

# **Being Baptized in the Spirit:**

## **The Truth Over Against the False Teaching of the Charismatics**

**by James A Laning**

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Before going into the specific saving works of the Holy Spirit, such as regeneration, calling, justification, and sanctification, we take some time to consider the Spirit's work as a whole. There are many who deny the fundamental truths of the Reformed faith, who nevertheless claim that a mighty work of the Spirit is going on in their midst. One such group, known as the Charismatics, claims to be the only group that has actually been baptized in the Holy Spirit. They call their gospel the full gospel, and accuse us of not preaching and teaching the full counsel of God, because we deny that God is still causing His people to speak in tongues in the same way that He did back in the days of the apostles. Over against this error, it is important that we understand what it really means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Who are the Charismatics? The name Charismatics is used to denote those who, within many different denominations, claim that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a second baptism received only by some Christians. They themselves claim to have received this baptism, and argue that this is evident from their being able to speak in other tongues, just as some believers did on Pentecost. As one might expect, this group also maintains that some of God's people are still able to perform miracles, just as they were performed by Christ and His apostles. The fact that these miracles are not being performed in our midst, they attribute to our lack of faith.

It is our intention not only to refute this false teaching, but also and primarily to set forth the truth of the Word of God on this subject. It is important that we refute false teachings. But when we do so, it is also important to remember that God sovereignly controls the wicked, so that they come up with the false teachings they maintain, and that He does this so that we might consider what the truth is over against their lies.

### **The Correct Position Set Forth**

We consider, first of all, what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist distinguished the baptism he was administering from the baptism Christ would administer, when he said,

*I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Luke 3:16b*

The distinction John was making here is the distinction between the sacrament of baptism and the actual, spiritual baptism; or, in other words, between the external washing with water and the real washing with the Holy Spirit. This is the distinction found in Article 34 of the Belgic Confession.

*Therefore the ministers, on their part, administer the sacrament and that which is visible, but our Lord giveth that which is signified by the sacrament, namely, the gifts and invisible grace; washing, cleansing, and purging our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort . . .*

John the Baptist said he was administering only the visible sacrament, and that Christ is the One who performs the real baptism, the invisible washing and renewing of our souls.

This real baptism is the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The word translated "with" in Luke 3:16 is literally the word "in." To be in the Spirit is to be in the gracious dominion of the Spirit. That Christ baptizes us in the Spirit means that He cleanses us by pouring out His Spirit upon us, so that we are in the gracious dominion of the cleansing Spirit of God.

This baptism can, however, also rightly be referred to as the baptism by or with the Spirit. Questions 70 and 71 of the Heidelberg Catechism speak of Christ baptizing us by and with the Spirit. This means that Christ is cleansing us by means of His Spirit, whom He sends to us to wash away our iniquities and to conform us to His image.

But what about the blood of Christ? Does not baptism picture our being washed by the blood of Christ? Indeed it does. The Heidelberg Catechism says we are washed by the blood and Spirit of Christ (Q. 70, 71). The relationship between the blood of Christ and the Spirit of Christ is also explained in Article 34 of the Belgic Confession:

*. . . as water washeth away the filth of the body when poured upon it, and is seen on the body of the baptized when sprinkled upon him, so doth the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from*

*children of wrath unto children of God.*

Thus the relationship is that Christ washes us in His blood, and does so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This spiritual baptism refers to the whole of our salvation. It refers to Christ's cleansing us both from the guilt of sin and from the corruption of sin. Or, in other words, it refers to our receiving both the forgiveness of sins and the deliverance out of those sins.

There is a sense in which this baptism is a one-time event, referring to the moment in which a person is regenerated, and receives by faith the blessings of both justification and sanctification. But there is also a sense in which this baptism is ongoing. When we sing the psalms we sometimes ask God to cleanse us from our sins. This indicates that the child of God in this life is constantly in need of the spiritual baptism, the spiritual cleansing, which continues to bring him out of his sins into the one body of Christ. But this baptism is still one baptism, a baptism we begin to receive at a certain moment in time, but that we continue to experience throughout our life on this earth.

