

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

The aim of this article

In this article we would like to share with you our belief that God loves each of his children in the same way and wants to have a full relationship with them immediately when they decide to become His children. Therefore the Holy Spirit fills their heart at repentance without any time delay. This is the baptism with the Holy Spirit that is God's immediate response to their decision. We would like to explain on basis of biblical passages why we believe so and point out the errors of the Charismatic-Pentecostal teaching according to which repentance and Spirit-baptism are usually^[1] two separate events with time delay inbetween.

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⚓ 1 Occurance and Meaning of the Term in the New Testament

The term “to baptize with Holy Spirit” occurs in all four gospels: Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33. These words of John the Baptist refer to Jesus: he will be the one who baptizes with Holy Spirit. Jesus is mightier than John. John called the people to regret and repent of their sins. Jesus is able to give them heavenly power through the Holy Spirit to live godly lives following him. The promise made by John was fulfilled at Pentecost in the year AD 30, just as Jesus had predicted before his ascension (Acts 1:4-8). We can see that the disciples who hid behind locked doors out of fear of the Jews (John 20:19) started to proclaim the Good News with great courage and wisdom after receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14).

⚓ 2 The Unique Situation of the Disciples: Time Delay Between Repentance and Baptism in the Holy Spirit

The first disciples decided to follow Christ but they had to wait till Pentecost 30 AD for being baptized with the Spirit. We find the reason for this time delay in Jesus' words:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (*John 16:7*)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (*John 7:37-39*)

As these passages show, the disciples were in a unique situation: although they had made a decision to follow Jesus when they first met him, they only received the Holy Spirit later, after Jesus' glorification.[2] They had to wait because the Spirit had not been given yet (John 7:39). However, since the Spirit was given (i.e. the third divine person was revealed at Pentecost) there has no longer been any need for those who have decided to follow Jesus to wait: they can be filled with the Holy Spirit without time delay.

3 The Situation of Christians After Pentecost 30 AD.: Holy Spirit Baptism at Repentance—Fullness Without Time Delay

After Pentecost repentance and baptism in the Holy Spirit are not two separate events anymore. If someone opens his heart and invites God into his life God makes his home in him immediately:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ...Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (*John 14:16-17 & 23*)

Jesus first speaks about sending the Holy Spirit that he will be with the believers forever, then about the Father and himself. This means that by receiving the Holy Spirit actually the Triune God makes his abode with us. **As not only a part of the Father and a part of Jesus make abode in us when we repent neither is the Holy Spirit poured out into the heart of the convert partially.** The only prerequisite is: to love him and the decision to keep his word. In this case **God does not delay with his love but he comes immediately and pours it out into the believer's heart:**

...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (*Romans 5:5*)

It is very far from God's being that he gives only a reduced quantity of his love to the one who yearns for Him. On the other hand **the Holy Spirit is a person who cannot be divided in parts or portions** like a mass of water. His work is often compared with that of water that revives, refreshes and quenches one's thirst but we can never read in such passages that God first gives a little portion of water and only later the full quantity. When **the Old Testament** promises the Holy Spirit using the picture of water it always **speaks in terms of fullness**: Isaiah 32:14-16; 44:1-5; 43:19-20; 41:17-20; 35:7; 55:1-2; 58:11; Joel 3:18; Ezechiel 47:1-12)

Since **the Holy Spirit is a person** either he is present in someone's heart or he is not. **If he is present then he is present fully, with his complete being** and consequently he fills a person's heart.

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal [3] of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (*Titus 3:3-7*)

In the context Paul speaks about repentance. Once we were disobedient but God saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out upon us **RICHLY**. This means that **repentance and receiving the Spirit richly** (i.e. fully, since the richness of God cannot mean that he merely gives the Spirit partially) **cannot be regarded as two separate events**, which occur with a time-delay in between.

