

THE HOLY SPIRIT WANTS TO BAPTIZE YOU**LUKE 3:15-18; 1 COR. 12:13**

Did you know the Holy Spirit wants to baptize you? What on earth does that mean? Just last week we started a new series of messages about the Holy Spirit: "Invasion From Above: Why the Holy Spirit Matters." Let me tell you a story as we get started. Graham Pulkingham was raised in the theologically liberal Episcopal Church. He became a pastor in that tradition and was eventually sent to an Episcopal church in Houston. It was a tough, demanding situation. The church was located in a changing, economically depressed neighborhood. The congregation itself had several internal conflicts and problems. Pulkingham felt powerless and longed for a deeper experience of God. Soon thereafter he met David Wilkerson, a Pentecostal evangelist and the author of the book, "The Cross and the Switchblade," which told the story of Wilkerson's amazing ministry to youth gangs in New York City.

On one occasion, when Wilkerson and Pulkingham were together, Wilkerson asked Pulkingham to kneel down. Then, Wilkerson and several others surrounded Pulkingham, laid their hands on his head, and began to pray in a language that Pulkingham had never heard. Something began to happen to Pulkingham as those people prayed for and over him. He felt great joy. He was only dimly aware of the people, their prayers, the room they were in, and even of himself.

When Pulkingham remembers that experience, he says, "the very foundation of my soul shook violently." He recalls Wilkerson saying to the other people, "We can go now; the Baptizer is here." Pulkingham was left alone with God. A sense of God's infinite greatness overwhelmed him and he also wept as he recognized His own unworthiness before this great, holy God. Speaking of that day, Pulkingham says, "It was there that I received the baptism with the Spirit." He says it revolutionized his Christian life. A new joy came into his life, a new power flowed into his ministry that was manifested in healings, in his preaching, in a new freedom to pray and worship, and in a new ability to work productively with other Christians from other Christian traditions.

What do you make of that story? It raises some interesting questions. Have you ever had an experience with God that was similar to the one Graham Pulkingham had? Should you have a similar experience? Was his experience real? He referred to it as being baptized with the Holy Spirit. That's actually a phrase found in the New Testament. But did Pulkingham use it in the same way Scripture does? There are some Christians who believe and teach that after you are born again or saved, you should have yet another experience which they call getting baptized with the Holy Spirit. Are they right? Is there indeed a second and subsequent experience every follower of Jesus should have after conversion? Or, to put it another way, is there something more? Is there something more to following Jesus than most of us have experienced? I'd like to answer that question in three ways.

YES, BUT IT ALL BEGINS AT CONVERSION.

God has always wanted to indwell His people spiritually. Back in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was only available it seems to the leaders of God's people so they could lead with God's wisdom and power. Apparently, the Holy Spirit didn't indwell individual Israelites – just leaders like Moses or prophets like Isaiah. But the Old Testament told us a day was coming when that arrangement would change. God said to His people through the prophet, Ezekiel, “And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.” (Ezk. 36:26-27 NLT) Through another prophet, Joel, God said, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on servants—men and women alike.” (Joel 2:28-29 NLT)

When were those prophecies fulfilled? On the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit came in a way He'd never come before. Read all about in Acts 2. He began to take up residence and indwell anyone and everyone who put his or her trust in Jesus. Jesus had made it possible for us to have a relationship with God. He died in our place taking the guilt and the penalty of sin upon Himself. When we put our trust in Jesus to be our Savior and Lord and when we ask for and receive forgiveness of our sins, it's then that the Holy Spirit comes to live within us spiritually.

To be a genuine follower of Jesus – a Christian – means to have the Holy Spirit living within you. Scripture assumes every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. “Remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them do not belong to him at all.” (Rom. 8:9 NLT) The Holy Spirit is the way God indwells your life and mine. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus makes His home in us and the spiritual presence of Jesus can be truly experienced. So, is there something more? Well, yes, and it all starts at conversion – that moment you cross the line of faith. That moment you put your trust in Jesus for both this life and the next life. At that moment, the Holy Spirit invades your human spirit and God Himself begins to dwell within you.