### **The Two-Baptism Teaching of the Charismatics**

The Charismatics say there is not one baptism, but two. The first baptism, they say, is performed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes an unregenerate person and washes him in the blood of Christ, with the result that he is born again and has the fruit of the Spirit. Every believer, they say, has received this baptism. The second baptism is performed by Christ. Christ takes a believing person who has received only the first baptism, and washes him in the Holy Spirit, with the result that he receives power and has the gifts of the Spirit. These two baptisms can be contrasted as follows:

<b>The First Baptism</b>	<b>The Second Baptism</b>
<i>Performed by the Spirit</i>	<i>Performed by Christ</i>
<i>A washing in Christ's blood</i>	<i>A washing in the Spirit</i>
<i>Result: New life, the fruit of the Spirit</i>	<i>Result: Power, the gifts of the Spirit</i>

Those who have received the first baptism are merely Christians, but those who have received also the second baptism are super-Christians, endowed with power to do amazing things.

They attempt to prove this strange doctrine by the references in the book of Acts to believers who received the power to speak in tongues when they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. These people, they point out, were already believers and had received the life of Christ. But when they received the second baptism, the baptism in the Spirit, they received power to speak in tongues and to go about saving others.

A second proof for their position is said to be found in the baptism Jesus received. They say there were two distinct operations of the Spirit in the life of Jesus. The first operation was when Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit. This operation of the Spirit gave Jesus merely life. The second operation of the Spirit took place when He was baptized in the Spirit, which happened right after He was baptized by John the Baptist. This second operation of the Spirit gave Jesus power, so that He could go about saving others. These two operations, they argue, correspond to the two baptisms that the Spirit-filled Christian receives. The first baptism gives him merely life, but the second baptism gives him the power to go about saving others.

### **Refutation of the Error of the Charismatics**

We will begin by showing that the teaching of the Charismatics is false, and then proceed to show how we are properly to understand the passages to which they refer.

**First** of all, the Scriptures explicitly say that there is only one baptism, and not two. Ephesians 4:4-6 says,

*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

It is interesting to note that this passage appears in a context which is setting forth the unity of the church. There is one baptism into the one body. A two-baptism doctrine divides the church. It results in there being a division between those who have received only the first baptism and those who have received also the second baptism, between Spirit-filled Christians and non-Spirit-filled Christians, between powerful Christians and powerless

Christians.

**Secondly**, they separate the work of Christ from the work of the Spirit. The Spirit, they say, performs the first baptism, and Christ performs the second baptism. The truth is that Christ is the One who performs the one baptism, and does so in and by His Spirit. Christ pours out His Spirit into us, and the Spirit cleanses us from all our sins. In addition, there is not one baptism in the blood of Christ and another baptism in the Holy Spirit. Rather, as has already been set forth, the one baptism is a baptism in which Christ washes us in His blood, and does so by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But why then did Christ tell His disciples, who had already received the spiritual baptism, that they could not go forth preaching the gospel until they had received the baptism in the Spirit, and were thus endowed with power from on high? Evidently, there was a sense in which they had already been baptized, and a sense in which they had to wait until they were baptized. How is this to be explained?

The explanation for this is to be found in the fact that the church at this time was going through the transition of Pentecost. At Pentecost, Christ poured out His Spirit upon His church, so that God's people experienced the blessings of salvation to a much greater degree than they had before. This change took place after Christ was exalted to the right hand of the Father and received from the Father the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). Christ then proceeded to pour out this Spirit upon His body, the church. When God's people were thus filled with the Spirit, they received the additional grace they needed to proclaim the gospel of sovereign grace to the different nations of the world.

Although there was a sense in which the disciples had already been baptized prior to Pentecost, it was at Pentecost that they experienced this baptism to a much greater degree. This baptism caused them to experience more the sanctifying power of the Spirit that cleansed them more from sin and gave them a deeper knowledge into the truths of Scripture. This was precisely what they needed in order to perform the work Christ had given them to do.

### **The Devilish Signs and Wonders of the Charismatics**

What draws many to the Charismatic movement is the "power" they claim to possess. The first baptism, they say, merely brings one into Christ. But the second baptism gives one power to perform amazing things. This was referred to in the previous article. This power is said to manifest itself, first of

all, in their being able to speak with tongues, a gift which they say always accompanies the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Some of these people also claim to have the power to perform miracles. This is no surprise, for the external signs of speaking in tongues and performing of miracles go together. They are referred to together in Mark 16:17, 18.

*And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;*

*They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

Scripture makes clear that the signs and wonders performed by Christ and the apostles ended when the Scriptures had been completed. These miracles are referred to as "signs of an apostle" in II Corinthians 12:12. Signs of an apostle were obviously performed only during the days of the apostles.