If someone has not received the Spirit richly, he is not washed, renewed and regenerated. Consequently **he is not saved**, nor justified and is not an heir of eternal life (v. 7).

In another passage **Paul connects receiving the Spirit fully with being a member of the church**.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (*1 Corinthians 12:12-13*)

Every member of the church was made to drink of one Spirit. **Being made to drink is again a strong expression of fullness**. As we showed above, as the Spirit is a person he can only give himself completely and not partially. If he gives himself to drink, he does it fully and **does NOT first just give us a sip of himself and later everything**. **Such a teaching fits rather the oriental concept of an impersonal God and a mass of energy** but not the personal God who revealed himself in the Bible.

If there were two steps of receiving the Holy Spirit (first partially and then fully) there should be two groups or two kinds of Christians in the church according to the quantity of the Spirit they have. But 1 Corinthians 12 does not show such a picture of the church. If we look at the wider context Paul says that **each and every member of the church is very precious because the same Spirit lives in him** by whom he confesses Jesus as his Lord and **from whom he has received gifts**: 1 Corinthians 12:3-11. There are differences in the gifts, in the ministries and in the effects but **Paul does not speak at all about differences in the quantity of the Spirit** (having him partially or fully) although it would be very appropriate to mention it in verses 4-6 if such a distinction existed. All the gifts mentioned in verses 8-10

are signs that someone is filled with the Spirit—not only speaking in tongues, as the charismatic teaching highlights it as a clear sign of that someone is baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:1-17 also excludes fleshly Christianity—like the charismatic teaching usually calls people who are “Christians” without baptism in the Holy Spirit fleshly Christians.^[4] Those who live according to the flesh cannot please God and they will die. Christians are controlled by the Spirit and put to death the deeds of the body. Being controlled by the Spirit is a clear expression of being filled with Him. God wants to share his whole being with his children from the beginning and He wants to support them in their fights. **Why would he do it only partially just in the beginning when a newborn Christian usually has quite strong fights? He gives us the fullness so that we experience a deep relationship** with him out of which we are able to live a victorious life in obedience.

Paul’s own example in Damascus is also a testimony for that being filled with the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from repentance: *Acts 9:17-18*. By the way, there is no report about speaking in tongues (as the classic charismatic theory teaches) or any other visible gift of the Spirit when Ananias lays his hands on him.

Also in *Acts 10:44-48*, in **the case of Cornelius** we can see that the Spirit was poured out on him and his household at their repentance and, what is more, before their baptism with water (while according to the classic charismatic teaching the sequence should be: repentance, water baptism, Holy Spirit baptism).

⚓ 4 Being Filled with the Spirit: The Relationship with the Holy Spirit During Christian Life

At repentance God starts dwelling in us by the Holy Spirit. **This is a relationship with him which can be strengthened by our obedience** (good decisions, devotion, prayer) **but also weakened by our disobedience**. Such expressions as “be filled with the Spirit” in *Ephesians 5:18*, or “do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God” in *Ephesians 4:30* show that it strongly depends on us, our obedience how much the Holy Spirit can work in us. Paul says something similar in *Galatians 5:25*: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”

In *Acts 4:31* the first Christians were praying fervently and experienced great strengthening in their faith by the Holy Spirit:

...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

We find the expression “**being filled with the Spirit**” also in other situations in Acts **when the Holy Spirit strengthened someone in a difficult situation**: *Acts 4:5-10*; *Acts 13:9-12*. Being filled with the Spirit in such cases has a different meaning than e.g. in *Acts 2:4* or elsewhere when somebody repented and received the Holy Spirit (e.g. *Acts 9:17*). **It is not the beginning of the relationship with the Spirit but a strengthening of it and experiencing His power and help in a special way.**

When we read about a Christian being full of the Holy Spirit it does not mean that he was baptized with the Spirit while others were not but *it means that by his obedience the work of the Holy Spirit was very visible in his life*, e.g. *Acts 6:5*: “They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.”. It certainly does not mean that the other six brothers were not baptized with the Holy Spirit in contrast to Stephen.

