

Are We A Charismatic Church?

Part 1: The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

by Mark Mitchell

It is not unusual for newcomers to CPC to ask, “Are you a charismatic church?” We are not always sure how to answer that question. We are usually quite certain that they are not using this term as it is often used in our society—to describe a person of charm, genius or attractive personality. The term *charismatic* as it applies to the church is normally used to describe a church that somehow ascribes to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace and the use of spiritual gifts such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. In such cases, we would have to confess to these well meaning newcomers that CPC may not meet their expectations. You could spend a fair amount of time at CPC and probably not see or hear about any of these phenomenon. But we are also aware of the fact that the Bible uses this term in a very different way. In that case, we would answer with a hearty affirmative: “Yes! We indeed are a charismatic church.”

Before we dive into the specific issues, it is important to make two preliminary comments. First, not all of those who are Charismatics or Pentecostals adhere to exactly the same teachings on these matters. Indeed, we are making some generalizations about what these folks believe that might not always be true. We are simply trying to state our convictions on these issues and for that purpose are responding to some common beliefs that have traditionally been held by many within these groups. Second, we believe that the people who hold these views are our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we are debating these issues, it is a family debate. There is plenty of room for sincere believers to disagree on these issues and still maintain their unity in Christ.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

We begin with the concept of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life begins with the work of God’s Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that we must be born again and this new birth is “*of the Spirit*” (John 3:3–8). “He is the Spirit of life and it is he who imparts life to our dead souls. More than this, he comes to dwell within us, and the indwelling Spirit is the common possession of all God’s children” (Stott, p. 19). This is why the apostle Paul could say, “*But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness*” (Romans 8:9b–10).

Once the Spirit of God has taken up residence in our lives, he is there to stay. This was the assurance Paul gave to the Ephesians, “*you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance*” (Eph. 1:13–14). These images of the Spirit as a “pledge” and a “seal” are meant to communicate the profound security the believer has as one who forever belongs to Christ and is bound for heaven.

Furthermore, those who have been indwelt with the Spirit will need to rely on him to manifest Christlike attributes, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law*” (Gal. 5:22–23). In order for the fruit of the Spirit to be manifest in our lives, we need to continuously heed the command to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18), not in the sense that he no longer indwells us, but in the sense that we must let him control us in such a way that our lives increasingly manifest his power and love. There is much evidence in the book of Acts and elsewhere that repeated fillings with the Holy Spirit brought both increased sanctification and power for ministry. As we will see, we believe that when people speak of special experiences with the Holy Spirit after conversion that these are fillings of the Holy Spirit rather than baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Is this promised gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit the same as the baptism of the Spirit? Here is where some Christians differ. Some say the gift of the Spirit is different than the baptism of the Spirit while others say they are essentially the same. The former are sometimes called Charismatic or Pentecostal. Many of these folks believe that the baptism of the Spirit is an experience that takes place some time after conversion as a kind of “second blessing” and that this experience is often marked by speaking in tongues. These people often point to the book of Acts as proof for their convictions.

The Day of Pentecost

In Acts 1:4–5 Jesus told his 120 followers to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit: “*for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not*

many days from now.” This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, which Peter quoted in Acts 2:17, “*And it shall be in the last days... That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind.*” Several days after Jesus ascended into heaven the Spirit indeed fell on these early believers on the Day of Pentecost. It was a dramatic event accompanied by a rushing wind and tongues of fire which empowered them to speak in foreign languages.

