

What Is Required of Believers Concerning Baptism?

by Raymond C. Faircloth

What Does the Word ‘Baptize’ Mean?

The word ‘baptize’ is a transliteration of the New Testament Greek words *baptizoo*, *baptisma*, and *baptismos* rather than being a translation. These terms mean “dip frequently or intensively, plunge, immerse” according to *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. All reputable scholarly works give the same or similar definitions. These words have several applications.

The Example and the Command to Be Baptised

So baptism is a Christian arrangement that refers to **a believing person’s** being dipped into and under a body of water, by other Christians, and then brought back up from under the water. The two primary reasons for baptism are that:

1. Christ was baptized (Matt. 3:13-16) and later oversaw baptisms in water (John 4:1, 2) and so giving his followers that example.
2. Christ commanded that all believers were to be baptized when he said: “So you must go and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them as identified with** the Father and the Son and the **holy spirit**,²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember: I am with you every day, until the end of the age”” (*Matt. 28:19-20 KGV*).

So by example and by command a believing person should be baptized.

Sprinkling Water on an Infant’s Head is Not Biblical Baptism

Over the centuries the traditional churches have practised the sprinkling or pouring of water on the head of each infant as its baptism. However, excluding Catholicism there are probably more Christians nowadays who recognize full immersion in water as the appropriate method than those who consider sprinkling as sufficient. So which practice really is baptism in the biblical sense? Yet interestingly, Luke tells us that those who were baptized were “men and women” (Acts 8:12) i.e. they were adults capable of making a mature decision on such a serious matter. But what about the idea of sprinkling or pouring water on someone?

Metaphorical Baptism Indicates Physical Immersion

- ❖ “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (*Rom. 6:4*). Also see *Colossians 2:12*.

This is an example of baptism in a figurative sense. Nevertheless it is based on the literal full immersion (“buried”) of the new Christian rather than a simple sprinkling.

The Early Practice was of Immersion in Water, John’s Baptism

- ❖ “Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him [John the Baptist], and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (*Matt. 3:5, 6*).

This baptism by John included Jesus himself even though he was sinless. Jesus gave his reason as: “...it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). This possibly referred to a symbolizing of his coming death, burial and resurrection. It further served as an example setting the pattern for the later baptisms “into his death” to be performed by later Christians. So Christians today cannot afford to ignore the seriousness of ‘full immersion in water’ and what it represents.

Baptism under Jesus’ Authority

- ❖ “After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people

were coming and being baptized (for John had not yet been put in prison). Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, 'Rabbi, he [Jesus] who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him'" (*John 3:22-26*) "... although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples..." (*John 4: 2*).

Baptizing of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Philip

- ❖ "And he [Philip] commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water..." (*Acts 8:38*).

It is very likely that both Philip and the Eunuch were carrying drinking water for their journey. So if sprinkling was the correct procedure Philip could easily have sprinkled water on the eunuch's head. However, the account tells us that, they both "went down into" and "came up out of" the water. In view of other factors that we shall look at shortly there is no reason to think that the Eunuch was anything other than being completely covered by water.

Evidently the above passages refer to literal baptism i.e. immersion in water. So when the words "baptize"/"baptism" occur ordinarily in the New Testament, they always imply one's being immersed in water. Yet, when these words are used figuratively/metaphorically it is clearly indicated in the context of the passage.

Baptism Is Only for Believers

THREE THOUSAND PENTECOST BELIEVERS

- ❖ "So those who **received his word were baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (*Acts 2: 41*).

SAMARITAN BELIEVERS

- ❖ "But when they **believed** Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they **were baptized**, both men and women" (*Acts 8:12*).

When these Samaritans believed Philip's preaching (vs. 12), they "*were baptized*" which is defined as "*baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (vs. 16).

CORNELIUS AND FAMILY

- ❖ "And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that **everyone who believes in him** receives forgiveness of sins through his name.' ... 48And he [Peter] commanded them to **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days" (*Acts 10:42-43, 48*).

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR

- ❖ "Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they [*Paul and Silas*] said, '**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved**, you and your household.' 32And they **spoke the word** of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he **was baptized** at once, he and all his family" (*Acts 16:30-33*).

THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

- ❖ "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him **the good news about Jesus**. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?' And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and **he baptized him**" (*Acts 8:35-38*).

Very likely Philip had raised the subject of baptism during his witnessing to the eunuch so that he would respond with his words: "what prevents me from being baptized?" Please note that the eunuch was a mature person capable of real understanding so as to believe the things taught by Philip concerning Jesus Christ. Clearly the right response to hearing the good news of the Kingdom is to believe it, to repent, and to be baptized.

NOTE: The KJV contains verse 37, that is, the words "And Philip said if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." These words are not included in any modern version, even including the NKJV.

THOSE IN CORINTH

- ❖ "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed in the Lord**, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and **were baptized**" (*Acts 18:8*).

THEREFORE NOT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- ❖ “But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (*Acts 8:12*).

