

Chapter 39

Baptism in and Filling with the Holy Spirit

Should we seek a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” after conversion? What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Systematic theology books have not traditionally included a chapter on baptism in the Holy Spirit or filling with the Holy Spirit as part of the study of the “order of salvation,” the study of the various steps in which the benefits of salvation are applied to our lives.¹ But with the spread of Pentecostalism that began in 1901, the widespread influence of the charismatic movement in the 1960’s and 1970’s, and the remarkable growth of Pentecostal and charismatic² churches worldwide from 1970 to the present, the question of a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” distinct p 764 from regeneration has come into increasing prominence. I have put this chapter at this point in our study of the application of redemption for two reasons: (1) A proper understanding of this question must assume an understanding of regeneration, adoption, and sanctification, all of which have been discussed in previous chapters. (2) All the previous chapters on the application of redemption have discussed events that occur (or in the case of sanctification, that begin) at the point at which a person becomes a Christian. But this question concerns an event that occurs either at the point of conversion (according to one view) or sometime after conversion (according to another view). Moreover, people on both sides of the question agree that some kind of second experience has happened to many people after their conversion, and therefore one very important question is how to understand this experience in the light of Scripture and what scriptural categories properly apply to it.

EXPLANATION AND SCRIPTURAL BASIS

A. The Traditional Pentecostal Understanding

The topic of this chapter has become important today because many Christians say that they have experienced a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” that came after they became Christians and that brought

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great blessing in their lives. They claim that prayer and Bible study have become much more meaningful and effective, that they have discovered new joy in worship, and they often say that they have received new spiritual gifts (especially, and most frequently, the gift of speaking in tongues).

This traditional Pentecostal or charismatic position is supported from Scripture in the following way:

(1) Jesus' disciples were born-again believers long before the day of Pentecost, perhaps during Jesus' life and ministry, but certainly by the time that Jesus, after his resurrection, "breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" ' ([John 20:22](#)).

(2) Jesus nevertheless commanded his disciples "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father" ([Acts 1:4](#)), telling them, "Before many days you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit*" ([Acts 1:5](#)). He told them, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" ([Acts 1:8](#)). The disciples then obeyed Jesus' command and waited in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come upon them so that they would receive new empowering for witness and ministry.

(3) When the disciples had waited for ten days, the day of Pentecost came, tongues of fire rested above their heads, "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" ([Acts 2:4](#)). This clearly shows that they received a baptism in (or with)³ the Holy Spirit. Although the disciples were born again long before Pentecost, at Pentecost they received a "baptism with the Holy Spirit" ([Acts 1:5](#) and [11:16](#) refer to it this way) that was subsequent to conversion and resulted in great empowering for ministry as well as speaking in tongues.⁴

(4) Christians today, like the apostles, should ask Jesus for a "baptism in the Holy Spirit" and thus follow the pattern of the disciples' lives.⁵ If we receive this baptism in the Holy Spirit, it will result in much more power for ministry for our own lives, just as it did in the lives of the disciples, and will often (or always, according to some teachers) result in speaking in tongues as well.

(5) Support for this pattern—in which people are first born again and then later are baptized in the Holy Spirit—is seen in several other instances in the book of Acts. It is seen, for example, in [Acts 8](#), where the people of Samaria first became Christians when they "believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" ([Acts 8:12](#)), but only later received the Holy Spirit when the apostles Peter and John came from Jerusalem and prayed for them ([Acts 8:14–17](#)).⁶

Another example is found in [Acts 19](#), where Paul came and found "some disciples" at Ephesus ([Acts 19:1](#)). But, "when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied" ([Acts 19:6](#)).

All of these examples ([Acts 2](#), [8](#), sometimes [10](#), and [19](#))⁷ are cited by Pentecostals in order to show that a "baptism in the Holy Spirit" subsequent to conversion was a very common occurrence for New Testament Christians. Therefore, they reason, if it was common for Christians in Acts to have this second experience sometime after conversion, should it not be common for us today as well?

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We can analyze this issue of the baptism in the Holy Spirit by asking three questions: (1) What does the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit” mean in the New Testament? (2) How should we understand the “second experiences” that came to born-again believers in the book of Acts? (3) Are there other biblical expressions, such as “filling with the Holy Spirit,” that are better suited to describe an empowering with the Holy Spirit that comes after conversion?

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B. What Does “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” Mean in the New Testament?

There are only seven passages in the New Testament where we read of someone being baptized in the Holy Spirit. (The English translations quoted here use the word *with* rather than *in*.)⁸ The seven passages follow:

In the first four verses, John the Baptist is speaking of Jesus and predicting that he will baptize people in (or with) the Holy Spirit:

[Matthew 3:11](#): “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will *baptize you with the Holy Spirit* and with fire.”

[Mark 1:8](#): “I have baptized you with water; but he will *baptize you with the Holy Spirit*.”

[Luke 3:16](#): “I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will *baptize you with the Holy Spirit* and with fire.”

[John 1:33](#): “He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who *baptizes with the Holy Spirit*.” ’

It is hard to draw any conclusions from these four passages with respect to what baptism with the Holy Spirit really is. We discover that Jesus is the one who will carry out this baptism and he will baptize his followers. But no further specification of this baptism is given.

The next two passages refer directly to Pentecost:

[Acts 1:5](#): [Here Jesus says,] “John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit*.”

[Acts 11:16](#): [Here Peter refers back to the same words of Jesus that were quoted in the previous verse. He says,] “I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be *baptized with the Holy Spirit*.’”

These two passages show us that whatever we may understand baptism in the Holy Spirit to be, it certainly happened at the day of Pentecost as recorded in [Acts 2](#), when the Holy Spirit fell in great

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power on the disciples and those with them, and they spoke in other tongues, and about three thousand people were converted ([Acts 2:14](#)).

