

7th January 2024



*Come, Holy Spirit.
Immerse us in your Spirit again.*

Intro |

I wonder how many of you have dyed clothing.

Surely there are some tie-dyeing experts here with us today.

Even if you haven't, I'm sure we've all accidentally put something brightly coloured into our washing machine, making the entire load a rather different colour from what we desired!

Why am I talking about dyeing clothes?

Because today we are talking about 'baptism' and the visible and experiential action of dyeing fabric very closely relates with the spiritual realities of baptism.

And baptism is what both our Gospel and our New Testament passages are all about.

So today I'd like to concentrate on how God's word speaks about baptism.

This is quite an ambitious undertaking, as God's written word has a whole lot to say about baptism. So, I'll do my best to be succinct.

The Greek word '*baptiso*' means to dip, sink or submerge. It also means '*to come under the influence or to be changed.*'

In its many forms, the word is used about 80 times in the New Testament. Because of its broad use we need to spend some time dissecting what we mean when we use the word 'baptise' ... because it can indeed become quite confusing.

Point 1 | While there are seven baptisms referred to in Scripture – but only ONE imperative Baptism: our baptism into Christ.

Would you be surprised to learn there are seven baptisms mentioned in the Bible? Let me list them briefly before looking at the three referred to in today's passages.

The Apostle Paul identified the first foreshadowing of baptism way back in the Old Testament when Moses led the people through the Red Sea.

As the Israelites followed Moses through the waters, Paul says, they were "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (see Exodus 13:21, 1 Corinthians 10:1-3).

It is not hard to discern this was amazing prophetic action of what would occur thousands of years later, in our baptism into Christ – in the cloud of the Spirit and the waters of cleansing, initiating us being born again into eternal life.

When we open to the Gospels and read about John, we see him preaching repentance as a way for people to prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah.

By being baptised in the River Jordan, they were demonstrating their intention to turn away from their sins (Mark 1:4). We'll talk more about this soon.

Then, as we read today, we read that even Jesus Himself came to be baptised in the Jordan waters. Although having no need for repentance, Jesus was baptised by John, *"to fulfill all righteousness."* (Matthew 3:13-17)

When Jesus came up out of the water, the disciples heard the Father say, "This my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased" (v17) and the disciples saw the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form.

It is on this occasion that John spoke of another baptism.

"I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Matthew 3:11)

So, the fourth, is baptism in the Spirit and is referred to seven times in the New Testament (especially throughout the book of Acts which describes how Jesus' church was birthed, empowered and released.) We'll talk more about this soon.

Many theologians also list the baptism of fire separately as it speaks of Jesus' judgement of the world for its sin (John 5:22, Revelation 20:15).

There are still two other ways baptism is used.

Jesus spoke of His dying on the cross as a baptism, particularly the suffering He was about to endure (Mark 10:35-39). In fact, Jesus prophesied that both James and John would also experience the same baptism of suffering, by dying for their faith.

Finally, there is the water baptism, also called the 'believer's baptism'. This is a physical experience which represents an inward commitment of becoming a disciple of Christ.

In the Anglican church, believing parents, as a sign of their commitment to raise their child as a disciple of Christ, bring their child to be baptised. In many ways,

however, their child is being baptised into their parent's faith in Christ. Later the child will need to confirm and profess their own faith in Christ.

But hang on a minute! I have just listed seven baptisms. Why then did Paul say there is only ONE baptism?

Well, if you are a bit confused, you're not the first!

There was quite a bit of confusion about all these baptisms when Paul visited the believers at Ephesus.

However, before we get into what happened then, I'd like to clarify about the ONE baptism which Paul speaks about.

Paul wrote,

"There is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4-6)

It is our baptism into Christ which is the ONE baptism Paul is referring to.

I like to call this ONE Baptism, Baptism with a capital 'B'.

It is the MAIN Baptism, the really important Baptism, but it is not the only baptism referred to in the life of the Christian. But it is the ONE into which every believer must be submerged or immersed.

Point 2 | A helpful metaphor is to consider our baptism into Christ as like dyeing a piece of cloth – our hearts dyed until pure and holy.

To help us understand this concept, I'd like to use a metaphor which first appeared in the rather obscure historical text entitled the *Gospel of Philip*.

Now ... don't worry, this text was not written by Philip, nor is it in the Bible. It was written in about the third century by which time the Apostle Philip was long deceased.

