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THE BAPTISM AND THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT

(Holy Spirit I)

By D.B. Knox

THE PROTESTANT FAITH
There is a good deal of talk these days in all the denominations, including the Roman Catholic denomination, about being baptised with the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit, and consequently speaking in tongues, that is, speaking unintelligent sounds, which are said to be the sign that God is present in the heart. It is worth examining this phenomenon briefly.

The teaching and the experience of the Holy Spirit is a unique feature of Christianity. The phrase 'Holy Spirit' is a synonym for the 'Spirit of God', that is, for God Himself, and the gift of the Spirit means that God gives Himself to His children, spirit to spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we are in personal relationship with our God, in the same way as men are in relationship with each other through their spiritual, that is personal, fellowship.

The work of God's Spirit in the world is to perfect His purposes. Thus, in Genesis 1, the Spirit of God is at work in the creation, and in Psalm 104:30 and in Job 33:4 the Spirit of God brings nature to its fulfillment. In the endowing of Boaz and the Mosaic elders and the judges of Israel the Spirit of God brought the natural gifts of these persons to their completion in order that God's purposes through them and these gifts might be accomplished; for example, the building of the tabernacle on the one hand and the governing of His people on the other (the Bible references are Exodus 35:21; Numbers 11:17; Judges 3:10, etc.). God's ultimate purpose in creating men and women is that they might be in fellowship with Him, and this is brought about by God's Spirit dwelling with our spirit after we have been forgiven and made God's sons and daughters through the salvation in Jesus.
The Spirit is the spirit of the knowledge of God, that is, experience and fellowship with God in the same way as we know a person. During his ministry Jesus said that He alone knew the Father (Matthew 11:27). This was because up till then He alone had received the Spirit of the knowledge of God. But in the same verse Jesus promised to give this knowledge of God, this fellowship with God, to his disciples; and this he fulfilled by giving them the same Spirit of God so that all who believe on Jesus have this Spirit of God (John 7:39); and all have this knowledge and fellowship (1 John 1:3; 2:13, 14, 20).

This is the fulfillment of the promise of the Old Testament that in the time of the Messiah all of God’s people would receive the fullness of God’s Spirit, that is, would be in permanent and full relationship with God, all could know God (Jer. 31:31). This promise was couched in metaphors drawn from water; thus, the Spirit is to be poured out (Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28; Zechariah 12:12), the Spirit is to be sprinkled as water is sprinkled (Ezekiel 36:25, 26, 27), the Spirit flows out from God’s presence like a river (Ezekiel 47:9). In particular, the gift of the Spirit of God is to be pre-eminently given to the Messiah (Isaiah 11:2) and it will result in a relationship of knowing God.

In the New Testament the Old Testament promises are fulfilled. Jesus is the man filled with the Spirit (Acts 10:38; Luke 4:1-18; John 1:32, 3:34). Thus, He becomes the exemplar of the Spirit filled man. It is worth, perhaps, noting that He is not an enthusiast, but His character is selfless, full of joy and peace. He is devoted to His duty; i.e., He obeys God exactly, sensitive to the slightest sin (compare His rebuke of Peter). He exercises signs of His messianic office through miracles, but there is no suggestion anywhere that Jesus spoke in tongues.
The gift of the Spirit to those who believe in Jesus follows from Christ's victory on the cross and His exaltation and crowning at God's right hand (Acts 2:33).

Jesus Himself had prophesied that this would be so, using water metaphors drawn from Ezekiel 47 (John 7:38, 39). John the Baptist had himself predicted it, using a water metaphor drawn from his own practice of baptism. He said that the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit. St. Paul uses the same water metaphor of baptism to describe the experience of every Christian in receiving the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) and he adds a second water metaphor drawn, doubtless, from the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness, saying that all Christians have been made to drink of one Spirit. There is no doubt that the two halves of this verse are identical in meaning and refer to the experience which follows from the victory of Christ for all who believe. Every Christian has this relationship with God through His Spirit (Romans 8:9), and will deepen our experience of His presence and fellowship, if that is really what we want in life. Jesus promised that God would give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him (Luke 11:13). "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