It is important to realize that all six of these verses use almost exactly the same expression in Greek, with the only differences being some variation in word order or verb tense to fit the sentence, and with one example having the preposition understood rather than expressed explicitly.⁹

The only remaining reference in the New Testament is in the Pauline epistles:

[1 Corinthians 12:13](#) (NIV mg): “For we were all *baptized in one Spirit* into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

p 767 Now the question is whether [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) refers to the same activity as these other six verses. In many English translations it appears to be different, for many translations are similar to the RSV, which says, “For *by one Spirit* we were all baptized into one body.” Those who support the Pentecostal view of baptism in the Holy Spirit after conversion are quite eager to see this verse as referring to something other than baptism in the Holy Spirit, and they frequently emphasize the difference that comes out in the English translations. In all the other six verses, Jesus is the one who baptizes people and the Holy Spirit is the “element” (parallel to water in physical baptism) in which or with which Jesus baptizes people. But here in [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) (so the Pentecostal explanation goes) we have something quite different—here the person doing the baptizing is not Jesus but the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they say, [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) should not be taken into account when we ask what the New Testament means by “baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

This point is very important to the Pentecostal position, because, if we admit that [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) refers to baptism *in* the Holy Spirit, then it is very hard to maintain that it is an experience that comes after conversion. In this verse Paul says that this baptism *in/with/by* the Holy Spirit made us members of the body of—“We were all baptized *in* one Spirit into one body” ([1 Cor. 12:13](#) NIV mg). But if this really is a “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” the same as the event that was referred to in the previous six verses, then Paul is saying that it happened to all the Corinthians *when they became members of the body of Christ; that is, when they became Christians*. For it was that baptism that resulted in their being members of the body of Christ, the church. Such a conclusion would be very difficult for the Pentecostal position that holds that baptism in the Holy Spirit is something that occurs after conversion, not at the same time.

Is it possible to sustain the Pentecostal view that the other six verses refer to a baptism *by Jesus* in which he baptizes us in (or with) the Holy Spirit, but that [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) refers to something different, to a baptism *by the Holy Spirit*? Although the distinction seems to make sense from some English translations, it really cannot be supported by an examination of the Greek text, for there the expression is almost identical to the expressions we have seen in the other six verses. Paul says ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ... ἐβαπτίσθημεν (“in one Spirit ... we were baptized”). Apart from one small difference (he refers to “one Spirit” rather than “the Holy Spirit”),¹⁰ all the other elements are the same: the verb is βαπτίζω ([G966](#)) and the prepositional phrase contains the same words (ἐν, [G1877](#), plus the dative noun Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004).

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πνεύματι from πνεῦμα, [G4460](#)). If we translate this same Greek expression “baptize *in* the Holy Spirit” (or “baptize with the Holy Spirit”) in the other six New Testament occurrences where we find it, then it seems only proper that we translate it in the same way in this seventh occurrence. And no matter how we translate, it seems hard to deny that the original readers would have seen this phrase as referring to the same thing as the other six verses, because for them the words were the same.

But why have modern English translations translated this verse to say, “By one Spirit we were all baptized into one body,” thus giving apparent support to the Pentecostal interpretation? We should first note that the NASB gives “in” as a [p 768](#) marginal translation, and the NIV margin gives both “with” and “in” as alternatives. The reason these translations have chosen the word “by” has apparently been a desire to avoid an appearance of two locations for the baptism in the same sentence. The sentence already says that this baptism was “into one body,” and perhaps the translators thought it seemed awkward to say, “*in* one Spirit we were all baptized *into* one body.” But this should not be seen as a great difficulty, for Paul says, referring to the Israelites, “all were baptized *into* Moses *in* the cloud and *in* the sea” ([1 Cor. 10:2](#))—a very closely parallel expression where the cloud and the sea are the “elements” that surrounded or overwhelmed the people of Israel and *Moses* means the new life of participation in the Mosaic covenant and the fellowship of God’s people (led by Moses) that the Israelites found themselves in after they had passed through the cloud and the sea. It is not that there were two locations for the same baptism, but one was the element in which they were baptized and the other was the location in which they found themselves after the baptism. This is very similar to [1 Corinthians 12:13](#): the Holy Spirit was the *element* in which they were baptized, and the body of Christ, the church, was the *location* in which they found themselves after that baptism.¹¹ It thus seems appropriate to conclude that [1 Corinthians 12:13](#) also refers to baptism “in” or “with” the Holy Spirit, and is referring to the same thing as the other six verses mentioned.

But this has a significant implication for us: it means that, as far as the apostle Paul was concerned, *baptism in the Holy Spirit occurred at conversion*. He says that all the Corinthians were baptized in the Holy Spirit and the result was that they became members of the body of Christ: “For we were all baptized in one Spirit into one body” ([1 Cor. 12:13](#) NIV mg). “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” therefore, must refer to the activity of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the Christian life when he gives us new spiritual life (in regeneration) and cleanses us and gives a clear break with the power and love of sin (the initial stage of sanctification). In this way “baptism in the Holy Spirit” refers to all that the Holy Spirit does at the beginning of our Christian lives. But this means that it cannot refer to an experience after conversion, as the Pentecostal interpretation would have it.¹²

[p 769](#) But how, then, do we understand the references to baptism in the Holy Spirit in [Acts 1:5](#) and [11:6](#), both of which refer to the day of Pentecost? Were these not instances where the disciples, having previously been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, now experienced a new empowering from the Holy Spirit that enabled them to minister effectively?

It is true that the disciples were “born again” long before Pentecost, and in fact probably long before Jesus breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit in [John 20:22](#).¹³ Jesus had said, “No one Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004).

can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” ([John 6:44](#)), but the disciples certainly had come to Jesus and had followed him (even though their understanding of who he was increased gradually over time). Certainly when Peter said to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” ([Matt. 16:16](#)), it was evidence of some kind of regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. Jesus told him, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” ([Matt. 16:17](#)). And Jesus had said to the Father regarding his disciples, “I have given them the words which you gave me, and *they have received them* and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me ... *I have guarded them and none of them is lost* but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled” ([John 17:8, 12](#)). The disciples had “little faith” ([Matt. 8:26](#)) at times, but they did have faith! Certainly they were regenerated long before the day of Pentecost.¹⁴

p 770 But we must realize that the day of Pentecost is much more than an individual event in the lives of Jesus’ disciples and those with them. The day of Pentecost was the point of transition between the old covenant work and ministry of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit was at work throughout the Old Testament, hovering over the waters of the first day of creation ([Gen. 1:2](#)), empowering people for service to God and leadership and prophecy ([Ex. 31:3](#); [35:31](#); [Deut. 34:9](#); [Judg. 14:6](#); [1 Sam. 16:13](#); [Ps. 51:11](#), et al.). But during that time the work of the Holy Spirit in individual lives was, in general, a work of lesser power.