Getting saved. Being converted. Trusting Jesus for salvation. Being regenerated. Being born again. These are all different ways of describing the same event. Being baptized in water is a wonderful, meaningful Christian ritual, but it isn't the moment of conversion. Being confirmed or taking communion for the first time are important moments, but neither is the moment of conversion. Joining a church is an important commitment, but that isn't the moment of conversion either. Instead, when you confess your sins and ask for God's forgiveness, when you acknowledge that when Jesus hung on the cross, He died there for you personally, when you commit to become His follower for the rest of your life, that's when the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your life. And He comes to live in your spirit permanently and forever. But is there something more than that experience? Yes, but it can only begin at conversion. It starts there. Here's a second way to answer our question: Is there something more?

YES, BUT GET YOUR THEOLOGY RIGHT.

One of the most powerful, dynamic forces within worldwide Christianity is what's called the Pentecostal or charismatic movement. Some of the largest, fastest growing churches here and around the world consider themselves to be Pentecostal or charismatic. Both Pentecostals and charismatics tend to emphasize the Holy Spirit. The word "Pentecostal" refers to the Day of Pentecost which was that moment in history when the Holy Spirit came to God's people in a new and unique way. The word "charismatic" is based on the Greek words "charis" or "charisma" and those often refer to the gifts of the Holy Spirit which we'll discuss another time. This movement has become so influential all over the world that some have called it the third major force or group in worldwide Christianity today: Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals. By the way, Baptists fall into the Protestant group because we trace our spiritual heritage back to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s.

Each of those three groups has a different interpretation of the phrase "baptism in the Holy Spirit." Our Roman Catholic friends believe a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit when he/she is baptized in water. This usually happens when a person is an infant. Catholic theology teaches that when a child is baptized in water, the Holy Spirit enters that person and he or she is saved, converted, or born again. Protestant groups differ as to when it's appropriate to baptize someone, but most would hold the view that a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion. So, we, as Protestants, believe baptism in the Spirit and conversion are synonymous – they mean the same thing. When a person is born again, he or she is regenerated – made alive again spiritually - by the Holy Spirit.

Our Pentecostal friends take a third view. They suggest a person receives the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion, yes, but then he or she should seek and receive a second, subsequent experience after being born again. They call that second experience being baptized in the Holy Spirit. They testify this experience has brought new vitality to their experience of God. Some Pentecostals also suggest that the evidence you've been baptized in the Spirit – the way you know it's happened to you - is the ability to speak in tongues – a kind of heavenly language. That's what those men praying over Graham Pulkingham were doing in the story I told earlier. They were speaking in tongues. By the way, speaking in tongues is mentioned in the Bible. It's a completely biblical experience practiced by many Christians today all over the world.

So, which viewpoint is correct? Being the happy evangelical Protestant that I am, I believe God's Word is our ultimate guide. What does Scripture suggest? The phrase "baptism in (or with) the Holy Spirit" appears seven times in the New Testament. Let's look at two of those passages this morning. (Luke 5:8-13) Another place baptism and the Holy Spirit are used together is in 1 Cor. 12:13 (NIV): "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." So, what did John the Baptist in Luke 3 and Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 mean by being baptized with or in the Holy Spirit?

We don't have time today to do an in depth Bible study of these two passages, much less the other five, so I'll simply share my conclusions with you today. None of them support the Roman Catholic view that being baptized in water is the same as being baptized in the Holy Spirit. In the Luke passage we just read, John the Baptist contrasted his water baptism with the kind of baptism Jesus would provide – a baptism in the Spirit. In the 1 Corinthians verse, Paul didn't equate water baptism with Spirit baptism either. Paul never mentioned water baptism here at all. Frankly, all of us have known people who were baptized as infants by their parents, but now they have no use for Jesus whatsoever and scorn the Bible. To call these people Christians just because they were baptized in water years ago in some ceremony is ludicrous. For me, then, the Roman Catholic interpretation of being baptized in the Holy Spirit is inadequate.

What about the Pentecostal interpretation? In the Luke passage, John the Baptist didn't suggest being baptized in the Spirit happened after someone was already a follower of Jesus. He implied instead that only when a person is baptized in the Spirit does he or she even begin to have any kind of relationship with God. Here's the most natural interpretation: when you become a follower of Jesus, you are baptized in or by the Holy Spirit. In the 1 Corinthians passage, Paul implied being baptized in the Spirit wasn't something that followed conversion, but instead it was and is the experience that made you a Christian. I find Pentecostal theology at this point inadequate as well.

