

Spirit-filled (7) – Christianity On Tiptoe

In the book of Acts the filling of the Spirit was not a reward for being holy. It was a free gift given to empower weak & ordinary people to live lives they otherwise would not have lived. The gift was given before they done anything! The gift enabled them to do what they did! The Christian life is impossible from start to finish without the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit was to withdraw himself from the Church genuine Christianity would go with him. It is impossible to be a Christian apart from the Spirit's work of New Birth. It is impossible to grow as a Christian without the Spirit's work of sanctification. It is impossible to fulfil your ministry & mission as a Christian without the Spirit's work of empowerment.

Let me share a bit of my own story about being filled with the Spirit for the first time. I put so much down to this encounter with the Holy Spirit. I had been born again around a year. I had been timid about my faith outside of church life. I was extremely timid in general. I had low expectations for my life. I had failed everything at school. I had little confidence in my ability to do anything. I had never read a book right through. I did not have the discipline to apply myself to study. My writing & my communication skills were very poor. And what I'm doing now was my worst fear... I didn't think I had anything to offer. I cannot emphasise all this enough. Every time I get up to preach it is a fresh reminder to me of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

I had been asking God for boldness to share my faith for a number of months & then I found myself camping at Hillsborough Bible Week. In one of the evening meetings I felt strongly compelled to go forward for prayer during the ministry time after the preaching. I wrestled about this for a bit. Then I went forward, a man prayed for me & as he did I fell over as the the power of the Holy Spirit surged through me. As I lay on the floor, totally still, every part of me was filled with the presence & peace of God. I could have got up at anytime, but I wanted to stay in that moment forever. God was so present & so real.

This isn't the only time I've had such an encounter but it was the first time & it was the one single tangible experience that changed the direction of my whole life. After this encounter there were a number of new things in my life... One of new things was an increasing desire to read the Bible & books that helped me understand more about the Bible & the Christian life. I also began to write out my thoughts & desired to share with others what I was learning. My desire to learn, study & preach eventually led me to Bible College & then into ministry training with Elim. I was not primarily equipped for ministry at Bible College. I was called & equipped for Bible College & ministry through the baptism with the Holy Spirit. That's a vital & inescapable part of my testimony.

1. Is baptism with the Spirit a once off experience?

Is baptism with the Holy Spirit a once off experience in the life of a Christian? I do not believe it is. Here's why. One of the phrases I've heard a number of times regarding this question is: *One baptism, many fillings*. Meaning there is one baptism with the Spirit, but many fillings with the Spirit... I struggle with this conclusion because when I read the NT I don't see baptism with the Spirit & being filled with the Spirit being distinguished from each other at all. For example in Acts 1:5 Jesus says; **"For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."** Then in Acts 2, the first time it happens in verse 4 it says **"all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit."** *Baptised with* was the promise, *filled with* was how it was fulfilled. The way these disciples were baptised with the Spirit was by being filled with the Spirit. Luke uses the term filled with to describe the fulfilment of Christ's promise of baptism with the Spirit. The two terms are used to describe the exact same experience.

Another example is in Acts 10 while Peter is in Cornelius's house. Verse 44 says **"When Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on (or fell on) all who heard the message."** Then in the next chapter when Peter is reporting the event Peter says; **"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he came upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord said: 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 11:15-16).** So Peter is also happy to see being filled with the Spirit at Pentecost & the Holy Spirit coming on all who listened in Cornelius's house as baptism with the Holy Spirit.

The same reality is being described in a number of different ways & I can't see any evidence for one term being distinguished from the others. Baptism with, filled with, falling on, coming on, clothed with are all interchangeable terms describing the same reality. Of course there is a first time, there's a first time for everything, but the first time is not the only time as we will see, & the first time is not given a distinct term in the NT. The terms are all describing the same experience. For this reason we can expect to be baptised with, filled with, clothed with the Holy Spirit more than once. We need it more than once, just like believers in Acts did. Surely a fresh baptism is what we need today! (Drainpipe analogy).

So this is why I don't think the term *one baptism, many fillings* is very helpful. It creates a distinction Scripture does not make. It seems clear that the different terms describe the same experience which can be repeated in different ways throughout our lives. This means all of us can ask God for a fresh baptism or filling with the Spirit. It's not a case of I've been there got the T-shirt. There is more & we need more.

There are times in life when energy is running low, when our courage, confidence & vision are almost gone. When fear or discouragement etc threaten to get the better of us! In such times a fresh filling is the answer needed. The Holy Spirit can & will energise us again; he can & will encourage & embolden us again; he can & will fill us with fresh confidence, vision & power. It's not a case of us pulling ourselves up by the

bootstraps; it's a case of us being filled again & again with the limitless resources of the Spirit of the living God.

Turn with me to Acts 4:31 ESV. It says; **“And when they had prayed, the place in which they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”** Here again we find believers being filled with the Holy Spirit. It's the exact same term used to describe what happened at Pentecost... Now think about this. Acts 2:47 tells us **“the Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved.”** So everyday there are new believers. Now we find ourselves in chapter 4. Peter & John have just been released from prison & banned from preaching about Jesus. They report what happened to their fellow believers... Then they all pray together. One of the things they pray for is boldness. They must have felt a level of intimidation & fear creeping in, but God answers their prayer & they are ALL filled with the Spirit & continue to speak the word of God boldly.