There are several indications of a less powerful and less extensive work of the Holy Spirit in the old covenant: the Holy Spirit only came to a few people with significant power for ministry ([Num. 11:16–17](#), for example), but Moses longed for the day when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all of God’s people: “Would that all the LORD’s people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” ([Num. 11:29](#)). The equipping of the Holy Spirit for special ministries could be lost, as it was in the life of Saul ([1 Sam. 16:14](#)), and as David feared that it might be in his own life ([Ps. 51:11](#)). In terms of spiritual power in the lives of the people of God, there was little power over the dominion of Satan, resulting in very little effective evangelism of the nations around Israel, and no examples of ability to cast out demons.¹⁵ The old covenant work of the Holy Spirit was almost completely confined to the nation of Israel, but in the new covenant there is created a new “dwelling place of God” ([Eph. 2:22](#)), the church, which unites both Gentiles and Jews in the body of Christ.

Moreover, the Old Testament people of God looked forward to a “new covenant” age when the work of the Holy Spirit would be much more powerful and much more widespread ([Num. 11:29](#); [Jer. 31:31–33](#); [Ezek. 36:26–27](#); [Joel 2:28–29](#)).¹⁶

When the New Testament opens, we see John the Baptist as the last of the Old Testament prophets. Jesus said, “Among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he ... all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come” ([Matt. 11:11–14](#)). John knew that he baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit ([John 3:16](#)). John the Baptist, then, still was living in an “old covenant” experience of the working of the Holy Spirit.

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In the life of Jesus, we first see the new covenant power of the Holy Spirit at work. The Holy Spirit descends on him at his baptism ([Luke 3:21–22](#)), and after [p 771](#) his temptation Jesus “returned *in the power of the Spirit* into Galilee” ([Luke 4:14](#)). Then we begin to see what this new covenant power of the Holy Spirit will look like, because Jesus casts out demons with a word, heals all who are brought to him, and teaches with authority that people had not heard before (see [Luke 4:16–44](#), et al.).

The disciples, however, do not receive this full new covenant empowering for ministry until the Day of Pentecost, for Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem, and promises, “*You shall receive power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” ([Acts 1:8](#)). This was a transition in the lives of the disciples as well (see [John 7:39](#); [14:17](#); [16:7](#); [Acts 2:16](#)). The promise of Joel that the Holy Spirit would come in new covenant fullness was fulfilled ([Acts 2:16](#)) as Jesus returned to heaven and then was given authority to pour out the Holy Spirit in new fullness and power ([Acts 2:33](#)).

What was the result in the lives of the disciples? These believers, who had had an old-covenant less-powerful experience of the Holy Spirit in their lives, received on the Day of Pentecost a more-powerful new-covenant experience of the Holy Spirit working in their lives.¹⁷ They received much greater “power” ([Acts 1:8](#)), power for living the Christian life and for carrying out Christian ministry.

This transition from an old covenant experience of the Holy Spirit to a new covenant experience of the Holy Spirit can be seen in figure 39.1.¹⁸

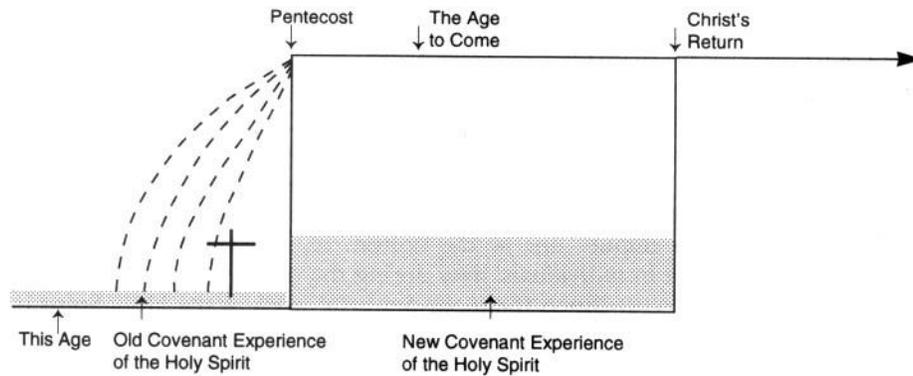


Figure 39.1: At Pentecost Believers Experienced a Transition from an Old Covenant Experience of the Holy Spirit to a More Powerful, New Covenant Experience of the Holy Spirit

In this diagram, the thinner line at the bottom represents the less-powerful work of the Holy Spirit in individuals’ lives during the old covenant. The thicker line that begins at Pentecost shows the more-powerful work of the Holy Spirit in people’s lives after that time. The lines for “this age” and “the age to come” overlap now because the powers of the age to come have broken into this present evil age, so that Christians live during an “overlap of the ages.” The dotted lines prior to Pentecost indicate that in

the life of Jesus the more-powerful work of the Holy Spirit had already begun in a way that anticipated (and even surpassed) what would come at Pentecost.¹⁹

This new covenant power gave the disciples more effectiveness in their witness and their ministry ([Acts 1:8](#); [Eph. 4:8, 11–13](#)), much greater power for victory over the influence of sin in the lives of all believers (note the emphasis on the power of Christ's resurrection at work within us in [Rom. 6:11–14](#); [8:13–14](#); [Gal. 2:20](#); [Phil. 3:10](#)), and power for victory over Satan and demonic forces that would attack believers ([2 Cor. 10:3–4](#); [Eph. 1:19–21](#); [6:10–18](#); [1 John 4:4](#)). p 772 This new covenant power of the Holy Spirit also resulted in a wide and hitherto unknown distribution of gifts for ministry to all believers ([Acts 2:16–18](#); [1 Cor. 12:7, 11](#); [1 Peter 4:10](#); cf. [Num. 11:17, 24–29](#)). These gifts also had corporate implications because they were intended not to be used individualistically but for the corporate building up of the body of Christ ([1 Cor. 12:7](#); [14:12](#)). It also meant that the gospel was no longer effectively limited to the Jews only, but that all races and all nations would hear the gospel in power and would be united into the church, to the glory of God ([Eph. 2:11–3:10](#)).²⁰ The Day of Pentecost was certainly a remarkable time of transition in the whole history of redemption as recorded in Scripture. It was a remarkable day in the history of the world, because on that day the Holy Spirit began to function among God's people with new covenant power.

