

Message #41 of Scripture Beneath The Surface
“What Is The Baptism of the Holy Spirit? - Part 1”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to answer a question which was sent to us from William Zelmer of Battle Creek. His question was, “What is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?” This question is quite common, and of course every church denomination has its own interpretation of this. However, I'm going to try to explain this concept as well as I can, but you must remember that I am just one man, and I can only relate to you what I feel. If you are from a Pentecostal church background, you may not care for my understanding of this subject. In Pentecostal church circles, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is very closely associated with the Holy Spirit gift of speaking in tongues. As I've said in a recent program, tongues are not what the Holy Spirit is all about. It certainly is important, and it certainly is a viable gift of the Spirit, but receiving the Holy Spirit, and being led of God's Spirit, is much more than just what some Pentecostal church denominations try to imply. I guess what we should do first, in our explanation of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, would be to explain what Baptism is itself. If we don't understand the symbolism of water baptism, then it's pretty hard to understand being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

So for your sake, William Zelmer, and you others who wonder about this, let's see what we come up with. First of all, let me just say that there is no quick explanation of what the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is. The principles of God's word are established with line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Because of this, we must understand the foundation of each principle in order to understand the principle itself. Because our program, Scripture Beneath the Surface, is based on trying to explain scripture at the foundation level rather than by

just skimming the surface, I will need to go into a detailed explanation of the parts of scripture which lay the foundation of support for the principle of Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

First of all, we should recognize what water baptism is. Water baptism is essentially a symbolic rite which we enter into because we have a desire to change from our old wicked nature into a new man whose nature is one of righteousness. When we become convicted of our sinfulness, we then determine to change. In the Old Testament writings, the people recognized the symbolism of dying out to the old way of living, and the beginning of a new life in righteousness. The water baptism that they accepted from John the Baptist was an act of being renewed in their manner of living. In essence, they went under the water to symbolize the burying of the old way of life, and when they rose up from the water, this symbolized a new start. This is what the word repentance implies, a turning away from that which was before, and a determination to strive toward righteousness. Just being sorry for your sins is not the same thing as repentance. There has to be an actual turning away from evil, the actual stopping from going in the former direction, and then a heading in the other direction, in order for it to be considered repentance. For the people in the day of John the Baptist, the immersion in water was the death and burying of the old man. The rising up from the water symbolized being born again. This new man would be a man who had turned away from the evil nature of the old man, and now his focus was going to be applied toward obedience to God.

When John the Baptist baptized people, he helped them to make an outward show of what they had determined in the heart to do. When a man went down into the water, it was with the intent that the old man, the old way of life, was to be put to death. It was going to be buried. The water was going to overwhelm them, and they would be completely beneath it. This would bring a symbolic death and burial, and this death was needed in order to complete the act of repentance.

Let me explain this part, about the death being needed to complete the act of repentance. Few people understand the concept of making a covenant. But the act of baptism was not just a sign of washing away of sins, but an actual covenant with God. A covenant is a statement of what one person will do concerning his relationship with another person. A covenant between two people is a statement which describes how they will act and speak, thereby affecting the relationship between themselves. When you repent from your sins, you are not just turning away, but are actually saying to God something like this. It may not be exactly like this, but probably something close.

“God, I have heard you speak to my heart, and I accept your word. You have shown me that I am a sinner, and that I am not pleasing to you. I declare this day that I have been disobedient, and that I have not been pleasing to you, and that it is my determination to stop being disobedient and to begin to act and speak in a way that is pleasing to you. From this day on, I have determined that the old way of life will cease, and I will now be a new man who will live for you in righteousness to the best of my ability. My former life is ending, and my new life in you is beginning.”

Now, this is an example of a covenant that a person makes with God when they finally realize they have been wicked, and when they also are willing to change their ways. Notice that the statement is one sided. It isn't a two person agreement. The statement is only a statement that explains what that person's will is now. It is like a last will and testament for a person who is dying. Jesus made a last will and testament before he died. He said that he would come again and receive us unto himself if we believed on him. Then he died. And this too is an important part of a covenant. When you make a covenant, there can be no enforcement of that covenant without blood. This is pointed out first in Genesis 15, where God establishes his covenant with Abraham. When we read this chapter, we see two specific things of importance. First, it was God who gave Abraham the covenant, and Abraham had nothing to do with what was promised. And second, this covenant of promise was not put into effect without blood.