But the metaphor this writer uses, I think, is quite helpful.

He writes,

"God is a dyer. Just as the good dyes, said to be genuine dyes, dissolve into what is dyed in them, so also those whom God dyes become immortal through his color, for his dyes are immortal. And God dips those to be dipped in water."

The ONE baptism into Christ is very similar to dyeing a cloth.

When we make a confession of faith in Jesus Christ – believing in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead - the Spirit of God plunges our dirty, unclean, sin-stained heart until it is immersed in the cleansing blood of Jesus washing away all impurities until our heart is dyed perfectly clean, forgiven and pure. Having been plunged or submerged in God's cleansing Spirit, we take on the pure, holy, cleansed nature of God, His brilliant white, holy nature.

Yes! Once we've been immersed into Christ, the Spirit of God, God's eternal dye, changes us entirely from the inside out.

That's the picture the writer of the Gospel of Philip was working with.

To illustrate his point, he wrote a little parable:

"The master went into the dye works of Levi, took seventy-two coloured clothes, and threw them into a vat. He drew them out and they were all white. He said, "So the Son of man has come as a dyer".

Without spending too much time dissecting everything in this little story, it is obvious that Jesus is the Son of man, and He is the one doing the dyeing.

And I think the colour is significant. He is 'dyeing' the cloth white – symbolizing purity and holiness. There is no trace of stains or impurities.

You may think that all this sounds rather weird. But there is a hint of this same idea when we read the transfiguration account in Mark.

When Jesus led Peter, James and John up the mountain, and was transfigured before their eyes, Jesus clothes became dazzling white.

The text says, *"such as no one on earth could bleach them"* (Mark 9:3).

Another way we could say that, is *"such as no person could dye them."*

When we are baptised into Christ, our hearts are dyed with the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11) – the immensely powerful, eternal Spirit of life.

So ... we could say ... all Christians – 'in Christ ones' are dyed in the colour of Jesus Christ!

Point 3 | Another baptism referred to in Scripture in the baptism in the Spirit. Subsequent to conversion, in Spirit baptism we are immersed in God's Spirit for empowerment to proclaim the Gospel.

Well let's move onto what is happening when Paul met a group of disciples at Ephesus some 20 years after Pentecost.

They are described as "disciples" (v1) but we could ask, 'were they really Christians, or were they disciples of John the baptiser'?

They were evidently converted under the ministry of Apollos and had received John's baptism (Acts 19:3).

However, knowing that Apollos had been instructed and taught accurately concerning Jesus (Acts 18:25) it may seem strange that this small group of disciples had not caught up with correct Christian theology!

Nevertheless, when Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" he was plainly assuming they were Christians, and therefore it is reasonable to infer that Paul understood it to be possible for people to believe as Christians, but not "receive the Holy Spirit" in some sense.

Furthermore, when he did point them to believe in Jesus, and baptised them in the name of the Lord Jesus (19:4,5), he still was not satisfied that they had "received the Holy Spirit when they believed."

So, when Paul laid hands on them it was with a separate intention, not to convert them, for they were already converted and baptised in water (v5), but for them to 'receive' the baptism of the Spirit.

And when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them in an evident way (v6) for they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

So, to repent and believe in Jesus (v4) and to be baptised in water (v5) was one thing. But then, having been told that the Holy Spirit had been given (John 7:9), Paul hands laid on them and they experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit as a subsequent experience.

So, what Paul was referring to when he laid hands on them to 'receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit'?

It was a subsequent act of grace from God. Subsequent to conversion, where we actively seek after God to pour His Holy Spirit into our lives, to the extent that we are *baptised*, or *immersed* or *dyled* to even more potent colour of Christ!

Now, this Spirit infilling baptism is never spoken of as a 'once only' event.

That is why I like the 'dye analogy'. Anyone who has dyed clothing knows, in order to keep the colour vivid and bright, you need to dye the cloth again and again!

Throughout the book of Acts we read of the disciples being 'filled with the Spirit' again and again. (*see when believers who spoke with boldness (Acts 4:31), Peter when called before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8), Paul after regaining his sight (Acts 9:17-20), and later all believers (Acts 13:52).*)

So, it is God's desire that we come to him frequently with great anticipation and expectation.