But this fact helps us understand what happened to the disciples at Pentecost. They received this remarkable new empowering from the Holy Spirit *because they were living at the time of the transition between the old covenant work of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant work of the Holy Spirit*. Though it was a “second experience” of the Holy Spirit, coming as it did long after their conversion, it is not to be taken as a pattern for us, for we are not living at a time of transition in the work of the Holy Spirit. In their case, believers with an old covenant empowering from the Holy Spirit became believers with a new covenant empowering from the Holy Spirit. But we today do not first become believers with a weaker, old covenant work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and wait until some later time to receive a new covenant work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, we are in the same position as those who became Christians in the church at Corinth: when we become p 773 Christians we are all “*baptized in one Spirit into one body*” ([1 Cor. 12:13](#))—just as the Corinthians were, and just as were the new believers in many churches who were converted when Paul traveled on his missionary journeys.

In conclusion, the disciples certainly did experience “a baptism in the Holy Spirit” after conversion on the Day of Pentecost, but this happened because they were living at a unique point in history, and this event in their lives is therefore not a pattern that we are to seek to imitate.

What shall we say about the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit”? It is a phrase that the New Testament authors use to speak of coming into the new covenant power of the Holy Spirit. It happened at Pentecost for the disciples, but it happened at conversion for the Corinthians and for us.²¹

It is not a phrase the New Testament authors would use to speak of any post-conversion experience of empowering by the Holy Spirit.

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C. How Should We Understand the “Second Experiences” in Acts?

But even if we have correctly understood the experience of the disciples at Pentecost as recorded in [Acts 2](#), are there not other examples of people who had a “second experience” of empowering of the Holy Spirit after conversion, such as those in [Acts 8](#) (at Samaria), [Acts 10](#) (Cornelius’ household), and [Acts 19](#) (the Ephesian disciples)?

These are not really convincing examples to prove the Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit either. First, the expression “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is not ordinarily used to refer to any of these events,²² and this should give us some hesitation in applying this phrase to them. But more importantly, a closer look at each case shows more clearly what was happening in these events.

In [Acts 8:4–25](#) the Samaritan people “believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” and “they were baptized, both men and women” ([Acts 8:12](#)). Some have argued that this was not genuine saving faith on the part of the Samaritans.²³ However, there is no indication in the text that Philip had a deficient understanding of the gospel (he had been prominent in the Jerusalem church) or that Philip himself thought that their faith in Christ was inadequate, for he allowed them to be baptized ([Acts 8:12](#)).

p 774 A better understanding of this event would be that God, in his providence, sovereignly waited to give the new covenant empowering of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans directly through the hands of the apostles ([Acts 8:14–17](#))²⁴ so that it might be evident to the highest leadership in the Jerusalem church that the Samaritans were not second-class citizens but full members of the church. This was important because of the historical animosity between Jews and Samaritans (“Jews have no dealings with Samaritans,” [John 4:9](#)), and because Jesus had specified that the spread of the gospel to Samaria would be the next major step after it had been preached in Jerusalem and the region of Judea that surrounded Jerusalem: “You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea *and Samaria* and to the end of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](#)). Thus, the event in [Acts 8](#) was a kind of “Samaritan Pentecost,” a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the people of Samaria, who were a mixed race of Jewish and Gentile ancestry, so that it might be evident to all that the full new covenant blessings and power of the Holy Spirit had come to this group of people as well, and were not confined to Jews only. Because this is a special event in the history of redemption, as the pattern of [Acts 1:8](#) is worked out in the book of Acts, it is not a pattern for us to repeat today. It is simply part of the transition between the old covenant experience of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant experience of the Holy Spirit.

The situation in [Acts 10](#) is less complicated, because it is not even clear that Cornelius was a genuine believer before Peter came and preached the gospel to him. Certainly he had not trusted in Christ for salvation. He is rather a Gentile who was one of the first examples of the way in which the gospel would go “to the end of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](#)).²⁵ Certainly Cornelius had not first believed in Christ’s death and resurrection to save him and then later come into a second experience after his conversion.

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In [Acts 19](#), once again we encounter a situation of some people who had not really heard the gospel of salvation through Christ. They had been baptized into the baptism of John the Baptist ([Acts 19:3](#)), so they were probably people who had heard John the Baptist preach, or had talked to others who had heard John the Baptist preach, and had been baptized “into John’s baptism” ([Acts 19:3](#)) as a sign that they were repenting of their sins and preparing for the Messiah who was to come. They certainly had not heard of Christ’s death and resurrection, for they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit ([Acts 19:2](#))!—a fact that no one who was present at Pentecost or who had heard the gospel after Pentecost could have failed to know. It is likely that they had not even heard that Jesus had come and lived and died, because Paul had to explain to them, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, *that is, Jesus*” ([Acts 19:4](#)). Therefore these “disciples” in Ephesus did not have new covenant understanding or new covenant faith, and they certainly did not have a new covenant empowering of the Holy Spirit—they were “disciples” only in the sense of followers of John the Baptist who were still waiting for the [p 775](#) Messiah. When they heard of him they believed in him, and then received the power of the Holy Spirit that was appropriate to the gospel of the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Because of this, these disciples at Ephesus are certainly not a pattern for us today either, for we do not first have faith in a Messiah that we are waiting for, and then later learn that Jesus has come and lived and died and risen again. We come into an understanding of the gospel of Christ immediately, and we, like the Corinthians, enter immediately into the new covenant experience of the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

It seems therefore that there are no New Testament texts that encourage us to seek for a second experience of “baptism in the Holy Spirit” that comes after conversion.