When we consider the purpose of these signs, we can understand why these signs ended once the Scriptures were completed. These signs accompanied new divine revelation and served to confirm that word, taking away any doubt that the word which was spoken was really the word of God.

We see this already in the days of Moses. When God gave Moses a message to deliver to the people, Moses expressed doubt that the people would believe that God had really spoken to him. Then God gave Moses some miracles that he would be able to perform before his brethren, signs which would confirm that the word he had spoken was really the word of God.

The signs performed in the days of the new dispensation had the same purpose, namely, to confirm the word of God. We read of this in Mark 16:19, 20.

*So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*

*And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.*

New revelation was being brought, and signs were being performed to confirm this new revelation. But now that this period of new revelation has come to a close, these confirming signs have also ceased.

The one who is working among the Charismatics is none other than the devil,

who has been given power to perform lying signs and wonders, to deceive those who have pleasure in unrighteousness. We read in the Scriptures that in the last days there will indeed be some performing signs and wonders. But these signs and wonders will be signs and wonders of the lie, performed by those under the dominion of the devil. II Thessalonians 2:9-12 speaks of this when setting forth the work of the coming Antichrist.

*Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,*

*And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

*And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:*

*That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Similarly, Revelation 13:13 says that the antichristian church will do "great wonders" in front of the ungodly world.

The devil is bringing another gospel today, and he is trying to confirm that lie by these "signs and wonders of the lie." This, however, is taking place under the sovereign control of God, who governs even the forces of evil. God is making use of these lying signs and wonders. They belong to the strong delusion He is sending against all those who do not love the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.

### **The Power of the Devil: An Impersonal Force**

The power working among the Charismatics is impersonal and devilish. It does not bring the people into a personal, intimate communion with God. It is a devilish force that directs and controls people, so that they are more and more in bondage to sin.

This stands in direct contrast with the work of the Holy Spirit. When the disciples of Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were brought much closer to God, so that Peter, for example, could now clearly explain how the Old Testament Scriptures spoke of the suffering and exaltation of Christ. The power of the Charismatics, however, is not a power that causes them to grow in their knowledge of God, so that they willingly serve Him. Rather, the power of which they speak leads them to teach all sorts of false doctrines,

causes them to babble incoherently, and sometimes makes them fall over backwards. This is clearly not the power that brings one into a deeper understanding of the Word of God. It is a power that appeals to the sinful flesh, and gives one the feeling of being taken over by a power from outside of him.

Thus this power of which the Charismatics speak can rightly be called a force. It is something they give themselves over to, so that it controls them and keeps them in bondage. They babble without knowing what they are saying, unless someone is there to "interpret" the message. Some of them say that the language they speak is a real foreign language that is unknown to them, while others say it is a heavenly language unknown to anyone on this earth. But, either way, they are involved in an activity in which there is no growth in the conscious knowledge and covenant fellowship with God. All emphasis is placed on the experience of having a power come over them and take control of them.

### **The Holy Spirit: The Power from on High**

The power of which Christ spoke is the Holy Spirit Himself. In Article VIII of the Belgic Confession, the Holy Spirit is called the eternal power and might of God. This power is actually a person; He is the third person of the holy Trinity. It is this person who is the power that brings us into the personal, intimate friendship that is called the covenant of God.

This power from on high always works with the Word, guiding us into the truth of that Word. He guides us into Christ by guiding us into the truth, for Christ is the truth. Therefore, the churches where this Spirit is found are churches where there is great emphasis placed upon growing in the knowledge of the truth. And because this Spirit has been guiding the church into the truth from generation to generation, Spirit-filled churches also have sound, biblical creeds that the Spirit has guided them to write.

When the disciples were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter stood up and preached a sermon that indicated that he now had a much deeper understanding of how the Scriptures all speak of Christ and His work. Similarly today, the more we pray for the filling of the Spirit, the more we receive that Spirit, who causes us to grow in our love of the truth and to be able to preach that truth with boldness.

This is what the church needs in order to preach God's Word to the nations. In



every nation the church has to battle against many lies. The church needs the power of the Spirit to sanctify her and to cause her to grow in faith, so that she is prepared to battle these errors with Scripture.

By God's grace we continue to receive this Spirit, this baptism. It is in this way that we are prepared to proclaim the gospel of grace to the nations, so that every nation may embrace this truth, and proclaim it in their own language, to the glory of God.

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