filled churches fall into is saying that "if you don't experience the Lord the way we do, then you're not really Christian." Unfortunately, that was the way I perceived my grandfather's faith. One evening we were the last two up and me being concerned about the state of his soul, I pulled out my Bible and I read this passage to him. If I had come about it a different way, we might have had a good conversation. But, I was "concerned about his soul" and he picked up on that and didn't appreciate it. Instead of asking, "Granddaddy, what do you make of this Holy Spirit stuff?" as if I was asking him to help me understand something, I asked, "Granddaddy, have you received the Holy Spirit?" He looked at me quite stunned and said, "All those times back in the war I just had to of." Then he immediately got up to go to bed and when he got to the stairs he looked at me wondering had I lost my mind.

Like my grandfather, I think we Presbyterian types have a difficult time understanding this Holy Spirit stuff. We're suspicious of people who talk too much about the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues and prophecy are not in our vocabulary. Our way of doing the Christian faith is based more in reasoned understanding, duty, and living ethically not having Holy Spirit experiences.

Well, with respect to this passage from Acts I may be presumptuous, but I think the question we'd all like to hear explained is what did Paul mean when he asked, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" What is it to receive the Holy Spirit? Do we mean Jake Blues in the Blues Brothers Movie glowing and somersaulting after "getting religion" in an African-American inner-city Pentecostal church? Or, is it something more down to earth?

Well, getting beyond the fantastic and getting to the point, the Holy Spirit is God's presence with us. He is God revealing himself to us. Upon encountering the Holy Spirit, we know ourselves to be in a new and personal relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. This encounter is a touch by God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that leaves us saying, "God is indeed concerned

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about *me* and that changes *me*.” Receiving the Holy Spirit leaves us knowing we have a living devotional life in which God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit address us each personally and He hears us. When the Holy Spirit is in our lives we find ourselves gifted for ministry in Jesus name and doing ministry that we never thought ourselves capable of. Bill (and I hope he doesn't mind me sharing this) reflected at Bible study the other night how all he'd known his whole life was the petroleum business. But since retiring and volunteering at the hospital he has found himself doing things with people he'd never thought himself able to do. The same is true with me with respect to being a minister. A large part of who I am has been shaped by what the Holy Spirit has gifted me to do as a minister. So, for me to answer the question what do we mean when we talk about receiving the Holy Spirit, I say first the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives causes us to know we are in a new and living personal relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because of Jesus Christ and we find ourselves gifted for and changed by the ministry into which Christ Jesus leads us.

To fill this in even more, let's look at Paul's next question to the Ephesian believers, “into what then were you baptized.” For us Presbyterians, I think we're at a bit of a disadvantage answering this question. Most of us were baptized as infants because our parents strongly felt that having us baptized was something they must do. On the other hand, churches that practice adult baptism often do it as simply the means for a person to say “I believe.” The biblical teaching about Baptism is quite adamant that somehow by means of the Holy Spirit Baptism is a person's participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus that initiates and resituates us into the kingdom of God and the future new creation that is breaking into the present through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Ephesian disciples answered that question saying, “Into John's Baptism” meaning they were part of the movement begun by John the Baptist to prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God. Paul told them that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance preparing them for the one who would come after him, the one whom in the Gospels John said would baptize people in the Holy Spirit. The New Testament Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* and it means to become “with minded” or thinking the things of God rather than the things of man. We tend to think that repentance is something that we do by our own volition and usually in an attempt to bargain with God for his help. We say, “I'm going to start living my life for God” and then we launch out in a futile attempt to do so. That is not really repentance. Repentance says, “Lord Jesus, here's my life. Do what you will with it.” There is a difference between saying “I'm going to start living my life for God” and “Lord Jesus, here's my life. Do what you will with it.” The first keeps us in the driver's seat. The second throws us before the Lord in humility, desperation, and even humiliation crying for a new life we know we can't bring about on our own.

John's Baptism of repentance was the only means in his day that God's people had to ready themselves for the coming messiah, the one who would come after John and who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The people coming to John were coming in an act of desperation. They were expecting the imminent coming of the messiah and knew themselves to be sinners not ready for him.

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They also knew that the religious charade going on in Jerusalem at the temple could not get them ready for the Lord whom John the prophet said was soon to come. So they went out into the desert to John, the only authentic person of the Lord in their day, and he washed them in the Jordan to ready them for the Lord. That's the state Paul found these Ephesian believers in. They were washed and ready. Yet, they didn't not know that Jesus had come or had they heard anything about the Holy Spirit.

When Paul told them the gospel that Jesus, the one John was readying them for, had come and the kingdom was come with the power and “fire” of the Holy Spirit, they had him baptize them in the name of the Lord Jesus so that by receiving the Holy Spirit they participated in Jesus death and resurrection and newly began to live in the in-breaking new creation and Kingdom of God. The sign of this was that they were enabled to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples of all languages, the gift of tongues (Acts 2:4-11), and began to speak for God things that build up, comfort, encourage, and convict the people of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 14). The Holy Spirit enabled them to live as a small, new church that would grow to become one of the most important churches in the early church. By the gift of the Holy Spirit Christ Jesus equips all his churches to proclaim the gospel and to speak and teach the things of God that build up his churches.

To conclude, the question obviously falls back on us now – Into what have we been baptized – a baptism of repentance or into the name of Jesus Christ? I don't know how you would answer that question, but I would say indeed we are a Pentecostal church. By the gift of the Holy Spirit Jesus has indeed equipped us to proclaim the gospel and in this church words from God are spoken, preached, and taught that build up, comfort, encourage, and correct the people of this congregation. We have received the Holy Spirit and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. We are small but yet I pray we come to perceive ourselves as being new in the Lord. In the last ten years God has begun a new work here. The congregation that is here now is not the same as the one that was here seven, ten, fifteen, and twenty years ago. Jesus Christ is doing new work in this small congregation. Go forth from here invite your friends to come and see what our Lord is doing here. Invite them to come and rest in the peace of Christ. Amen.