This speaks of adult men and women who are therefore capable of making a mature decision. Furthermore, as shown from the many verses above, infants cannot be believers and there are no examples in the Scriptures of young children being baptized.

More on What One Must Believe In Before Getting Baptized

Jesus made it so plain and simple. He directed people to believe in the Good News of the Kingdom:

- ❖ “...Jesus came...proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and **the kingdom of God is at hand**; repent and believe in *the good news*”” (*Mark 1:15*).

Additionally the apostle Peter noted that:

- ❖ “...you have been **born again**, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, *through the living and abiding word of God*; ... 25... And this word is **the good news** that was preached to you” (*1 Peter 1:23, 25*).

So it is one’s reception of the imperishable seed—the message of the good news of the Kingdom that brings one to the position of being “born again” and so into a saved position; and naturally one must have “the faith *of* Jesus Christ” (Rom. 3:26) i.e. his belief system.

After having appropriated this faith one should be baptized as the symbolic action of declaring, retrospectively, what one already believes i.e. “the good news” that “the kingdom of God is at hand.” So baptism does not procure the spirit for a person or procure one’s salvation, or one’s regeneration, but rather, it declares them all.

REPENTANCE LINKED WITH BELIEF AND BAPTISM

- ❖ “I [John the Baptist] baptize you with water for {meaning: in view of} repentance” (*Matt. 3:11*).
- ❖ “...Jesus came...proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe** in the gospel”” (*Mark 1:15*).

So the above examples are biblical examples of obedience to Jesus’ command in Matthew 28. But what if these individuals had been circumstantially unable to get baptized at that time? Would this mean that they were not saved then?

Having God’s Spirit and Being Saved Occurs before One Gets Baptized

In his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul showed that a person is in a saved position because of convicted belief:

- ❖ “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you **will be saved**. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and **is saved**” (*Rom. 10:9, 10*).

Then again, in Ephesians Paul showed that a person is in a saved position because of having God’s spirit which they have from the moment they believe in Jesus” i.e. having made a commitment to him:

- ❖ “In him [*Jesus*] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and **believed in him**, were **sealed with the promised holy spirit**” (*Eph. 1:13*).

This means that God’s spirit dwells in such a person and that, in having God’s spirit, one is no longer rebellious toward God, as Paul said:

- ❖ “You, however, are not in the flesh [i.e. not having a rebellious disposition toward God] but in the Spirit, if in fact **the Spirit of God dwells in you**” (*Rom. 8:9*).

So although some may not circumstantially be able to be baptised in water this does not mean that they are not a saved person. One biblical example is that of the outlaw, hanging crucified next to Jesus, who was told that he would be with Jesus in paradise. Because of these factors it is evident that baptism is a symbolic action, and in no sense is it a saving ordinance—initial salvation having occurred because of belief i.e. faith. Therefore, faith i.e. belief is pre-requisite to baptism.

The Physical Action of Baptism Is Symbolic

Baptism demonstrates one's public declaration of what has **already** transpired in one's heart. But what is it that has transpired in a believer's heart? It is the receiving of God's spirit so that one has become saved, born again, and regenerated, and has welcomed Christ fully into one's life. Water baptism symbolizes that the believer has total trust in, and total reliance on, the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as having a commitment to live obediently to him. It also symbolizes the believer's unity with "God's household" (Eph. 2:19)

A believer is saved initially by the gracious favour of God through his/her faith (Eph. 2:8). However, saving faith requires godly repentance which in today's language means a change around in one's mindset and life-direction. (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9). So both faith and these changes are integral to forgiveness and salvation. All of this occurs before baptism and therefore making baptism the symbolic means of showing what has already transpired in one's heart.

So although symbolic as a visible expression of what is in one's heart, baptism in water is both a requirement and a privilege—it is not optional for believers who are circumstantially able. However, to try to give it saving value, as such, is to destroy its symbolic nature and to lose its retrospection.

Baptism in Water Symbolizes One's Having Been "Baptized into Christ"

As well as clearly demonstrating that one has had his/her past sins forgiven, a Christian's baptism also shows that another very important factor has occurred in his/her life. This is that one has identified oneself with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Paul explains:

- ❖ "Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ** Jesus were **baptized into his death**? ⁴We were **buried** therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was **raised** from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in *newness of life*. ⁵For if we have **been united with him in a death like his**, we shall certainly be **united with him in a resurrection** like his. ⁶We know that our **old self was crucified** with him...so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (*Rom. 6:3-6*).

This is an example of baptism in a figurative sense. Nevertheless it is based on the literal full immersion ("buried") of the believer rather than a simple sprinkling. So in Christian baptism, the action of being immersed in the water symbolizes that one has joined with and identified with Jesus Christ in his death. This means that as one goes under the water, one is now symbolizing the fact that one has already died to one's old way of life; and, that as one comes up out of the water, one has already been resurrected to a new life. It is only by this **physical action** of complete immersion in water that it is possible for these things to be symbolized.

Secondly such baptism in water shows to other Christians that one really is part of Jesus' body of believers:

- ❖ "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" (*1Cor. 12:13*).