The blood on that day was of animals and birds, but this same covenant of promise was extended to us by Jesus Christ. The promise to us was not just a physical land of promise, as to Abraham, but a spiritual land of promise which would be ours for eternity. Jesus Christ was the one who died, in order that blood might be spilled, which would cause the New Testament, the new will and testament of God, to be established. In Hebrews 9:14-17, it tells us that in order for a testament to be in force, there must be the death of the testator. A testator is the person who gives the will and testament. Jesus Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh, had to die in order to establish this covenant with us. He died so that we would be inheritors according to the promise of God.

Now, when you think of this concept, realize that you are no different than God, or his son, in the sense that you must also experience death before your last will and testament can come into force. Just as Jesus made promises to us, and then died, thereby sealing the New Testament in his blood, man is also required to die in order to seal his will and testament. When John the Baptist was baptizing in the wilderness, people were being convicted of their sinfulness, and they were ready to renew their covenant with God. They were ready to make a statement that would demonstrate their will. It was a testimony of their will that they were making. Because the people of Biblical times understood the necessity of there being a death of the testator, a death of the person making the statement of will, they knew that they had to die in order to make their testimony valid. Of course, in the physical sense they could not actually die, for they were making a testimony that was intended to be lived. Therefore, as God had made a symbolic death with the animals for his covenant promise to Abraham, the people in the day of John the Baptist would go down into the water where a symbolic death would occur. The baptismal waters would wash over them, and the act of death would be accomplished. This signified that the death of the testator had been accomplished, and this meant that the covenant they had made with God was now in effect.

This is what happens when a person is baptized, at least, this is what should happen. In some cases, the heart of the person is not as pure as it should be. But if your heart is pure, and you truly do repent of your sins, meaning that you turn away from your former wicked way of life, there is then an establishment of your will. What you willed to happen, will happen if you really

do die out to the old way of life. But it has no effect without your symbolic death taking place. Sometimes there are people who are baptized with water, but they have no real intent that there should be a death. In this case, the covenant is not enforceable. Many people don't even realize a death is necessary in order to establish a will and testament. By the way, many people think infants can be baptized. But how can an infant have a will and testament? Many think they are being baptized when they are sprinkled with water instead of being immersed. But when people are sprinkled, how do they then signify their deaths? I, personally, do not consider water baptism to be realistic unless there is immersion. The key ingredient to a legal covenant, is death. Immersion is the only thing that signifies death in water baptism. But then, what you do is between you and God. It's not up to me to judge whether or not someone is saved by the way they are baptized. However, we cannot ignore the concept of death for the enforcement of a will and testament. No covenant is in force without it. Therefore, baptism must cause the death of the old person in order to bring about the life of the new person. So, baptizing with water is a way to signify the physical death of the former man in order that another physical man might live.

Now, let's take a look at how water baptism relates to spiritual baptism, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 3:11, as well as in each of the other three gospels, we have the reference to John the Baptist being asked if he were the Christ, the Messiah. He told them that he was not the one who should come. He said that he baptized with water, but the one who was coming was going to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. In addition to this we read in Acts 1:4-6, that just prior to his ascension into heaven, Jesus told his disciples that they should not depart from Jerusalem until they had received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. From these scriptures we get the concept of Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

If you read these verses, you will notice two important things. First, the instrument John used to baptize with was water. And second, the instrument Jesus would use to baptize with was the Holy Spirit and also fire. I would like to point out to you that if what John did was to help a person signify the death of the old physical man in order to establish a personal will and testament, then the baptism that Jesus does is the act of helping a person to establish the death of someone also. It is important to understand that baptism is not washing, but in essence, is the killing of the old man. Water baptism symbolically kills the old physical man, the old way of living, and spiritual baptism kills the old spiritual man, the old way of being moved by spirits. What I want you to see is that John baptized a physical person in order to symbolize that the person intended to show a new physical way of life, and Jesus baptized a person with the Holy Spirit in order to make certain that the old spirit nature changed, just as the old physical nature had changed.

Now, here is the essence of the two baptisms; the one with water and the other with the Holy Spirit. When baptizing with water, which is a physical element, you bring about an outward change of the physical body of man. But, when baptizing with the Holy Spirit, which is a spiritual element, you bring about an inward change of the spirit of man.

Now, a change must take place if baptism is real. And this change is in the direction in which the man feels that God is calling him. If the man is wicked to begin with, and the man exhibits wickedness in his actions and words, then the man answers God's call to righteousness, and begins a new life which conforms to what God has called him to do. God calls men out of wickedness and into righteousness. When man is baptized, he is essentially answering the call of God and is re-ordering his life into conformity with what God has called him to. It is absolutely necessary that we understand that baptism is not just a washing, but is an answer to a calling. Whatever you believe God has shown you, you will respond in kind. If you believe God called you to be a better example in your life and witness, than you will answer that calling. To be baptized without answering the call of God is to not truly be baptized at all. Unless you are answering the call of God, and intend to order your life from that day forward according to the principles he has made real to you, you haven't truly turned away from anything.

