

## THE MERCIES OF GOD: Indwelling

**“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” ~ 1 Corinthians 12:12-13**

### Introduction

“Have you been baptized in the Spirit?” You have probably been asked that question more than once. Professing Christians from Pentecostal churches or the charismatic movement zealously implore others to seek this special experience. Like conversion itself, this “second blessing” radically changes a believer’s life, instantly injecting him with a new level of supernatural power for sanctification, service, and worship. After all, it is this event which Jesus’ own disciples experienced when the Spirit was poured out on them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Who wouldn’t want to be identified with that?

The claims that such a baptism has been experienced by believers today are too numerable to count. In fact, these personal testimonies have now become the dominant authority used to compel other Christians to seek the same experience. But is this experience consistent with what God’s Word actually teaches about the Spirit’s ministry and presence in the believer’s life? No. Sadly, what is indeed a rich component of the spiritual blessings that have been poured out on God’s elect, Spirit baptism—and the related concepts of Spirit indwelling and Spirit filling—has been misunderstood by many, resulting in a distorted understanding of God’s gift of salvation.

### A. Key Terms and Definitions

There are three related concepts that must be considered: (1) the *baptism* of the Spirit; (2) the *indwelling* of the Spirit; and (3) the *filling* of the Spirit. (*Note:* This session will be better understood in light of a previous session on the Spirit’s “sealing.” That session was taught on 3/11/2020.)

1. **“Baptism of the Spirit.”** The word “baptism” basically means *immersion*. Baptism of or in the Spirit therefore refers to a *spiritual immersion*. MacArthur and Mayhue define this spiritual immersion as “the act of Jesus Christ, from Pentecost on, of placing every true believer into the church at the moment of salvation” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 925). In other words, the baptism of the Spirit is a one-time work, done by Jesus Christ, to the believer, through the Holy Spirit, at the moment of conversion. It specifically relates to the **placement of the believer into the spiritual body of Christ—the universal church.**

There are **seven texts** which directly mention Spirit baptism. The first four of these texts record the prophecy of John the Baptist with respect to the ministry of Jesus: “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with [in] the Holy Spirit and fire” (**Matt 3:11-12; see also Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16-17; John 1:33**). So important is this prophecy that all four Gospel writers record it.

The next two references to Spirit baptism are found in the book of Acts. The first of these, **Acts 1:4-5**, records the words of Jesus Himself, as He instructs the disciples just prior to His ascension to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of this prophecy. Acts 2 then records its fulfillment, describing the inauguration of a new phase in God’s redemptive work, during which Jesus pours out on believers the Holy Spirit. **Acts 11:15-16** also refers to Spirit baptism, recording Peter’s own recollection of Jesus’ promise and its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost.

The first six of the seven references are all very similar. They do not describe much about the nature of Spirit baptism, but they do indicate clearly that it is a work done *by* Jesus to believers, and that this work was specifically inaugurated on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

It is the seventh and final reference to Spirit baptism in the New Testament that is the focus of debate: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (**1 Cor 12:13**). Unlike the previous six references, this text reads as *normative* for believers. It does not record a prophecy or look back to the historical event of Pentecost (Acts 2). It records what

is now to be viewed as common in the church. Moreover, as Paul explains Spirit baptism to the Corinthian believers, he describes it as having been done to them at the moment of conversion (“we were all baptized”). It is **an accomplished fact**. It is **a component of conversion**. There is no need to seek it as a future work of grace.

This is where Pentecostal and charismatic theologians object. Rather than seeing Paul’s words to the Corinthian church as the normative explanation for Spirit baptism today, Pentecostals and charismatics reject the idea that 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks about Spirit baptism. To them, Spirit baptism is just the opposite: it is an experience that is distinct from conversion. It is something which the Christian must seek at as a second kind of conversion. For example, a 2010 declaration of the Assemblies of God denomination—the largest Pentecostal denomination in the United States, reads as follows:

The most distinguishing features of the baptism in the Holy Spirit are that: (1) it is theologically and experientially distinguishable from and subsequent to the new birth, (2) it is accompanied by speaking in tongues, and (3) it is distinct in purpose from the Spirit’s work of regenerating the heart and life of a repentant sinner. . . . Candidates must be willing to yield to whatever the Lord prompts them to do. While genuine speaking in tongues cannot be self-generated, the seeker must cooperate with, or be borne along by, the Holy Spirit and to give vocal expression to an inner prompting to utter unfamiliar sounds. (“Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” a statement affirmed by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, August 2010)

Pentecostal and charismatic proponents of this view base this understanding on the following arguments:

- (a) Jesus’ disciples received Spirit baptism after their conversion (Acts 1:5; 2:4).
- (b) Christians in the early church received Spirit baptism after their conversion (Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-6).
- (c) Christians today experience Spirit baptism after their conversion.
- (d) Therefore, 1 Corinthians 12:13 simply cannot apply to the discussion. In fact, Pentecostal and charismatic proponents argue that the language of 1 Corinthians 12:13 even suggests this. They note that unlike the other six references, the baptism described by Paul is a baptism “by” and not “in” or “with” the Holy Spirit.