So Christian baptism is an outward testimony to other Christians of what has occurred inwardly in a believer's life, namely that he or she has made drastic changes and gained forgiveness of past sins (Acts 2:38, 41), become one with Christ, and is now part of his body—the Congregation. Also being "baptized into Christ Jesus" symbolizes that one has welcomed Christ fully into one's life, so that one is "in Christ" or better expressed, "united to/with" or "in union with him."

Clarifying the Development of the Different Baptisms

IMMERSION OF SACRED UTENSILS

The Greek word *baptismos* was not used exclusively of John's or Christian baptism but was also used in the Greek Septuagint of the Old Testament, in Hebrews 9:10 and in Mark 7:4 concerning the ritual ordinance of the washing of utensils which were dipped in water.

BAPTISM OF PERSONS WAS A PRACTICE BEGUN BY JOHN THE BAPTIST

There is no real evidence that Pharisees or others baptized proselytes i.e. Gentile converts into Judaism as some have proposed, at least not until after the end of the 1st century. Furthermore, such a practice was not based on any Mosaic or other Hebrew Scripture law and so was not required by God.

In contrast, John's baptism was required and baptism in Jesus' name is required (Luke 7:30; John 1:33 and 3:26, 27). John stated that God was "he who sent me to baptize with water..." (John 1:33), and so making John the first to administer baptism to persons. So neither the purification rituals under the Mosaic Law nor any

supposed practice of proselyte baptism formed the basis for John's baptism. It was a unique ritual that God had directly commanded John to administer. Yet when we read the New Testament accounts it becomes clear that there are several developments and descriptions of baptism:

1. John the Baptist's baptism.
2. Baptism in the name of Jesus
3. Baptism in holy spirit

1. *a.* John the Baptist's work of baptizing in water was for the dual purposes of revealing the Messiah to Israel so as to direct them to him (John 1:31) and for "*repentance for the forgiveness of sins*" (Mark 1:4, Acts 19:4, 5). However, this latter purpose of baptism was as a preparatory phase leading to and **in anticipation of one's actual forgiveness** of sins. The actual forgiveness could only happen after Jesus had shed his blood (1 John 1:7). As a forerunner of Christian baptism, John's baptism was phased out once it had served its purpose.

b. Jesus' ministry superseded the ministry of John (John 3:30), but also included the performing of baptisms in water just as John's had and with the same meaning as John's baptism i.e. **in anticipation of one's forgiveness** of sins (John 3:22, 26). This baptism also came to an end at some unknown point during Christ's earthly ministry.
2. After Jesus had shed his blood by his death, his disciples were to baptize any new Christian in water and "**in the name of Jesus**" (Acts 2:38) for the **actual forgiveness** of their sins (Matt.26:28, 1 John 1:7, Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; and Col.1:14; Heb. 9:13-15; 10:11-22 and 12:24). This became the default meaning of baptism. So whether it is "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the holy spirit" or "in the name of Jesus Christ" such was not a fixed verbal formula to be recited because "in the name of" simply means "by the authority of" or "according to everything about" God, Jesus, and holy spirit."
3. After his ascension to God's right hand Jesus baptized his Church **in holy spirit—giving them the gift of holy spirit** as an empowering force to perform miracles so that Christianity might be established: firstly concerning the Jewish believers at Pentecost, then those in Samaria, and later the believing Gentile household of Cornelius.

We need say nothing more in this study about the baptism of John or that of Jesus during his earthly life. However, we now need to examine what "baptism in holy spirit" means.

NOTE: The metaphorical usages of the word baptism are detailed in the appendix.

To What Does "Baptized In Holy Spirit" Refer?

JESUS' PROMISE OF HOLY SPIRIT

- ❖ "Rivers of living water will **flow from within him**. He said this **in reference to the Spirit** that those who came to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit yet, because Jesus had **not yet been glorified**" (*John 7:38, 39 NAB*).

So it was only after his glorification that Jesus gave the spirit and, in fact, not until Pentecost. So what did Jesus mean when, after his resurrection, he: "...breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the **holy spirit**" (John 20:22). Evidently this was a **prophetic promise** of something to be fulfilled several weeks later at Pentecost. It was then that the disciples had their experience of the gift of holy spirit.

After his resurrection Jesus used the phrase "baptized in holy spirit" when he commissioned his disciples, saying:

- ❖ "John, on the one hand, baptized in water, but you will be baptized in holy spirit not many days from now." ...⁸"But you will receive power when holy spirit has come upon you, and you will be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 1:5, 8 KGV also see Luke 24:49*).

THE PURPOSE OF BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT

According to Paul the baptism in holy spirit was **not** so that individuals could:

- Access the gifts of the spirit
- Achieve personal spiritual upbuilding
- Speak in tongues (Gentile native languages), or
- Receive a more powerful testimony

The purpose of the baptism in holy spirit was **to form the one body of Christ**, by gathering together men and women of every language, (Jews and Greeks) and every status (slaves or free):

- ❖ “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 Cor. 12:13*).