D. What Terms Shall We Use to Refer to an Empowering by the Holy Spirit That Comes After Conversion?

The previous sections have argued that “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is not the term the New Testament authors would use to speak of a post-conversion work of the Spirit, and that the examples of “second experiences” of receiving the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts are not patterns for us to imitate in our Christian lives. But the question remains, “What is actually happening to the millions of people who claim that they have received this ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ and that it has brought much blessing to their lives? Could it be that this has been a genuine work of the Holy Spirit but that the biblical categories and biblical examples used to illustrate it have been incorrect? Might it be that there are other biblical expressions and biblical teachings that point to this kind of work of the Holy Spirit after conversion and help us understand it more accurately?” I think there are, but before we look at these, it is appropriate to comment on the importance of having a correct understanding at this point.

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1. Harm Comes to the Church From Teaching Two-Class Christianity. At various times in the history of the church Christians have attempted to divide the church into two categories of believers. This is in effect what happens with the Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit. It might be pictured as in figure 39.2, which shows the world divided into Christians and non-Christians, and then shows Christians divided into two categories, ordinary believers and Spirit-baptized believers.

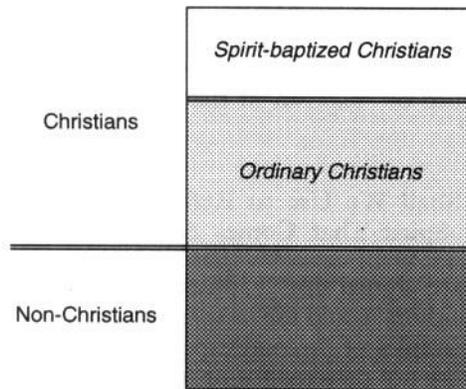


Figure 39.2: Christians Divided into Two Categories: Ordinary and Spirit-Baptized

But such a division of Christians into two categories is not a unique understanding that is found only in Pentecostal teaching in the twentieth century. In fact, much Pentecostal teaching came out of earlier holiness groups that had [p 776](#) taught that Christians could either be ordinary believers or “sanctified” believers. Other groups have divided Christians using different categories, such as ordinary believers and those who are “Spirit filled,” or ordinary believers and those who are “disciples,” or “carnal” and “spiritual” Christians. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church has long had not two but three categories: ordinary believers, priests, and saints. All of these divisions into different categories of Christians can be seen in figure 39.3.²⁷

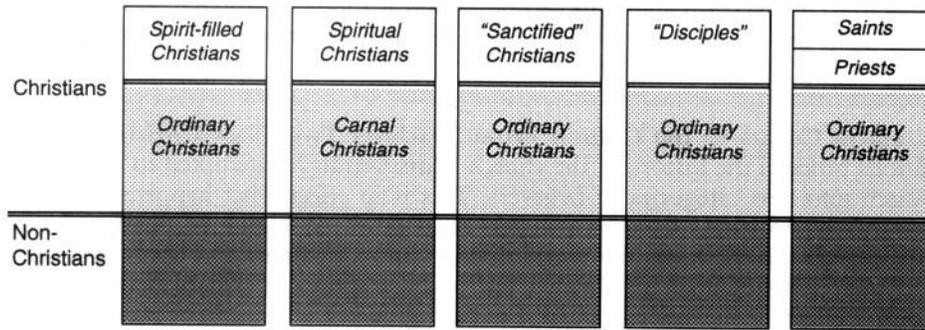


Figure 39.3: Other Ways People Have Classified Christians So As to Divide Them Into Two (or Three) Categories

Although those who teach the classical Pentecostal view of baptism in the Holy Spirit may deny that they are attempting to divide Christians into two categories, [p 777](#) such a division is implicit every time they ask whether someone has been baptized in the Holy Spirit or not. Such a question strongly suggests that there are two groups of Christians, those who have had this experience of “baptism in the Holy Spirit” and those who have not.

What is the problem with viewing Christians as existing in two categories like this? The problem is that it contributes to a “we-they” mentality in churches, and leads to jealousy, pride, and divisiveness. No matter how much these people who have received this special empowering of the Holy Spirit try to be thoughtful and considerate of those who have not, if they genuinely love their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and if this has been a very helpful experience in their own Christian lives, they cannot help but give the impression that they would like others to share this experience as well. Even if they are not proud in their hearts (and it seems to me that most are not) with respect to this experience, such a conviction that there is a second category of Christians will inevitably give an impression of pride or spiritual superiority. Yet there will very likely be a sense of jealousy on the part of those who have not had such an experience. In this way, a view of two groups within the church is fostered, and the repeated charge of divisiveness that is made against the charismatic movement is given some credibility. In fact, divisions often do occur in churches.

The major objection to this position is that the New Testament itself teaches no such two-level or two-class Christianity. Nowhere in the Epistles do we read of Paul or Peter telling a church that is having problems, “You all need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Nowhere do we hear of the risen Lord Jesus speaking to the troubled and weak churches in [Revelation 2–3](#), “Ask me to baptize you in the Holy Spirit.” It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the two-level or two-class view taught by all of these groups throughout history does not have a solid foundation in the New Testament itself.

2. There Are Many Degrees of Empowering, Fellowship With God, and Personal Christian Maturity. Is there a better model for understanding the varying degrees of maturity and power and fellowship with

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God that Christians experience? If we are willing to eliminate the categories that make us think of Christians in one group or another, a better model is possible, as represented in figure 39.4.

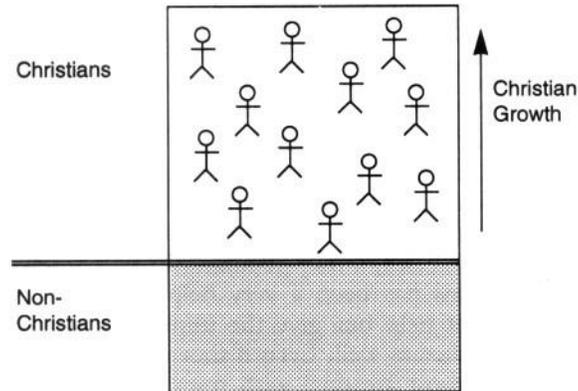


Figure 39.4: A Better Picture: Christians Have Experienced Varying Degrees of Growth, but They Should Not Be Divided into Two Distinct Categories

This chart shows the world as divided into non-Christians and Christians, but among Christians there are not categories into which we can place believers and divide them into set groups. Rather, there are Christians at all points along a scale of increasing Christian maturity (sanctification), increasing closeness of fellowship in their walk with God (an aspect of adoption), and greater experiences of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives and ministries.