But several arguments must be made in response:

- (1) The ministry of the Spirit among New Testament believers is qualitatively different than it was among Old Testament believers, which is why Jesus’ disciples received the Spirit in a different order. They believed in Jesus as Messiah *before* the church—the spiritual body of Christ—even existed! Naturally, they had to receive the Spirit after Jesus’ ascension, even though they had been converted previously. They were unique.
- (2) The book of Acts records the period of transition that existed temporarily after the day of Pentecost. The church—the spiritual body of Christ—was never intended for the Jews only (Eph 2:11-22). So as the church expanded to include Samaritans (Acts 8:14-17), Gentiles (Acts 10-11), and other Old Testament believers (Acts 19:1-6), the disciples needed visible testimony to the immersion of these groups into the church—the spiritual body of Christ. The outpouring of the Spirit was suspended until key leaders of the early church could witness it in person, and then testify about it to the rest of the church.
- (3) Regarding experience: as important as experience is in the Christian life, it must never be treated as an authority. Regardless of what one feels, Scripture must always dictate the norms of the Christian life. Experience must be interpreted according to the Bible—not *vice versa*.
- (4) Finally, the argument about the language of 1 Corinthians 12:13 is based exclusively on English translations (NASB, NIV, KJV), and not the original Greek wording. According to the Greek, it is actually not “For by one Spirit we were all baptized,” but “For in one Spirit we were all baptized” (ESV). The language—specifically the use of the preposition *ἐν* (*en*, “in” or “with”)—is in fact parallel to the other six references.

Thus, it is best to agree with Thomas Schreiner, who described the meaning of Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:13 as follows:

At conversion, Jesus Christ plunged believers into the Holy Spirit, so that we are immersed with the Spirit when we are saved. In the same way, at our conversion, we are made to drink of the Spirit, and we live because we drink from the water of life. The one we are immersed into is the one we drink from. (*Spiritual Gifts*, 59)

Or in the words of Anthony Hoekema,

What this means is plain as daylight: *all* Christians have been Spirit-baptized. Being baptized with the Spirit is here describe as identical with regeneration—with the sovereign act of God whereby we are made one with Christ and incorporated into his body. You don't need to seek a Spirit-baptism as a post-regeneration experience. (*Saved by Grace*, 49)

2. **“Indwelling of the Spirit.”** The immersion of the new believer into the Holy Spirit at conversion inaugurates a new, ongoing reality: *the Spirit's abiding presence in the believer*. On the one hand, Spirit indwelling is to be understood as distinct from Spirit baptism. On the other hand, it is Spirit baptism that brings about Spirit indwelling.

This abiding presence of the Spirit in the believer's life is another glorious aspect of redemption. It is not based on merit. It is not earned. It does not ebb and flow according to feelings. It is a permanent fact—regardless of whether the believer is conscious of it or not. As a gift from Father, the Spirit now abides in the believer throughout the rest of his life, bringing him surely to final glorification. Jesus Himself promised this when He stated to His disciples, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you” (**John 14:16-17**). Jesus specifically called the Holy Spirit “another Helper”—i.e., another *paraclete* (παράκλητος), one specifically called alongside to be present in another's behalf. Later, the Apostle Paul points to the fulfillment of this promise when he writes about “the Spirit of God” who “dwells in you” (**Rom 8:9, 11**). This indwelling has two dimensions:

- (a) An individual nature, as He indwells each and every believer: **1 Corinthians 6:19-10**; **2 Timothy 1:14**.
- (b) A corporate nature, as He indwells all believers collectively: **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**; **Ephesians 2:20-22**.

**“The Spirit of God dwells individually in each member of the New Testament body as well as collectively in them altogether.” —MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 368**

3. **“Filling of the Spirit.”** Because the believer has been spiritually immersed in the Holy Spirit at conversion, and because the Spirit now indwells the believer for the rest of his life, the believer has access to the spiritual resources associated with the Spirit. Thus, MacArthur and Mayhue define Spirit filling as “the Holy Spirit's control of the life of the Christian. The filling of the Spirit can be repeated and frequently needs to be. It is to be distinguished from the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which occurs once at the time of regeneration” (*Biblical Doctrine*, 929).