So here Paul is speaking about closing the original gulf between Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, so that now they are all baptized into one body so that they are all now God’s people. This baptism occurred starting with Pentecost, continued for the Samaritans, and was concluded at the home of Cornelius for the Gentiles. So baptism in holy spirit means the acceptance of believers of every language, hence the speaking in Gentile languages. As usual with many statements this is not a reference to individuals as if this happens today; although clearly individuals receive God’s spirit the moment they truly believe.

THE BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT WAS A 1ST CENTURY SPECIAL HISTORICAL EVENT AT PENTECOST

Because the word “baptize” refers to a literal immersion or plunging into water, the phrase of “baptized in holy spirit” is clearly metaphorical. It occurs 6 times in the New Testament and was first used by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11 also in the parallel accounts of Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).

So the phrase “*baptized in holy spirit*” refers to the disciples as being empowered with holy spirit to accomplish the world-wide witnessing for Jesus and his message. Later, in Acts 11:16, Peter quotes Jesus with this same phrase of “*baptized in holy spirit.*” This quotation links together several events in the book of Acts concerning baptism.

Because literal baptisms are always unique special events, the “*baptism in holy spirit*” was also a special historic event to open up Christianity for various categories of people. This special event was at Pentecost, with its various miraculous manifestations so that **the Jews would know that God was now going to include Gentiles as His people**. This opening up then became effective for those in Samaria (Acts 8:14-18) and then for the Gentiles at the home of Cornelius (Acts 10), again for the Jewish Christians to know that God was now going to include Gentiles as His people. This was completed for **those Jews baptized only in John’s baptism** (twelve of them in Ephesus in Acts 19:1-7) who then spoke in foreign languages after they were baptized in Jesus’ name.

Whenever “*baptism in the spirit*” is mentioned in each of the Gospels and Acts chapter 1, it is always as a coming event, as shown by the phrase: “*he will baptize you.*” But after Acts 1, it is only noted in reference to the past, even for immature believers like those in Corinth.

So the Pentecost event in Jerusalem was a metaphorical baptizing in holy spirit of the church with signs of concerning this new phase in God’s purpose:

- ❖ “When the day of **PENTECOST** had arrived, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole **house** where they were staying. ³ And **tongues, like flames** of fire that were divided, appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ Then they were **all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to **speak in different languages, as the Spirit gave them ability for speech**” (*Acts 2:1-4 HCSB*).

This was the “baptism in holy spirit” of these Jewish Christians as the special and one-off event. The speaking in different native languages was to let these listening Jews know that those whose languages these were would now start to become one with God’s people.

1. EFFECTIVE FOR THE JEWS AND PROSELYTES WHO BELIEVE

And so, 3,000 repentant ones from the listening crowd of Jews responded as Peter explained:

- ❖ “...having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [*Jesus*] has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing ... ³⁸ And Peter said to them, ‘**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive **the gift of the Holy Spirit ...**’ ⁴¹ So those who received his word **were baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (*Acts 2:33, 38, 41*).

This receiving of “the gift of the holy spirit” gave the Church the initial means to accomplish the ‘**Great Commission.**’ The same would be true for those in Samaria and later for the Gentiles who became believers. The speaking in Gentile foreign native languages at this time was so that the usually prejudiced Jews would know that God was now going to include others apart from Jews as His people.

2. EFFECTIVE FOR THE SAMARITAN BELIEVERS:

- ❖ “Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who went down and prayed for them, **that they might receive the holy Spirit**, for it had not

yet **fallen upon** any of them; they had only **been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the holy Spirit. When Simon **saw** that the Spirit was conferred by (through) the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money..." (*Acts 8:14-18 NAB*).

The Pentecost "*baptism in the spirit*" was now extended to the Samaritans. Its historical event status is indicated by the fact that it was only at the hands of the apostles Peter and John that the holy spirit fell upon these Samaritans, and this was after their "baptism in the name of Jesus." Later and after the apostle Peter had had his vision of being told to eat of the unclean creatures in the sheet to convince him that he should go to the Gentiles, he arrived and spoke at the home of Cornelius.

3. EFFECTIVE FOR GENTILE BELIEVERS:

❖ "While Peter was still speaking these words [*the good news*], the Holy Spirit **came down on** all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded, because the **gift of the Holy Spirit** had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speaking in [other] languages and **declaring the greatness of God**. Then Peter responded, "Can anyone withhold [*the*] **water** and prevent these from being baptized, *who have received the Holy Spirit* just as we have? And he commanded them to **be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ**" (*Acts 10:44-48*).

Yet here we have a reversal of the previous sequence of events in Samaria. "*The holy spirit came down on*" these Gentiles before their baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ." This was because a sign was needed to convince the Jewish Christians that God was now accepting Gentiles as his people, and this occurred before they were baptized. Peter later recounts the details of this event showing that this event was part of the fulfilment of Jesus' words concerning the baptism in the holy spirit. So he told the other apostles:

❖ "When I began to speak to them [*the Gentiles*], the **holy Spirit fell upon** them just as it did upon us at the beginning.¹⁶ and I remembered the saying of the Lord, 'John baptized in water, but you will be **baptized in the holy Spirit**'" (*Acts 11:15, 16 S&G*).