The Christian life should be one of *growth in all of these areas* as we progress throughout life. For many people that growth will be gradual and progressive, and will extend over all the years of their lives. We could represent it by the arrow in figure 39.5.²⁸

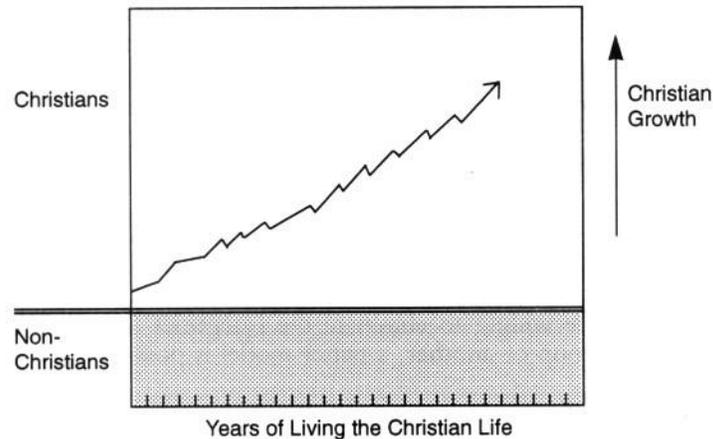


Figure 39.5: For Most Christians Growth Will Be Gradual and Progressive and Will Extend Over Their Whole Lives

p 779 a. **How Should We Understand Contemporary Experience?** What then has happened to people who say they have experienced a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” that has brought great blessing to their lives? We must understand first what is commonly taught about the need to prepare for baptism in the Holy Spirit. Very often people will be taught that they should confess all known sins, repent of any remaining sin in their lives, trust Christ to forgive those sins, commit every area of their lives to the Lord’s service, yield themselves fully to him, and believe that Christ is going to empower them in a new way and equip them with new gifts for ministry. Then after that preparation, they are encouraged to ask Jesus in prayer to baptize them in the Holy Spirit. But what does this preparation do? It is a guaranteed prescription for significant growth in the Christian life! Such confession, repentance, renewed commitment, and heightened faith and expectation, if they are genuine, can only bring positive results in a person’s life. If any Christian is sincere in these steps of preparation to receive baptism in the Holy Spirit, there will certainly be growth in sanctification and deeper fellowship with God. In addition to that, we may expect that at many of these times the Holy Spirit will graciously bring a measure of the additional fullness and empowering that sincere Christians are seeking, even though their theological understanding and vocabulary may be imperfect in the asking. If this happens, they may well realize increased power for ministry and growth in spiritual gifts as well. We could say that a person has moved from point A to point B in figure 39.6 and has made one very large step forward in the Christian life.

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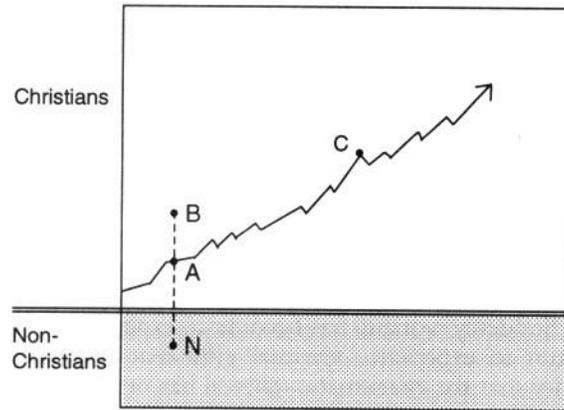


Figure 39.6: A Single Experience May Result in a Large Step of Growth in the Christian Life

Of course prayer and Bible study and worship will seem more meaningful. Of course there will be more fruitfulness in evangelism and other kinds of ministry. But it is important to recognize that someone who moves from point A to point B on the chart is not now in a separate category of Christians, such as a group of those who have been “baptized in the Holy Spirit” and who are therefore different from those who have not had such an experience. There might be another [p 780](#) Christian in the same church who has never had such a large step of growth but who has nonetheless been making steady progress for the last forty years of his or her Christian life and has come to point C on the chart above. Though that person has never had a single experience that Pentecostals would call a “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” he or she is still much farther along the path of Christian growth than the younger Christian who has recently been “baptized in the Holy Spirit” (according to Pentecostal terminology) and moved from point A to point B. Although the Christian who moved from point A to point B is not farther along in the Christian life than another person who is at point C, the person who moved to point B is certainly farther along *than he or she was before* and this is certainly a positive result in his or her life. Thus, with this understanding of the Christian life, we have no divisions of Christians into two categories.

Before we leave this chart, one more observation should be made: in many cases the charismatic movement has brought teaching on the baptism of [p 781](#) the Holy Spirit into more liberal churches where, for many years, there has not been a clear proclamation of the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone, and where people have not been taught that they can believe the Bible completely as God’s Word to us. In such cases, many of the people in those churches have never experienced saving faith—they are at point N on the chart above, actually non-Christians and not born again.²⁹ Now when a representative of a charismatic renewal comes to these churches and tells them that they can experience new vitality in their Christian lives, and then tells them that the preparation is to repent of all known sins, ask Christ for forgiveness of those sins and trust him to forgive them, and commit their lives totally to Christ as their Lord, they eagerly respond to those directions. Then they pray and ask Jesus to baptize them in the Holy Spirit. The actual result is that they move from point N on the chart to point A or perhaps even point B, because of their sincerity and deep eagerness to draw closer to God. While they think that they have been baptized by the Holy Spirit as a second experience in their Christian lives, Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 2004).

what has in fact happened is that they have become Christians for the first time. (They have been “baptized in the Holy Spirit” in the true New Testament sense!) The next day it is almost impossible to keep them silent, they are so excited. Suddenly, reading the Bible has become meaningful. Suddenly prayer has become real. Suddenly they know the presence of God in their lives. Suddenly worship has become an experience of deep joy, and often they have begun to experience spiritual gifts that they had not known before. It is no wonder that the charismatic renewal has brought such excitement (and often much controversy) to many Roman Catholic parishes and to many mainline, more liberal Protestant denominations. Though we may differ with the way this teaching is actually presented, no one should fault the good results that have come about as a result of it in these churches.