⚓ 5 Passages Misinterpreted in the Charismatic Teaching

There are some passages in the New Testament which are explained by most Charismatics/Pentecostals in

such a way as if repentance and being baptized / filled with the Spirit were separate events.[5] If we keep the things explained above in front of our eyes it will be no problem to understand also these passages in the right way.

🔗 5.1 Nicodemus: Being Born by Water and Spirit

...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (*John 3:5*)

The charismatic misinterpretation of verse 5 is that **baptism with water** and with the **Spirit** are two separate events because of the conjunction *and*. As we already explained concerning Titus 3 (and in footnote No. 2) two expressions connected by *and* are in the language of the Bible very often a parallelism, which means that **both expressions refer to the same content** emphasizing different aspects. We also showed above that **water is used in the Old Testament as a metaphor of the Spirit** e.g.:

For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. (*Isaiah 44:3-4*)

Pouring water on the thirsty land and pouring the Spirit on Israel's offspring are not two separate events but actually, they mean the same. Israel is compared with a dry land and then with willows by flowing streams after receiving the blessing, i.e. the Spirit (Spirit and blessing are again a parallelism). Therefore **being born by water and Spirit in John 3 means simply being renewed by the Holy Spirit** like the water renews the one who is washed by it.

In Ezekiel 36:22-38 we find similar expressions which, however, describe even more clearly the new birth or birth from above [6], which is an action carried out by God and thus fits very well as a parallel to what Jesus wanted to say in John 3 (and expected Nicodemus to understand as the teacher of Israel).

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (*Ezekiel 36:25-27*)

The whole context speaks about an action (i.e. the birth from above which presupposes—of course—that a person repents) that is carried out by God and not by man like in the case of water baptism. On the other hand, if in John 3:5 Jesus also meant the baptism by water, why does he speak from verse 6 only about the Spirit and does not say a word about baptism by water? Separating water and Spirit leads to a similar problem as what we pointed out concerning Titus 3: those who only received baptism with water cannot enter into the kingdom of God, consequently they do not have citizenship in heaven when they repent and are baptized with water until they do not get the baptism with the Spirit.

However, according to *Philippians 3:20* "our citizenship is in heaven..."—which is valid for everyone who converted to Jesus.

5.2 John 20:19-23: Receive the Holy Spirit—How Come Before Pentecost?

...he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (*John 20:22*)

As we pointed out above the prerequisite of sending the Holy Spirit was Jesus' going away and glorification (*John 7:39* and *John 16:7*). These prerequisites, however, had not been fulfilled yet in *John 20* since Jesus had not ascended yet to the Father to his glory. That is why **we have to exclude that the disciples received the Holy Spirit in this situation**. Verse 22 is the **confirmation of Jesus' promise given in the farewell discourses about sending the Counsellor**. He wanted to remind his disciples who were rejoicing at his appearance that he had to leave the Earth: he would not leave them as orphans but would send them the Holy Spirit. The symbolic act of breathing could help them understand the connection between Jesus and the Holy Spirit whom they were to receive some days later (*Acts 1:5*).

5.3 Acts 2:37-39: Repent and Be Baptized and You Will Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit—The First Two Separated from the Last?

...Repent and be baptized every one of you...and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (*Acts 2:38*)

There is no reason to conclude from this passage that repentance with baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit are two separate events with possible time delay in-between. Which other possibility (language tools) would Peter have had to express that repentance is answered by God with giving the Spirit immediately and by the Apostles with water baptism? We can see in verses 42-47 that **the Holy Spirit immediately started working in their life greatly. He filled their heart** and performed great miracles in and among them: deep brotherly love and unity.