Let me give you an example of baptism as a calling, rather than just a washing with water. In Mark 10:35-40, we read of the instance where James and John came to Jesus with a desire to sit on his right hand and on his left hand when he came into his kingdom. Interestingly enough, Jesus asked them if they were able to be baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with. Now we must assume that James and John, as disciples of Jesus, had already availed themselves of baptism, just as Jesus had. Yet Jesus was asking them if they could accept a baptism, and then affirmed to them that they indeed would be baptized with the same baptism that he was baptized with. This was indicating a future baptism. Actually, Jesus was telling James and John that the baptism they would be asked to accept was a call to doing whatever God would make real to them as being his will. To accept this baptism, James and John would have to be willing to take on a change of purpose which would be very much different from what their prior life had been. Although James and John were already baptized, God's calling, for them, would be much more specific than to just repent from their sins and accept Jesus as Lord. James and John, as apostles, would be asked to trade an average man's life style for an apostleship which may require them to suffer death as martyrs.

In this portion of scripture we recognize that the call to baptism may be a bit different for one person than for another. Your calling from God will be what he puts on your heart, and something which you believe. Whatever God's call means to you, your response is up to you. You can answer that call, or you can reject it. But if you accept it, then, no matter what it is, you must be baptized in order to die out to what you formerly were in order that you might become what God has called you to become.

Baptism by water will make an outward showing of answering the new call of God. Water baptism symbolized the physical outward change that replaces the old actions and words. But the Baptism by the Holy Spirit will not be an outward change, but a change in your spirit. Many people ask the question, "What is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," and expect to have an answer that points to an outward example, such as speaking in tongues or doing a miracle, or at least having a profound emotional outburst. There is a tendency to look for this outward demonstration in order to confirm that the Holy Spirit has indeed baptized you. But a particular

physical manifestation is not necessarily the indication of the Holy Spirit Baptism, for the event that takes place in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is an inward change of your spirit. Just as water baptism indicates that you are now going to show a body that is responding to the word of God, the Holy Spirit Baptism is now going to reveal a spirit that is responding to the word of God.

A most interesting point is found in Galatians 5:16, where it tells us that if we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. We know that we must attempt to abstain from sin in our physical bodies. But we also know that to perfectly abstain from sin is not possible. However, what we are told in Galatians 5:16, is that when we are led by the Holy Spirit of God, sin cannot take place. What it means is that when you are moved to action or words by God's Holy Spirit, his Spirit will not move you to act or speak in any way other than that which is in perfect accord with God's will. God never deviates from his word, and when he moves you through his Holy Spirit, you will only be moved to act and speak righteously. Therefore, when you are baptized by the Holy Spirit, a death to your old spirit man takes place. From that point on you are answering the call of God to being led by his Holy Spirit instead of being led by wicked spirits. The Holy Spirit is a force. It moves things. It moves people. God even moves the hearts of kings to obey his will. There is nothing that is not subject to the will of God, and when God wills something, his Holy Spirit moves that thing or that person to do the will of God. When you are baptized by the Holy Spirit, you then let God have his way. Instead of being led by a system of laws, don't do this, or don't do that, the Holy Spirit moves your heart to do or not to do something. Instead of trying to abstain from evil, you just allow the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts and desires. And because your spirit man has been reborn, you desire God's word to be fulfilled in you.

The bottom line is this. Whether Baptism of the Holy Spirit has taken place or not cannot be determined on the basis of an outward sign. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit can only be determined to have been accomplished in you when you begin to be moved to acts and words of love, kindness, forgiveness, graciousness, understanding, etc. When your life actually does begin to manifest righteousness, and not because you follow a set of Commandments, then you know that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit has taken place.

One more thing. A man can appear righteous because of the outward sign of keeping a Law of Commandments, but true righteousness only comes when the heart is so fervently in love with God that your heart only desires heavenly things. When this change in the inward man has taken place, you will be completely open to God's will within you, and you will have no desire to quench the moving of the Holy Spirit, for your spirit, which has been reborn into a spirit that is completely in tune with God's Holy Spirit, will never quench the moving of God. His Spirit will always have his way with you. And when his Spirit has his way with you, your only actions will be of righteousness. Baptism of the Holy Spirit completes the death of the evil spirit within man, and a new spirit being born which is 100% in tune with God's Holy Spirit. This is not demonstrated by a one time event, such as water baptism, but by a continuing daily walk with Christ. Baptism of the Holy Spirit will be known to have taken place when a person is moved by God's Spirit, rather than just keeping a set of Laws and Commandments.