So these dramatic events were part of God's attesting signs as needed in the 1st century. This shows that each time holy spirit "fell upon" the new believers it was a fulfilling of the Pentecost baptism in holy spirit and so was widening the range of those who were now included in God's people.

4. EFFECTIVE FOR EMIGRANT JEWS

The final stage of the baptism in holy spirit was when Paul, in Ephesus, came across *THE TWELVE JEWS* who had only been baptized in John's baptism, as recorded in Acts 19:1-7. These twelve Jews had not received holy spirit so these were not saved Christians. They evidently had not been in a situation whereby they had been directed by John the Baptist to Jesus. However, they responded to Paul's prompting by getting into the water and being:

❖ "...**baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus**.⁶ And when Paul had **laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them**, and they began to speak with [other] languages and to **prophesy**."

So we can be sure that **it was water baptism** for them because "*they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus*" the same as for those at Cornelius' home who were baptized in water. So by the laying on of an apostle's hands and the resulting speaking in foreign languages, these 12 were helped to realize that they formed one body with the Gentiles whose language they were supernaturally speaking. This would have included some of the disciples with Paul.

NOT THE SAME AS THE "SEALING WITH HOLY SPIRIT"

All of the above concerning "baptism in the spirit" as being a past outwardly miraculous event at Pentecost is quite distinct from the fact that, having occurred only once, it is still effective for those believers at all times who automatically receive God's spirit in their lives from the moment they believe and commit to Christ. Paul clearly shows this in his letter to the Ephesians when he tells them:

❖ "...when you heard the word of truth...and **believed in him**, [you] were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit**" (*Eph. 1:13*).

SUMMARY CONCERNING "BAPTISM IN HOLY SPIRIT"

Indeed, the purpose of baptism in the holy spirit and the laying on of the hands of an apostle was to give the first Christians miraculous powers in prophesying and languages so that **the Jews would know that God was now going to include Gentiles as His people**. These powers eventually fulfilled their purpose and so were no longer needed.

After Jesus' resurrection it was only with the personal involvement of an apostle that any Christian received these miraculous powers. This was because of the laying on of the hands of an apostle i.e., one who could demonstrate "*the true signs of an apostle*" (2 Cor. 12:12) as one who was a personal eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21, 22). So the following are the main reasons why 'baptism in holy spirit' concerned the past historical event at Pentecost:

1. A definite and special event seems to be being pointed to in Jesus' statement that baptism in holy spirit would take place "*before many days*" (Acts 1:5) rather than pointing to a continuous process.
2. A rare event is indicated in the above four accounts because the holy spirit is stated to specifically fall upon those now believing. This includes the occurrence of speaking in tongues (10:45f.) and prophesying. This aspect is similar to the unique event of the spirit descending as a dove on Jesus at his baptism.
3. The event that is described in Acts 10:1-11:18 where Peter receives a miraculous vision (10:11-16) indicates that the event at Cornelius' home was a unique event of great importance.
4. Peter also declares that with Cornelius this was a fulfilment of the promise of the baptism in holy spirit (11:16f.).
5. Peter directly links the meaning of baptism in holy spirit for Cornelius and his household with the first outpouring of spirit at Pentecost (Acts 11:18) as also having been a special event of baptism in holy spirit which enabled the disciple to exercise miraculous powers.
6. These events in Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19 are the formal opening of the door of the good news to Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles **in harmony with Jesus' words in Acts 1:8**:
 - ❖ "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in **all Judea and Samaria**, and to the **end of the earth**."
7. The phrase "baptism in the spirit" is not mentioned after Acts 11 and is not mentioned in any of the epistles. As Professors Mullins and Bromily state:

Nowhere in the Epistles do we find a repetition of the special baptism of the Spirit so that the event with Cornelius completes the baptism of the Spirit. This would be remarkable if it was understood by the writers of the Epistles that this baptism was frequently to be repeated. There is no evidence outside the book of Acts that the baptism of the Spirit ever occurred in late NT times...We conclude, therefore, that according to the NT teaching the pentecostal baptism, taken in conjunction with the baptism of the Spirit in the case of Cornelius, completes the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a special event.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. 1 427-8.

"Baptism in Holy Spirit" Does Not Replace Baptism in Water

The Quakers, the Salvation Army, and several smaller denominations deny that water baptism is necessary. They often state, quite correctly, that water cannot purify one's heart, and certainly it is a fact that, being brought into the new life by Christ Jesus is what purifies one's heart. Indeed, the water has no supernatural properties so as to make a change in the person who gets baptised. Such a change only comes about for a person because Jesus has already sealed them with holy spirit when they believed (Eph. 1:13). Yet because of both John's and Jesus' statements (Acts 1:5) concerning '*baptism in holy spirit*' it has been misconstrued by some that baptism in water was superseded by '*baptism in holy spirit*.' However, as shown above 'baptism in holy spirit' was a past historical event for the particular purpose of providing the miraculous gifts enabling the establishment of Christianity.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that water baptism stopped being the public demonstration that someone had become a Christian. In fact, the words "baptize" and "baptism," as used throughout the book of Acts, had already been **defined by** Peter as "*baptized in the name of Jesus*," and this was a baptism in water (Acts 10:47, 48)—it is the default meaning of the term "baptism." Neither Peter nor Paul changed this definition to "baptized in holy spirit." As professors Mullins and Bromily stated above: "There is no evidence outside the book of Acts that the baptism of the Spirit ever occurred in late NT times."