So, let us come to the Father, expectantly, as Jesus taught us:

Knowing that just as we "*give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.*" (Luke 13:11)

So let us ask, "Come, Holy Spirit, Come and fill our life".

A little more about the 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'

for those who are interested:

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We will never fully comprehend the mystery of God, but what is clear is that the power of God by his Holy Spirit is still poured richly upon his people and those who seek to serve him, in his power. That said, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an encounter with God in which the Christian begins to receive the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit into his or her life. Jesus promised his power to his disciples when he said in Acts chapter 1 verse 8:

"you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

This promise was fulfilled at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell as 120 gathered in the upper room. Acts 2:4, *"they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance."*

This experience of the power of God which we call the 'baptism in the Holy Spirit', or the 'infilling of the Holy Spirit', is given for the purpose of equipping the Christian with God's power for service. It is not for some self-serving spiritual warm fuzzy. It is not about your experience of feeling good. It is for the purposes of the Gospel, that you might be a powerful witness to the Gospel in all aspects of your life. It is the Spiritual baptism from Jesus himself in which he begins to exercise his sovereign possession, control and use us in supernatural fashion, through the Holy Spirit.

Remember that the only way for the Spiritual power of Jesus, to be manifest in your life, is to give him the throne of your life. For you to set aside control and say 'Come Holy Spirit!'

Is every Christian meant to have the baptism in the Holy Spirit? The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not necessary for salvation, but it is fundamental to the Christian life. If you take the battery out of your torch, it doesn't change the fact that it is the torch, it's just of no use.

It's pretty much the same with the Holy Spirit. Without him, our Christian life and witness is without authority and power and fulfillment. Some of us have the battery IN but it needs to be refreshed. The New Testament Apostles obviously believed that the Holy Spirit was for all people. In Peter's first sermon he said Acts 2:37-39, "repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven: and you will receive a gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all are far away, everyone that the Lord our God calls to him."

So the point was:

1. Repent and be baptised and
2. You will receive the Holy Spirit,

Some, after being baptised were subsequently prayed for to receive the in-filling of the Holy Spirit ... You may ask, is what happened at Ephesus the only time?

When Philip was preaching in Samaria, recorded in Acts 8, many were converted to Christ, and the apostles in Jerusalem quickly sent down Peter and John to – wait for it - to minister to the new converts that they might be filled with the Holy Spirit,

"for the Spirit had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:14-17).

It is important to note that the apostles were not content to leave the Samaritans without this further vital experience and in filling of the power of God.

Today the majority of Christians seem to fit the description of those Samaritans. They have salvation, but not the power to minister and witness which comes from Jesus' baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not reserved for the one particular emotional temperament. The Holy Spirit is not just for the extrovert, the clappers, the bouncy, or the deeply religious.

Peter makes that clear in his sermon *"repent and be baptised every one of you and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him."*

Just as every person can know Jesus Christ as Lord, so we believe that every Christian can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is not an experience for particular types but for all types.

Emotional temperament, personality or religious background may play a part in how quickly a Christian yield himself to the Spirit and may have some effect on the physical response to the Spirit's working, but they have no bearing on the spiritual reality or power implicit in the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

God works in our lives only to the extent that we are willing. He prompts us, he leads us, he woos us, but he does not force us. There is nothing to fear! This is the God who is love, who is offering to work in us, to bring about all things good. To become a Christian, a person must WANT to accept Christ, and they can.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit a Christian must, will and desire to receive, and they can. Spirit Baptism is available to every Christian.

Now, you may have some reluctance.

I would say to you look at Jesus' life would you like to be able to live that kind of life. JESUS was Spirit filled The Holy Spirit is not just for passionate Pentecostals but for sedate Anglicans who would love to see their lives emanating peace, joy, faithfulness, confidence in Christ, power in adversity.

You can receive the filling of the Holy Spirit right now if you:

FIRST | Sincerely desire to be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 5:6)
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

John 7:37 -39 Jesus cried out, *"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water. Now he said this about the Spirit,"*

SECOND | Present every area of your life to God (Romans 12:1, 2) *"brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,... present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world,"*

THIRD | Confess your sins. By faith thank God that He has forgiven all of your sins - past, present and future -

FOURTH | By faith claim the fullness of the Holy Spirit, according to:

The command – Be filled with the Spirit. *"And do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit"* (Ephesians 5:18).

His promise - He will always answer when we pray according to His will.

"And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14, 15).

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:13)