As I study God's Word, here are three conclusions I've come to on how best to understand that phrase or concept "baptism in the Holy Spirit." First, at the moment you are born again, you are baptized in the Holy Spirit biblically speaking. It doesn't follow conversion; it is conversion. It's getting saved or being born again. Second, you are baptized in or by God's Spirit once. You can only be born again once spiritually. You can only get converted once. Yes, you may well have periods of time when you live far away from God spiritually, but then hopefully you repent and return to Him. But you're not getting saved all over again. The past tense in the verse we read is important, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Cor. 12:13 NIV) Third, the baptism in the Spirit is something every follower of Jesus experiences. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Cor. 12:13 NIV)

While I could never become Roman Catholic, I still have great respect for some aspects of their tradition. As evangelical Protestants, we have more in common with Roman Catholic theology than liberal Protestant theology. Nevertheless, I think it's a theological mistake to believe the Holy Spirit comes into a person's life – baptism in the Spirit - without that person's own consent and invitation. I have even greater respect for Pentecostals and charismatics. Some of you know that's the heritage or background I grew up in. Some of the finest, godliest Christians I've ever known have been Pentecostals. I agree with them when they say we need to experience more of the Holy Spirit than just the moment we were born again. Right on. Absolutely. But I balk when it's believed and taught that there's a kind of specific, one of a kind spiritual experience

every Christian needs to have after they've been born again. When you believe and teach every Christian should have this second, subsequent, one of a kind experience with the Holy Spirit, you inevitably set up a group of Haves and Have Nots, of 1st class Christians and 2nd class Christians, of those are who spiritually in and those who are spiritually out. That destroys unity among all the members of God's family. It can lead to spiritual pride and division. So, is there something more? Yes, but it all begins at conversion. Yes, but get your theology right. Here's a third answer to that question:

YES, AND DON'T LIMIT GOD.

I've been accused of being a "Bapticoctal" and I'm fine with that! While I disagree with my Pentecostal/charismatic brothers and sisters on some theology and interpretations of Scripture, I'd like to point out what they've gotten oh so right! I believe their experiences in or with the Holy Spirit are, in most cases, real and genuine. While I might disagree with Graham Pulkingham's terminology of what happened to him – referring to it as being baptized in the Spirit - I would never deny he had a life-changing experience with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, many Pentecostal/charismatic Christians have experienced the Holy Spirit's power and presence at a depth that many believers have not. In all too many cases, we Protestants have been guilty of limiting God. The Bible calls it quenching the Holy Spirit. Fire is a symbol of the Holy Spirit in the Bible. When you pour water on a fire or throw a blanket over a fire, you quench it. Sometimes by our attitudes and actions, we tell the Holy Spirit to get lost or take a hike.

Pentecostals have the courage to say to Roman Catholics, "You have all this great history, ritual, and tradition, but where's the spiritual life and power?" They also have the courage to say to us Protestants, "You have all this in depth knowledge of Scripture and these great organizations, but where's the spiritual life and power?" A group of tourists was visiting Westminster Abbey in London – a majestic, historic Protestant church. In that tour group was a little old lady who looked a bit wrinkled and shabby. But she had an intense interest in everything the tour guide had to say. He pointed out the places where the King or Queen of England sat as well as other members of the British royalty. In his closing remarks, he pointed to the ornate pulpit and said, "This is the most famous pulpit in the world." Then, he asked, "Are there any questions?" The little old lady raised her hand, "I have one. Has anybody been saved here lately?" The guide's face was a picture of confusion. "What was your question? Repeat it, please." In a loud voice, the little old lady asked again, "Has anybody been saved here lately?" Still completely confused, the guide finally said, "I've never been asked that question before. I don't know the answer." But that is the question that needs to be asked about any church. And how its answered is the issue. Is your life, my life, and this church tapped into the Holy Spirit's life and power?