b. What Terms Should We Use Today? Now we can understand why our use of terms to describe this experience and the category of understanding we put it in are so important. If we use the traditional Pentecostal terminology of “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” then we almost inevitably end up with two-category Christianity, for this is seen as a common experience that *can* and indeed *should* happen to Christians at one point in time, and, once it has happened, does not need to be repeated. It is seen as a single experience of empowering for ministry that is distinct from the experience of becoming a Christian, and people either have received that experience or they have not. Especially when the experience is described in terms of what happened to the disciples at Pentecost in [Acts 2](#) (which was clearly a one-time experience for them), the Samaritans in [Acts 8](#), and the Ephesian disciples in [Acts 19](#), it is clearly implied that this is a one-time event that empowers people for ministry but that also puts them in a separate category or group than the one they were in before this experience. The use of the term “*the baptism in the Holy Spirit*” inevitably implies two groups of Christians.

But if we are correct in understanding the experience that has come to millions of people in the charismatic renewal as a large step of growth in their Christian lives, then some other term than “baptism in the Holy Spirit” would seem to be more appropriate. There might be several terms that we could use, so long as they allow for repetition, varying degrees of intensity, and further development beyond that one experience, and so long as they do not suggest that all truly obedient Christians should have the same experience.³⁰ We have already used one expression, “*a large step of growth* in several aspects of the Christian life.” Because this phrase speaks of “*a large step of growth*” it cannot be misunderstood to refer to a single experience that puts Christians in a new category. And because it is referred to as a large step of growth, it clearly implies that others may experience such growth in smaller steps over a longer period of time but reach the same point in the Christian life.³¹

Another term that may be helpful is “*a new empowering for ministry.*” It is certainly true that many who have received such a charismatic experience do find new power for ministry in their Christian lives, including the ability to use spiritual gifts that had not been theirs before. However, the problem with this phrase is that it does not say anything about the deepened fellowship with God, the greater effectiveness in prayer and Bible study, and the new joy in worship that often also result from this experience.

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c. What Is “Being Filled With the Spirit”? Yet an even more commonly used term in the New Testament is “*being filled with the Holy Spirit.*” Because of its frequent use in contexts that speak of Christian growth and ministry, *this seems to me to be the best term to use* to describe genuine “second experiences” today (or third or fourth experiences, etc.). Paul tells the Ephesians, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but *be filled with the Spirit*” ([Eph. 5:18](#)). He uses a present tense imperative verb that could more explicitly be translated, “Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit,” thus implying that this is something that should repeatedly be happening to Christians. Such fullness of the Holy Spirit will result in *renewed worship and thanksgiving* ([Eph. 5:19–20](#)), and in renewed ^{p 782} relationships to others, especially those in authority over us or those under our authority ([Eph. 5:21–6:9](#)). In addition, since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit who sanctifies us, such a filling will often result in *increased sanctification*. Furthermore, since the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us for Christian service and gives us spiritual gifts, such filling will often result in *increased power for ministry* and increased effectiveness and perhaps diversity in the use of *spiritual gifts*.

We see examples of repeated filling with the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. In [Acts 2:4](#), the disciples and those with them were “*all filled with the Holy Spirit.*” Later, when Peter was standing before the Sanhedrin, we read, “Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Spirit* said to them ...” ([Acts 4:8](#)). But a little later, when Peter and the other apostles had returned to the church to tell what had happened ([Acts 4:23](#)) they joined together in prayer. After they had prayed they were again filled with the Holy Spirit, a sequence of events that Luke makes clear: “*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly*” ([Acts 4:31](#) NIV). Even though Peter had been filled with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost ([Acts 2:4](#)) and had later been filled with the Holy Spirit before speaking to the Sanhedrin ([Acts 4:8](#)), he was once again filled with the Holy Spirit after the group of Christians he was meeting with had prayed.

Therefore, it is appropriate to understand filling with the Holy Spirit *not as a one-time event* but as *an event that can occur over and over again* in a Christian’s life. It may involve a momentary empowering for a specific ministry (such as apparently happened in [Acts 4:8](#); [7:55](#)), but it may also refer to a long-term characteristic of a person’s life (see [Acts 6:3](#); [11:24](#)). In either case such filling can occur many times in a person’s life: even though Stephen, as an early deacon (or apostolic assistant), was a man “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” ([Acts 6:3](#), [5](#)), when he was being stoned he apparently received a fresh new filling of the Holy Spirit in great power ([Acts 7:55](#)).

Someone might object that a person who is already “full” of the Holy Spirit cannot become more full—if a glass is full of water no more water can be put into it. But a water glass is a poor analogy for us as real people, for God is able to cause us to grow and to be able to contain much more of the Holy Spirit’s fullness and power. A better analogy might be a balloon, which can be “full” of air even though it has very little air in it. When more air is blown in, the balloon expands and in a sense it is “more full.” So it is with us: we can be filled with the Holy Spirit and at the same time be able to receive much more of

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the Holy Spirit as well. It was only Jesus himself to whom the Father gave the Spirit without measure ([John 3:34](#)).

The divisiveness that comes with the term “*baptism in the Holy Spirit*” could easily be avoided by using any of the alternative terms mentioned in this section. People could be thankful for “a new fullness of the Holy Spirit” or “a new empowering for ministry” or “a significant step in growth” in some aspect of another Christian’s life. There would be no separating into “we” and “they,” for we would recognize that we are all part of one body with no separate categories.³² p 783 In fact, many charismatics and even some traditional Pentecostals today are using the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” far less frequently, preferring to use other terms such as “being filled with the Holy Spirit” instead.³³

Moreover, many people who have had no single dramatic experience (such as what Pentecostals have called a baptism in the Holy Spirit) have nonetheless begun to experience new freedom and joy in worship (often with the advent of modern worship or praise songs in their churches), and to use a wider variety of spiritual gifts with effectiveness and edification for themselves and their churches (including gifts such as healing, prophecy, working of miracles, discernment of spirits, and the ability to exercise authority over demonic forces with prayer and a word of rebuke spoken directly to the evil spirits). Sometimes the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of interpretation have been used as well, but in other cases they have not. All of this is to say that the differences between Pentecostals and charismatics on the one hand, and more traditional and mainstream evangelical Christians on the other hand, seem to me to be breaking down more and more, and there are fewer and fewer differences between them.