OBJECTION: DIDN'T PAUL INDICATE THAT WATER BAPTISM NO LONGER APPLIED?

- ❖ "For Christ did **not send me to baptize** but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). *So isn't it clear from this that baptism in water was no longer valid when Paul wrote this in around 55 AD?*

RESPONSE: If this was a restriction on Paul then he clearly disobeyed Christ. This is because he had only just stated in vs.14, 16 that he had baptized Crispus, Gaius and the household of Stephanus. Additionally, Acts 16:33 records either his participation in the baptizing of the Philippian jailor and his family or at least his agreement with it.

Yet, the context here in 1 Corinthians 1:17 is that Paul is counselling the Corinthians against their having claimed to belong to whoever had baptized them. Paul was seeking unity in the congregation, so here he has used hyperbole, as is often used in Hebrew expression, so that he might emphasize his preaching rather than having anyone “belong” to him.

OBJECTION: DIDN'T PETER INDICATE THAT WATER BAPTISM NO LONGER APPLIED?

❖ “And I [*Peter*] remembered the saying of the Lord, ‘John baptized in **water**, **but** you will be baptized in the holy Spirit’” (*Acts 11:15, 16 S&G*).

Didn't Peter here mean, ‘I commanded water baptism, but then I remembered that I shouldn't have done it’? Also doesn't it appear here that Peter's use of the word “**but**” in “**but** you will be baptized with holy spirit” meant that water baptism was being replaced by baptism with the spirit?

RESPONSE: We might illustrate why this view is incorrect by considering 1 Corinthians 8:1 as an example of similar grammatical structure, where Paul writes, “*Knowledge puffs up, but [Gk. de] love builds up.*” Yet this clearly does not mean we dispense with Bible knowledge or indeed any useful knowledge. It simply means that knowledge without love is inadequate. This is really an example of the very black and white way the Jews spoke back then. So the “but” in Peter's words simply means “in addition to” and so not excluding water baptism.

Also Peter's words cannot be taken to mean, ‘I commanded water baptism, but then I remembered that I shouldn't have done it.’ Since Pentecost Peter had become emboldened because of his own receiving of holy spirit in that dramatic event. There is no reason to imagine that he would have made such a mistake.

REASONING ON THE REQUIREMENT FOR WATER BAPTISM

- a. A study of all the passages in Acts concerning baptism shows that “baptism in the name of Jesus Christ” in water is the default meaning of the term “baptism.”
- b. In Acts 2:33-41 we see a clear distinction between literal baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” in water and the church's receiving the gift of holy spirit.
- c. In Acts 2:33 Peter did not say that new Christians should, ‘Repent and be baptized in holy spirit.’ This baptism in holy spirit was **an action performed only by Jesus from heaven**, both at Pentecost and the other occasions recorded in Acts; whereas being baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” was a physical action in water to be performed by other Christians.
- d. In Acts 10:44-48 the literal reading in the Greek text is: “**the water.**” i.e., “*Can anyone withhold the water...*” indicating the water that was the well-known water of baptism. Cornelius and his household had received the gift of holy spirit even though they had not yet been baptized in water. However, Peter recognized the vital importance of their being baptized in water and so he commanded it.
- e. When Peter related the events which occurred at Cornelius' home (Acts 11:13-17) he showed the fulfilment of Jesus' words regarding the significant new and unique event of being “baptized in the holy Spirit.” Yet in the actual event recorded in Acts 10:48 the details show this as being additional to the water baptism that he had confidently commanded. So Peter first sees the holy spirit manifested, and then he commands baptism in water as the outward physical action for Cornelius and his household to submit to.
- f. In none of the passages contrasting John's water baptism and Jesus' baptizing in holy spirit is it stated that Jesus would baptize in the holy spirit as a replacement of water baptism.
- g. The phrase “be baptized in the Holy Spirit” is really a metaphor for what are now past events of great significance at Pentecost and at Cornelius' home when they received the miraculous gifts of God's spirit.

What Is the “One Baptism”?