But unlike the previous two concepts—*baptism* (at conversion) and *indwelling* (throughout the Christian life)—the Spirit's *filling* ebbs and flows and is dependent upon the believer's involvement. Just because the believer possesses the permanent gift of the Spirit's indwelling presence does not mean he lives in constant consistency with that reality. In fact, the believer can “grieve” (**Eph 4:30**) or “quench” (**1 Thess 5:19**) the Spirit who dwells within. As Hoekema states, “It may well be true of many of us that though we have all of the Spirit, the Spirit does not have all of us. What believers need, therefore, is not to seek a post-regeneration or post-conversion ‘baptism with the Spirit,’ but rather to be more completely filled with the Spirit” (*Saved by Grace*, 50).

Even though the translation “filling” may suggest that *spatial filling* is to be sought (as if the Spirit was like water which filled a glass), Spirit filling is actually nothing of the sort. Rather, **Spirit filling should be understood as permeating influence**. What is to be sought is an increasingly consistent influence of the Spirit in the believer's life. For example, in **Ephesians 5:18** Paul states, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.” He then goes on to describe what this filling brings: “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (**Eph 5:19-21**). In other words, the key idea is that of *influence*. Rather than the loss of judgment and morality brought about by the influence of alcohol, Spirit filling produces a Spirit-controlled rationality that results in authentic worship and empowerment for ministry. It is God-centered in nature, not self-serving. It produces joy and thankfulness. It results in humility and service to others.

Synonymous language is found in **Galatians 5:16-25**, where Paul writes, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. . . . If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Here, **walking by the Spirit means walking according to His rule**, and it is synonymous with being *filled by the Spirit*. When the believer walks according to the rule of the Spirit, revealed in the Word of God which was inspired by the Spirit (2 Peter 1:21), the believer manifests the fruit of the Spirit’s influence. This fruit is nothing less than the goal of Christian sanctification—the manifestation of all of the qualities exhibited by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In fact, the believer can know he is Spirit filled when his character is being increasingly transformed to the example of Jesus Christ.

## B. Essential Characteristics

Three characteristics for each of the three components are provided below.

1. **The baptism of the Spirit occurs once, at conversion.** 1 Cor 12:13.
2. **The baptism of the Spirit establishes unity among all true believers.** 1 Cor 12:13.
3. **The baptism of the Spirit introduces the believer to his new source of life.** 1 Cor 12:13; John 6:33; 7:37-39.
4. **The indwelling of the Spirit is a permanent reality for every true believer.** John 14:16-17; Rom 8:9, 11.
5. **The indwelling of the Spirit empowers sanctification, ministry, and worship.** Gal 5:25; 2 Tim 1:14.
6. **The indwelling of the Spirit makes sin particularly grievous.** 1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph 4:30.
7. **The filling of the Spirit is a state to be sought.** Eph 5:18; Gal 5:16; Col 3:16-17.
8. **The filling of the Spirit manifests itself by particular fruit.** Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:19-21.
9. **The filling of the Spirit is intended to glorify Christ.** John 16:13-14; 2 Cor 3:17-18.

## For Further Reflection

**Scripture Memory:** 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

### Recommended Reading:

- MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, pp. 353-74.
- John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, pp. 207-236.

### Homework:

- Hypothetically speaking, if a Christian today is not baptized in the Spirit, what does that say about him, especially with respect to the universal church—the spiritual body of Christ?
- How does the Pentecostal/charismatic view of Spirit baptism lead to a two-tier Christianity? What are the dangers apparent with this?
- Consider the nine “essential characteristics” listed below. Record how each one impacts your life today—whether in terms of praise or in terms of responsibility. Explain.
- Spirit-filling is to be sought, but it is to be sought using the means prescribed by God’s Word. List some of those means by which a believer today can seek and experience the filling (direct influence) of the Spirit.
- The experience of Spirit filling is often described today in terms of emotions. But as you reflect upon Scripture, what are the things we will experience as we are filled by the Spirit?

**Hymns:** “Holy Spirit, Living Breath of God” (*Hymns of Grace* #318); “Breath on Me, Breath of God” (#319)

**This Week’s Audio:** [gracechurch.org/motw](http://gracechurch.org/motw)

**Next Meeting:** April 15 – “Gifting”