5.4 Acts 8:5-24: Samaritans' Repentance and Receiving the Spirit with Time Delay

...Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. (*Acts 8:14-16*)

The evangelism of the Samaritans was a historic event which proved that not only the Jews are invited into and welcomed in God's kingdom. Because of the enmity for several centuries between the Samaritans and the Jews it was important that Peter and John as apostles and pillars of the church went there to greet the new Samaritan converts and to express to them that they were accepted in the Church as new brothers in Christ. But how shall we understand that: "the Spirit had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." Basing on the first part of this treatise we surely cannot understand it so that they were not filled with the Holy Spirit when they converted. **The Spirit's falling upon them** must have therefore a different meaning here. It must refer to a powerful and miraculous acting of the Spirit: [7] a clear sign of the Spirit's presence in their lives that they had not yet experienced before Peter's and John's coming. It must have been **something visible** as verse 18 says: "**Simon saw** that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands." So we have to understand verse 17: "They were receiving the Holy Spirit" so that **they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, most probably speaking in tongues. This was a confirmation of that the Spirit works in their life but not the moment when the Spirit was poured out into their heart**. The fact that it happened through Peter and John and not through Philipp when they repented could be explained by the above mentioned

unique situation of the Samaritans. It was important that their acceptance in the Church is approved by the apostles. [8]

5.5 Acts 19:1-7: The Twelve Disciples of John the Baptist

“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” (*Acts 19:2*)

These disciples were baptized into John’s baptism that means they were John’s disciples, the followers of his teaching but did not know the teaching of Jesus neither about the Holy Spirit. Consequently *we cannot regard them as Christians*. We can suppose that *they* were men in Asia Minor who had heard about John the Baptist and *had repented from their sins and had been trying to live righteously* according to their recognitions. That’s why they are called disciples in v.1 and Paul regards them as believers in v. 2. It seems they had also fellowship with each other. *They got to know Christianity through Paul and accepted it immediately*. They decided to follow Christ and so Paul baptized them and they received the Holy Spirit immediately. When Paul laid his hands on them they also received gifts from the Spirit: speaking in tongues and prophesying.

5.6 Acts 18:23-28: Apollos

He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. (*Acts 18:25*)

Although also about Apollos we read that he knew only the baptism of John he differs in several aspects from the twelve disciples of John in Acts 19:

- he had been instructed in the way of the Lord
- he was fervent in spirit (cf. Romans 12:11—as the only parallel in the New Testament with the same expression: it is clearly about Christians)
- he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus
- He began to speak boldly in the synagogue
- but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.
- he was not baptized by Aquila and Priscilla

All these differences show that *Apollos was on a completely different level than those twelve in Ephesus* so that although there were things he did not know about Jesus and the Christian teaching *Aquila and Priscilla regarded him as a brother in Christ* and consequently they did not baptize him but just explained to him the things he lacked.

5.7 Hebrews 6:1-2: Washings As One of the Elementary Teachings About Christ

...instruction about washings... (*Hebrews 6:2a*)

Washings (in Greek: βαπτισμα) [baptisma, Plural of baptismos] are mentioned in *the same letter* also in 9:10: “various washings”. Washings refer here (9:10) to the ritual washings according to the Mosaic law.

The aim of Hebrews is to encourage Jewish Christians not to fall back to Judaism and to point out the differences between faith in the Old Testament and New Testament. Therefore the most probable understanding of the *instruction about washings* is **to distinguish clearly the baptism of Jesus from the ritual washings according to the law and other washings of the Old Testament time** like the proselyte baptism or the baptism of John. This **is indeed a fundamental teaching**, which the addressees understood when they became Christians and the author wants to remind them of it. This understanding does not support the Charismatic theory (washings = water baptism and Spirit baptism) but fits well the topic and the teaching of the Letter to the Hebrews.