As noted above, at different periods there have been various baptisms described in the New Testament, but Paul says, “*there is...one baptism*” (Eph. 4:4, 5). However, he didn't say that there has always been one and only one baptism. So which of these baptisms had ceased by the time Ephesians was written in 60/61? Clearly John's baptism had ceased (Acts 19:1-5) because it had served its purpose. Also Jesus' metaphorical baptism into

suffering had ceased when it was “accomplished” (Luke 12:50) at his death. Furthermore, if the baptism into fire concerns the destruction of the wicked, then that has not yet occurred (Matt. 3:7-12). So the remaining baptisms are “*baptism in the name of Jesus Christ*” which was in water (Acts 8:38, 10:47) and “baptism in holy spirit.” These are two separate and distinct baptisms because one is performed by humans and the other by Jesus. So, just as with the earlier baptisms which had ceased when they had served their purposes, we must ask which of the two remaining baptisms is “the one baptism” Paul was referring to in Ephesians 4?

For the reasons given above it is evident that “baptism in the name of Jesus Christ” as baptism in water is an ongoing requirement and is the default meaning of baptism throughout the book of Acts and in the letters to Christians. This is as F. F. Bruce, Professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, England wrote that:

- I suggest that baptism in the New Testament is always baptism in water unless the context shows it to be something else; that is to say, the word is always to be understood literally unless the context indicates a figurative meaning (1973, 106).

In contrast, it seems clear that “baptism in the spirit” had a specific purpose which was fulfilled by the miraculous happenings during the earliest times of Christianity, and during which Christians experienced “all truth” (John. 16:13), “the perfect law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25), “everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3), and “the faith once for all time delivered to the holy ones” (Jude 3). So its purpose (Acts 1:8) of making evident to **the Jews that God was now including Gentiles as His people**, was completed and so is not the “one baptism” spoken of by Paul in Ephesians 4.

This leaves us with the “baptism in the name of Jesus Christ” as baptism in water and so as the “one baptism” of which Paul spoke (Eph. 4:4, 5). This form of baptism will last as long as there are men who need to demonstrate that they have received God’s forgiveness of their sins and have committed themselves to God and to Christ. Therefore, its purpose also will have been accomplished at some point of time in the distant future and then also will cease as a practice.

Why a Physical Action?

In the past certain prophets had to perform particular actions which were powerfully symbolic of particular realities that were to happen to the unrepentant nation. As examples Jeremiah had to bear several yokes upon his shoulders (Jer. 27) and Ezekiel draw a map of Jerusalem on clay brick/tablet and engage in certain actions toward it (Ezek. 4). These were object lessons. So too, the action of water immersion has a very powerful sensory effect in focusing one’s mind on one’s joining with and identifying oneself with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection, as well as the fact that all one’s past sins had been forgiven by God and that one is now embarking on a very different way of life.

The Response from a Good Conscience

The apostle Peter makes a comparison with baptism when he notes how:

- ❖ “...God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ark was being constructed. Only a few people—eight in all—were brought safely through water. ²¹That water prefigures baptism, which **now saves** you all, *not by removing dirt from the body*, but as **the response from a good conscience toward God**. It is effective because it comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand, with all the angels, authorities, and powers having been made subject to him” (1 Pet. 3:20, 21).
- ❖ “as the response **from** a good conscience toward God (WLV).
- ❖ “as a response to God **from** a clean conscience (NLT).
- ❖ “but the pledge **of** a clear conscience toward God” (NIV).
- ❖ “as the pledge **of** a good conscience toward God (HCSB).
- ❖ “but the promise made to God **from** a good conscience” (GNT and NCV).
- ❖ “but an appeal to God **of** a good conscience” (N.T Wright).
- ❖ “but an appeal to God **from** a good conscience” (REB).
- ❖ “one’s pledge to keep a good conscience toward God” (CJB).
- ❖ “it promises God that you will keep a clear sense of what is right and wrong” (NIRV)

This is not as in older versions which say: “*but an appeal to God for a good conscience*” as if one does not already have that and that the act of baptism itself gives one “a good conscience toward God.”

So for anyone getting baptised it is their “*response from a good conscience toward God*” and promise or pledge to Him to continue with that good conscience toward Him.

Summarizing the Requirements before Baptism

- The person seeking baptism must believe in Jesus and have “the faith of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 3:26) i.e. his belief system as far as one can ascertain it from the Scriptures. This is especially true concerning his main teaching about the Kingdom and obviously that God is “the Father” only.
- They must have repented of past sins. This significantly means one’s having a change of mindset and life-direction specifically with reference to the Kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17).
- They must understand that baptism signifies their having identified themselves with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.

If a person understands these things and desires to be baptized, then there is no reason to prevent the believer from being baptized.

Obedience to the Command to Be Baptized in Water

Jesus gave the command to be baptized in water in Matthew 28:19. (*Please see appendix below showing that all the words of this passage are genuine*).

So for one to undergo baptism by immersion is an act of obedience, a public proclamation of one’s having the faith of Christ and so being identified with Him. It is a picture of one’s having crucified one’s old self and having become a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Jesus further said: “*If you love me you will keep my commands*” (John 14:15).

A DEMONSTRATION TO OTHERS

Furthermore, getting baptized in water is a **demonstration of one’s faith** in Jesus’ command in Matthew 28:19. As James said: “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:20, 26). Similar to our partaking of **the Lord’s Supper**, with its literal bread and wine, there should be no problem with the outward, physical action of literal water baptism?