Someone may object that it is specifically this experience of praying for a baptism in the Holy Spirit that catapults people into a new level of power in ministry and effectiveness in use of spiritual gifts. Since this experience has been so helpful in the lives of millions of people, should we so quickly dismiss it? In response, it must be said that, if the terminology “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is changed for something more representative of New Testament teaching, there should be no objection at all to people coming into churches, and to encouraging people to prepare their hearts for spiritual renewal by sincere repentance and renewed commitment to Christ and by believing that the Holy Spirit can work much more powerfully in their lives.³⁴ There is nothing wrong with teaching people to pray and to seek this greater infilling of the Holy Spirit, or to expect and ask the Lord for an outpouring of more spiritual gifts in their lives, for the benefit of the body of Christ (see [1 Cor. 12:31](#); [14:1](#), [12](#)). In fact, most evangelical Christians in every denomination genuinely long for greater power in ministry, greater joy in worship, and deeper fellowship with God. Many would also welcome increased understanding of spiritual gifts, and encouragement to grow in the use of them. If Pentecostal and charismatic Christians would be willing to p 784 teach on these things without the additional baggage of two-level Christianity that is implied by the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” they might find a new era of greatly increased effectiveness in bringing teaching on these other areas of the Christian life to evangelicals generally.

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3. Being Filled With the Holy Spirit Does Not Always Result in Speaking in Tongues. One remaining point needs to be made with respect to the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Because there were several cases in Acts where people received the new covenant power of the Holy Spirit and began to speak with tongues at the same time ([Acts 2:4](#); [10:46](#); [19:6](#); probably also implied in [8:17–19](#) because of the parallel with the experience of the disciples in [Acts 2](#)), Pentecostal teaching has commonly maintained that the outward sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues (that is, speaking in languages that are not understood by and have not been learned by the person speaking, whether known human languages or other kinds of angelic or heavenly or miraculously given languages).³⁵

But it is important to realize that there are many cases where being filled with the Holy Spirit *did not* result in speaking in tongues. When Jesus was filled with the Spirit in [Luke 4:1](#), the result was strength to overcome the temptations of Satan in the wilderness. When the temptations were ended, and Jesus “returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” ([Luke 4:14](#)), the results were miracles of healing, casting out of demons, and teaching with authority. When Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, she spoke a word of blessing to Mary ([Luke 1:41–45](#)). When Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied ([Luke 1:67–79](#)). Other results of being filled with the Holy Spirit were powerful preaching of the gospel ([Acts 4:31](#)), (perhaps) wisdom and Christian maturity and sound judgment ([Acts 6:3](#)), powerful preaching and testimony when on trial ([Acts 4:8](#)), a vision of heaven ([Acts 7:55](#)), and (apparently) faith and maturity of life ([Acts 11:24](#)). Several of these cases may also imply the fullness of the Holy Spirit to empower some kind of ministry, especially in the context of the book of Acts, where the empowering of the Holy Spirit is frequently seen to result in miracles, preaching, and works of great power.³⁶

Therefore, while an experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit may result in the gift of speaking in tongues, or in the use of some other gifts that had not previously been experienced, it also may come without the gift of speaking in tongues. In fact, many Christians throughout history have experienced powerful infillings of the Holy Spirit that have not been accompanied by speaking in tongues. With regard to this gift as well as all other gifts, we must simply say that the Holy Spirit “apportions each one individually as he wills” ([1 Cor. 12:11](#)).

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Before reading this chapter, what was your understanding of “baptism in the Holy Spirit”? How has your understanding changed, if at all?
2. [p 785](#) Has your own Christian life included one or more events that you could call “a large step of growth” in some area or another in the Christian life? Or has it rather been one of small but continuing steps in sanctification, in fellowship with God, and in use of spiritual gifts and power in ministry?

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3. Have you known people who have claimed they received a “baptism in the Holy Spirit” after conversion? In your evaluation, has the result in their lives been mostly positive, or mostly negative, or has it been rather mixed? If you have had such an experience yourself, do you think that understanding it as a one-time “baptism in the Holy Spirit” was essential to the experience, or could the same results have come in your Christian life if it had been called “being filled with the Holy Spirit”? Do you think it would be right to seek for an experience of filling with the Holy Spirit in your own life now? How might someone go about doing this?
4. We all realize that it is possible to overemphasize something good in the Christian life to such an extent that our lives become unbalanced and not as effective in ministry as they might be. If we think of the various ways in which we can grow in the Christian life (knowledge of the Word and sound doctrine, prayer, love for God, love for other Christians and for non-Christians, trust in God each day, worship, holiness of life, use of spiritual gifts, effective power of the Holy Spirit in our witness and ministry, daily fellowship with God, etc.), in what areas do you think you need to ask God for more growth in your own life? Would it be appropriate to ask him for a new fullness of the Holy Spirit to accompany growth in those areas?
5. With regard to this topic of baptism in or being filled with the Holy Spirit, do you think that evangelical churches generally have been moving toward more divisiveness or more unity on this issue?

SPECIAL TERMS

[baptism by the Holy Spirit](#)

[baptism in the Holy Spirit](#)

[baptism with the Holy Spirit](#)

[being filled with the Holy Spirit](#)

[new covenant experience of the Holy Spirit](#)

[old covenant experience of the Holy Spirit](#)

[Pentecost](#)

[two-class Christianity](#)

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(For an explanation of this bibliography see the note on the bibliography to chapter [1](#), p. [38](#). Complete bibliographical data may be found on pp. [1223–29](#).) Note: Very few systematic theologies have included explicit treatment of this topic, since it has only become a controversial issue in this century.)

Sections in Evangelical Systematic Theologies

2. Arminian (Wesleyan or Methodist)

1983 Carter, 1:435–47