5.8 Luke 11:5-13

...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!
(*Luke 11:13b*)

Basing on this passage Charismatics and Pentecostals organise special meetings where they “ask God” for the Holy Spirit. However, the context and the original Greek text do not support this understanding. The Greek text says only (as NASB quoted above): “those who ask him” and does not say “those who ask him for the Spirit”. In the context Jesus teaches his disciples to pray and as an encouragement he speaks about how God relates to our prayers. In the parallel passage in Matthew 7:11 instead of Holy Spirit “good things” is written. So Jesus wants to say that we can turn to God as to a loving father when we need help and what we ask him for is in harmony with his will (1 John 5:14). According to Luke’s Gospel, Jesus wants to emphasize that the Holy Spirit is the best thing that God gives to those who ask him. Every other good thing he gives us, he gives through the fellowship, leading and strengthening of the Spirit. The first time this promise was fulfilled was at Pentecost, when Jesus’ disciples received the Holy Spirit.

✠ 6 Summary & Conclusion

Christian life starts with a decision to turn away from sin and follow Christ. God’s response to this decision is that he immediately pours out his Spirit abundantly into the heart of the new convert so that he can experience that God has accepted him as his child. By the Spirit he can experience God’s love, peace and power in fighting against sin. The Spirit fills his heart so that he can love his brothers and other people who do not know God yet. He helps him understand the sound teaching about Christ and come to unity with other Christians. No Christian has to wait for being baptized with the Holy Spirit after he repented because he is God’s beloved child whom God wants to give his fullness:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (*John 1:12-16*)

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Footnotes

1. They also agree that in some cases the two things can be at the same time, or what is more, the Holy Spirit baptism can precede the water baptism. But they regard such cases as exceptions and claim that usually after repentance and water baptism some time has to pass till the baptism with the Holy Spirit whose sign is usually the gift of speaking in tongues. In this study we will focus on refuting the most spread, main stream Pentecostal/Charismatic teaching about Holy Spirit baptism though we are aware of the fact that not all Pentecostals and Charismatics think in the same way about it.
2. God wanted to reveal his triune being in this way. First he wanted to make the Son known through Jesus' incarnation. Sending the Holy Spirit only after Jesus went away was a help for the people to understand that he is a separate person in Trinity. We see, though, especially from John 14, that the work of the three persons cannot be separated. For more details about this topic read our article on the Trinity.
3. Although "regeneration" and "renewal" are connected by an "and" they refer to the same content while highlighting different aspects. This is a well-known literary means used in the Bible which is called parallelism. This is here a COMPLETIVE PARALLELISM, like e.g.: Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The second part of the statement adds to and completes the first part.
4. The existence of a fleshly Christianity is usually based on the misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. Paul calls the Corinthians men of flesh because there is jealousy and strife among them and these are deeds of the flesh. According to Galatians 5:19-21 those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. So also the Corinthians had to repent from these sins. The reason of being fleshly is not that they have not yet been baptized with the Holy Spirit but that they do not obey Him. Therefore neither is the solution to pray for Spirit-baptism but to fight against their sins (cf. Galatians 5:13-15; 1 Corinthians 3:16-18).
5. Charismatics/Pentecostals themselves are not united in this point. Some teach that if someone repents he receives a small quantity of the Spirit and later he will get the fullness. Others claim that at repentance the Holy Spirit does not come into heart of the believer at all but only the baptism with the Holy Spirit which takes place some time later. Of course, both teachings give room to exceptions.
6. The Greek expression γεννω ανωθεν [gennao anothen] can mean both to be born again and to be born from above (also in John 19:11 & 23).
7. We find a similar expression in Luke 1:35. "The angel answered and said to her [Mary], 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.'" Here the Spirit's coming upon Mary refers to the powerful act of the Spirit in the virgin-conception.
8. In this situation and later when Cornelius repented we can see the specific application of the authority of the keys (Matthew 16:19) that Jesus had given to Peter. In Acts 2, 8 and 10 Luke reports step by step about the expansion of Christianity: Jews from the dispersion, Samaritans and Gentiles.

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