One’s Focus at the Time of One’s Baptism

The physical action of water immersion has a very powerful sensory effect in focusing one’s mind on a number of vital factors in the Christian life. So around the time of one’s baptism one might focus on one’s:

1. Having previously received God’s holy spirit
2. Repentance and God’s forgiveness of past personal sins.
3. Liberation from the reign of sin.
4. Having died to one’s old life and resurrection into a new life, because the death/resurrection of Jesus made this new life possible.
5. Union with Christ, especially because of his death and resurrection as the basis for one’s future literal resurrection.
6. Entry into the New Covenant giving access to our Father in heaven through Jesus.
7. Membership of Christ’s Congregation.
8. Inheritance of the future Kingdom.

At such a major point in one’s life it is of great benefit to show to others, by the external action of water baptism, that one has the new life “in Christ.”

Concluding Comment

Since Christ has commanded the act of baptism, a believer should be baptized as soon as they circumstantially can, so that they can be obedient to Jesus. This is something established Christians must physically do for new converts.

Also since baptism is a symbol of the inward reality of conversion, the believer’s salvation is by no means in jeopardy if they cannot get baptized because of certain circumstances. Yet if there are no circumstances preventing baptism then this is what should happen. It is as the Ethiopian Eunuch said: “What prevents me from getting baptized (Acts 8:36).”

APPENDIX

1. All of Matthew 28:19 was in the Original Text

The idea is often promoted that the phrase in Matthew 28:19: “*baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” was not in the original. This is primarily because of the early quotations of it by Eusebius in two forms as:

- “Go and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.”
- “Make disciples of all the nations **in my name.**” *However, a third and later form of Eusebius’ quotation reads:*
- “Go ye and make disciples of all nations, and **baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.** And teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

So Eusebius certainly did quote these words of Jesus in full on that last occasion. Perhaps the earlier quotes were just to make a particular point. Nevertheless, the doubted words concerning baptism do **appear in every extant Greek manuscript of this passage.** Furthermore, the book of Acts shows the apostles and disciples as actually performing water baptisms and so indicating that it was in obedience to this command from Jesus. Such obedience to Jesus is evident in all the following cases:

- The disciples prior to the event at Pentecost
- The three thousand new believers at Pentecost (Acts 2:38, 41).
- The Samaritan believers (Acts 8:12-17).
- Simon Magus (Acts 8:13).
- The Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-39).
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:18)
- Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:42-48).
- Lydia (Acts 16:14, 15).
- The Philippian jailor and his family (Acts 16:30-33).
- Crispus and other believers living in Corinth (Acts 18:8).
- The twelve in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).
- Believers at Colossae (Col. 2:12).
- Christians throughout Asia Minor (1 Pet. 3:21).

2. A Window on the Earliest Christian Practice of Baptism

The non-inspired Christian document entitled the *Didache* was written at sometime between 50 and 70 AD, and therefore shows just how the earliest Christians put into practice the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. This fairly short document, which is mainly a list of directions for Gentile Christians, covers about a half dozen subjects, one of which is baptism as the means to start out on “The Way of Life.” The relevant directions can be found in the sections 7.1-7.3 which specifically state:

- 7.1 With regard to baptism, here is the teaching:
You are to baptize in this way.
Once you have gone back over all that is the Two Ways, you baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit **in living water.**
- 7.2 However, if you do not have access to living water, then baptize in some **other water**; and if you do not have any *cold* water then you can use warm water.
- 7.3 And if you cannot get access to either [running or still water], then **pour water** three times on the head in the name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Clearly, many churches since then have opted for the pouring of water over the person to be baptized as being the norm, rather than as an exception to full immersion in water; whereas the reverse is true as shown by the meaning of the word “baptize” as “plunging” as well as the biblical descriptions of all the individuals who got baptized in water.

Nevertheless, the *Didache* does show that Christians continued to get baptized in water, whichever method was used. It also shows that the words concerning baptism in Matthew 28:19 were certainly part of the original.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

- Archaeological evidence from the early centuries shows that baptism was sometimes administered by submersion or immersion ...but also by affusion from a vessel when water was poured on the candidate's head... *The Oxford Dictionary of the Bible* (2004).

Nevertheless, it is clear that water was the medium that was always involved.

3. The Other Metaphorical Usages of the Word 'Baptize'

1. John the Baptist said the Messiah would "***baptize...with fire***" when he judges the wicked (Matt. 3:11, 12; Luke 3:16, 17). From the context this is not something that Christians will experience, as the Pentecostals teach. Rather, John the Baptist's next words of: "He (*Messiah*) will gather the wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire," show that to "baptize...with fire" refers to destruction of the wicked.
2. Jesus referred to his suffering and death when he said to James and John, "*Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism **with which I am baptized?***" (Mark 10:38, 39)
3. Being "***baptized into Moses***"—this was metaphorical of the experience of the Israelites through the red sea (1Cor. 10:2) as followers of Moses. This also serves as a type of Christian baptism for followers of Jesus.

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