We must understand that in certain respects this event was unique and unrepeatable. This was the very beginning of the new era when the Spirit would be poured out upon the church. Grudem writes, “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” (Grudem, p. 770). From that time on, believers would receive the gift of the Spirit when they turned to Christ, along with all the other blessings of being a child of God such as forgiveness and adoption. Later, that same day, Peter preached to a large crowd and promised that they would receive this same blessing when they became Christians through repentance and faith, “*Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 3:37). Three thousand people were baptized that day and all of them also received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is interesting to note that these 3,000 do not appear to have experienced the same miraculous phenomenon of rushing wind and tongues of fire. We can conclude, “This distinction between the two companies, the 120 and the 3,000 is of great importance, because the norm for today must surely be the second group, the 3,000, and not (as is often supposed) the first. The fact that the experience of the 120 was in two distinct stages was due simply to historical circumstances. They could not have received the Pentecostal gift before Pentecost. But those historical circumstances have long since ceased to exist. We live after the event of Pentecost, like the 3,000. With us, therefore, as with them, the forgiveness of sins and the ‘gift’ or ‘baptism’ of the Spirit are received together” (Stott, p. 29).

The Samaritan believers

There are two other occasions in the Book of Acts where it appears that perhaps believers have not received the Holy Spirit until some time later than their conversion. A closer

look at each of these reveals that there is something unusual about both situations.

In Acts 8:5-17 Philip has preached the gospel in Samaria and many believed and were baptized. The first sign that anything was unusual is that “*when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.*” This passage is confusing. Why didn’t these believers get the Holy Spirit when they believed? Some have said that these people weren’t really saved in the first place, but there is nothing to indicate that. Others take this to mean that the gift/baptism of the Spirit is something that happens after salvation. Why would God withhold the Spirit from these Samaritans when they believed?

This can be explained on the basis of the unique historical situation. There had been a great division between Jews and Samaritans for centuries, but now the Samaritans were being evangelized and were responding to the gospel. This was a critical moment in the history of God’s dealings with his people. What would happen now? Would the schism between these two groups continue? Would there be two different churches, a Jewish church under the apostles and a Samaritan church under someone else? To make sure that these two groups would become one, God withheld his Spirit until the apostles arrived. There had to be a delay for the apostles to come up to Samaria and confirm that God was indeed pouring out his Spirit on even the Samaritans. When they arrived, they found that the believers were genuine, except for the fact that they hadn’t received the Spirit. So the apostles laid hands on them and they received the Spirit, and there was likely some outward sign to demonstrate that to them. This was therefore a unique experience necessary to confirm that the Samaritans weren’t second class believers and they were all part of the same church.

The Disciples of John

The second incident takes place in Acts 19:1-7. Paul was in Ephesus where he meets up with about a dozen men who do not seem to be believers at all. Paul, sensing that something was missing, began to probe. First, he asked, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*” Paul wasn’t implying that somehow when they believed they might have missed out on the gift of the Spirit. He was just questioning the reality of

their faith because from what he could tell the Spirit wasn't present in their lives. Their answer reveals he was right: "No, we have not heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." This shows how truly ignorant they were. So Paul asks them another question, "Into what then were you baptized?" Paul knows that if they've never heard of the Spirit, they've probably never really believed in Jesus. And they told him, "Into John's baptism." They are talking, of course, about John the Baptist. Paul responded, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." We don't know how much they knew about Jesus, but it seems that somehow they had missed the fact that John's whole ministry was to get people ready for Jesus through repentance. But now they understood. Luke says, "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying." Once again, in this case God gave visible signs to validate for the Apostles the spiritual reality of what was happening. We

shouldn't take this as a norm for today because this was a unique experience for these particular people. But the point is clear, once they did truly believe in Jesus, they received the gift of the Spirit.

We conclude then that to be baptized with the Spirit is an experience all believers share at the moment of their conversion. The clearest statement of this is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "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." The emphasis here is on the common experience of all believers with the Holy Spirit. Regardless of differences in gender or race, we all became members of the body of Christ in the same way—through the baptism of the Spirit. This always has been and remains the one means of entry into the Christian life. As a result, the baptism of the Spirit is not a dividing factor among believers (some have it, others don't), but rather that which unites us. Let us celebrate our unity as those who share this experience of the Spirit's work.

1. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, InterVarsity Press, Leicester, England, and Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994.

2. John R. W. Stott, *Baptism & Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1964.