It's easy to settle for a kind of shallow, lukewarm, mediocre spiritual life. Pentecostals, by in large, will have none of it and God bless them for it! They actually expect God to show up at their worship services and affect them in powerful ways right in the service! They actually expect people to get saved all the time and think something's wrong if it

doesn't happen. They actually expect very broken lives to be changed by the power of God. They actually expect God to heal people physically and emotionally in answer to their prayers. They actually expect God's guidance in day to day decisions. They actually get excited about praising God with fervency and worshipping Him with joyful intensity. They've taken the Holy Spirit off the closet shelf of Christian experience and put Him right in the living room of their lives. We can learn much from them!

Over my years as a pastor, I've heard the occasional opinion, "I don't want any of that Pentecostal or charismatic stuff in my church." What are we afraid of? The Holy Spirit? When the Holy Spirit showed up in the Bible, it wasn't always a tame, orderly event. Shouldn't we expect a pretty dramatic change when the Holy Spirit invades a person or invades a church? Let's never limit God the Holy Spirit. Let's expect to be overwhelmed occasionally by the sheer experience of encountering the God of the universe. When the Holy Spirit shows up, let's expect a new dimension of joy in our worship, a new love for lost people, a new power in sharing our faith, a new concern for those who are in need, and a new ability to get things done that builds the Kingdom of God. Jesus compared the Holy Spirit to wind. You don't know from where He's coming and you can't control Him. Do you know what happens when you try and limit the Holy Spirit? He just leaves. Nothing worse than that. He just goes and finds other Christians and other churches that will let Him do what only He can do.

Is there something more? Yes, there is always more of God the Holy Spirit to experience. Let's live in such a way that we invite Him to invade us! How? Have an expectant heart. The Holy Spirit responds to faith and expectancy. If you don't want or believe the Holy Spirit can make a difference in your life, He probably won't. Have a clean heart. I'm not talking about being sinless or perfect. We're all damaged goods and the wonder of it all is that God uses damaged merchandise like you and me to get His will done, but He does. Confess all known sin. Get rid of all the sin the Holy Spirit reveals to you. Otherwise, the Holy Spirit won't show up. Have a hungry heart. If you're sitting out there today hearing my words today, and it just sounds very boring to you to experience more of God, may I warn you of something in love? If you have no hunger for more of God, there's something very wrong with you spiritually. Here's the irony. When the Holy Spirit comes into you, He satisfies your spiritual hunger but He also makes you even hungrier for all that God offers through His Holy Spirit.

The late Catherine Marshall, the widow of Peter Marshall, became a popular Christian author. She and her second husband, Len LeSourd (who was the editor of Guideposts magazine for many years), were involved in a small group Bible study. At one particular meeting, Len asked the group to pray for him. He was having some major relational problems with his teenagers as well as another person at work. Two members of the group stood by his chair, laid their hands on Len's head and shoulders, and then prayed. They simply asked the Holy Spirit to free Len from any and all antagonism and resentment. Later on, Len told Catherine that he felt a wonderful kind of warmth coming from the hands of the two people who prayed for him.

Hours later that same night, after they'd gone to bed, Len said softly, "Catherine, I hate to wake you up, but I have the strangest feeling." A little alarmed, she asked, "How do you mean?" He answered, "There's this rushing, headlong joy inside of me. I've been lying here thinking how silly it is to be so joyful when I should be asleep, but I can't control it. Catherine, I'd like to pray about it." She said sleepily, "Well, fine. Go ahead – pray." Len said, "But it just isn't enough to lie here. I'd like us to kneel." So both of them knelt beside the bed. Len began to pray out loud quietly. He prayed for everybody. In between he kept telling the Lord how much He loved him. Heartfelt love rose from the depths of his being for each person who'd been a thorn in his side. Usually, Len's prayers were short, well thought out, every word carefully chosen, and rather unemotional. But on that night, it was like a geyser of deep emotion went off inside of Len and his words were lavish and exuberant. Minutes passed, half an hour, an hour, as the love and joy just poured out from Len. The next morning he said to his wife, "That was the most cleansing experience I've ever had. God's love and joy just poured through me. This morning I have a scrubbed feeling."

In a time of spiritual discouragement, Len LeSourd opened his heart to the Holy Spirit. He had a believing heart, a clean heart, and a hungry heart. And the Holy Spirit met Him in a new, powerful, and wonderful way. Will the same thing happen to you or me? Not necessarily. But here's my point. Don't ever limit God. Is there something more? There's always more of God to know and experience. Always, always more. It's all a part of what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.