Here's why I'm pointing this out. If the Lord has been adding daily to the number of those saved... Then in that house there are surely believers who experienced Pentecost alongside those who have become believers since Pentecost. Therefore if ALL were filled with the Spirit then some were filled for a second time & others were likely filled for the first time. And the result this time is they ALL spoke the word of God with boldness.

In their prayer they may well have been praying that God would enable Peter & John to continue speaking God's word boldly. **“Grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness...”** However, God's answer was to fill them ALL to speak God's word boldly! God's plan is to fill & refill, to baptise & re-baptise every believer with the power of the Holy Spirit so we can ALL continue to boldly declare & demonstrate the reality of the gospel! Let's learn to pray to God like these early believers...

2. Is tongues the initial essential physical evidence of Spirit-baptism?

Many Pentecostal's believe speaking in tongues is the initial essential physical evidence of baptism with the Holy Spirit. I don't. Firstly because it wasn't part of my first experience of being baptised with the Spirit & more importantly because I don't think the NT teaches so. It teaches that it can be but it doesn't teach that it always is. One thing to point out is that much of the argument of speaking in tongues being the initial essential evidence is based on what I see as a misguided assumption that the NT teaches this concept, of one baptism, many fillings... but there is no such distinction!

In the book of Acts there are at least ten occasions when it talks about an individual or a group being filled with the Spirit. On three of those occasions people spoke in tongues. On the first of those three occasions, Pentecost, there was also wind & what looked like a tongues fire resting upon each person (Acts 2:1-4)... On another of those three occasions the believers spoke in tongues & prophesied (Acts 19:6). So even on

these three occasions, when people definitely spoke in tongues, there was something distinctive about each time the Holy Spirit fell. This fits with what we have learned about the unpredictability of the Spirit. He moves in new & unexpected ways, no time or event is exactly the same as before. He desires to fall on us in fresh & new ways.

Now this leaves at least seven occasions in which tongues is not mentioned. In Acts 4:8 it says; **“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...”** 4:31 says; **“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.”** Remember this occasion included new believers. 7:55 says; **“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand.”** In 8:17, in Samaria, it says **“Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”** In 9:17 Ananias says; **“Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”** 13:9 talks again of Paul being filled with the Holy Spirit as he confronted Bar-Jesus... 13:52 says; **“And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”** Many of these disciples were new believers!

Tongues is a wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit & it is 100% for today & like Paul I would say I wish everyone of you could speak in tongues & even more that you might prophesy. However let's not limit the Holy Spirit with theological assumptions or with our own personal experience. When we are baptised or filled with the Holy Spirit you might well speak in tongues but you might not... Our foundational truth regarding this is *that the believer is... promised an endowment of power as the gift of Christ through the baptism in the Holy Spirit with signs following.* It leaves it open.

The important thing about the baptism or filling with the Spirit is this: You can't miss it – it is an encounter! If it happens something happens & you know it does. Every time people were filled with the Spirit in Acts something happened. Sometimes it tells us what, other times it doesn't, but the sure thing is it was noticeable. In his book *Joy Unspeakable* on the baptism & gifts of the Spirit Martin Lloyd-Jones says 1. It is conscious. 2. It is usually subsequent to a person having believed. 3. It is the highest form of assurance.

You see when it happens you cannot but help know God is real & near & with you & for you, because you experience him in a conscious way. It is an encounter with God & encountering God has always been the heartbeat of the Pentecostal movement, which partly grew out of frustration with cold overly rational & overly formal & overly doctrinal forms of Christianity...

In an ecumenical gathering a number of years ago a Pentecostal leader was asked to identify the difference between him & the others. He responded, *‘You have the truth on ice, and I have it on fire’*. He might have been a bit cheeky, but he catches something of the heartbeat of Pentecostalism. THE FIRE. We need the

heat of the holy fire of Pentecost back in our hearts & lives & for that to happen surely we need a fresh baptism with the Holy Spirit! And whatever happens; it happens...

Another person describes Pentecostalism as '*Christianity standing on tiptoe, expecting something to happen.*' I love that! Let's get on our tiptoes again, let's climb up on our chair's again, expecting something to happen. Let's prepare our hearts by getting on our tiptoes again, by getting our expectancy back, because at the end of the day it doesn't matter how well the worship goes or how well the preacher does, what matters is that God shows up – our expectation is in him - & the truth is he is always here when we gather in his name...

The thing I love about baptism with the Spirit being a distinct & repeated experience in the Christian life is that it encourages us to desire fresh encounters with God, to depend on his empowering presence in our lives. If we are new believers it teaches us from the beginning to expect more! If we have been Christian's for a while it teaches us there is always more! And we need more; we need to be filled again & again with the Spirit's power so the blessing of God can flow through us & impact others.

There is something about this truth that keeps our hearts depending on & seeking more of God... **There is fresh power for every hour of our lives...** There is fresh power for *this hour*! In the book of Acts Peter & John did not rely on the experience of Pentecost for the rest of their lives. It changed their lives but they did not live of that single experience for the rest of their lives. They were filled again at the beginning of Acts 4 (4:8) & at the end of Acts 4 (4:31). This set a pattern. We too can, & need to be, filled again & again with the presence & power of the Holy Spirit. For it is only his inexhaustible power that can equip us with all we need as a church, to keep advancing & keep believing that we have what it takes in God to see this area, this county, this island, this world changed one life at a time!

Let's get on our tiptoes again, expecting God to show up in life-changing, church-altering, kingdom advancing ways.