The result of the Spirit's work is life; God is life and the Spirit is God. It is the Spirit of God who confers natural life (Ps. 104:30; John 3:4) and it is the same Spirit who confers spiritual life. Thus, in Titus 3:5,6, the beginning of spiritual life in the believer is referred to in the hendiadys of the washing and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit's presence is the presence of Christ. It is through Christ's Spirit that we have fellowship with Christ. He is His Spirit, "I will come
to you", "My Father and I will make our abode with him." The Spirit's presence ensures that the Spirit's character, that is God's character, that is Christ's character, is manifest in us (II Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:22 and I Cor. 13). The test of the Spirit's presence in anyone is the fruit of the Spirit manifest in the life of that person, and in particular, the character of love and righteousness, for "God is love" and "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all".

As in the Old Testament, so in the New, the Spirit of God endows for service in the church His servants. These gifts are, of course, based on natural gifts, as in the Old Testament, for example, Bezalel, and the Elders. Thus Peter's and John's gift of leadership and boldness, is the work of the Spirit in harnessing natural aptitudes, God works through His own gifts. He knows whom He has called before the foundation of the world.

The gifts Christians receive in the New Testament are for many different purposes; for example, boldness to witness, gifts of service such as hospitality, gifts in connection with the gospel (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors-teachers), evidential gifts (healing, tongues), gifts of administration (helps and governments) and so on.

In Ephesians 4 when St. Paul lists the gifts that the ascended Christ gave to mankind, he has four categories. All four are ministries of the Word. First apostles who are witnesses to the resurrection and so are foundation stones of God's revelation. Then come prophets who fill out the revelation. By the nature of the case, these two ministries have ceased now that the revelation of God in Christ is complete. The other two ministries
in Paul's list are evangelists and pastor-teachers. These two ministries are still with us as they are the ongoing essential ministries, the preaching of the Word to those outside and the preaching of the Word to those who have responded.

In considering the phrase "filled with the Spirit" or "full of the Spirit" as it occurs in the New Testament it should be noted that this also is a water metaphor. In Ephesians 5, being filled with the Spirit is contrasted with alcoholic intoxication. Apart from this instance, all the other references occur in Luke's writings. The phrase is based on the Old Testament language, and is normally in the parts where the second part explains what the work of the Spirit is to which reference is made. Thus, a typical construction is: so and so was full of the Spirit and he .... It occurs in Luke's gospel, pre-Pentecost; for example, Luke 1:41 "Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she lifted up her voice";

Luke 1:67 "Zecharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied"; Luke 4:1 "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit was led by the Spirit into the wilderness being tempted by the devil,...and Jesus answered him."

After Pentecost the same phrase is used by Luke in Acts. "Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, looked steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God...and said, (Acts 7:55). Luke uses the verb similarly, "filled...and" e.g., Acts 2:4 "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues".

Acts 4:8 "Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said to the people"; Acts 4:31 "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke the Word of God with boldness".
Acts 13: "Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost, fixing his eyes on him, said."

It is worth noting that these actions which follow filling with the Holy Spirit are actions of speaking. The presence of the Holy Ghost gives power to speak the word of God.

These are further examples. The reference to the gift of the Spirit to John (Luke 1:15) is followed immediately by a prediction of the effectiveness of his preaching; similarly the statement that Paul will be filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:17) is followed by the statement that he preached the Word of God with boldness.

The other references to being full of the Spirit in Luke are similar, but instead of the action of preaching or speaking, some gift of character is referred to in the second part. Thus, the Seven are men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3); Stephen is a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5); Barnabas, of goodness; the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost (Acts 13:52).

This style of language which St. Luke uses is drawn from the Old Testament. For example, in Judges 14:6 "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson and he rent the lion as he would a kid". And 14:19 "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson and he went down to Ashkelon and smote 30 men." Compare Judges 11:29, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel and he judged Israel."

We may conclude that Luke's use of "full of the Spirit" or "filled with the Spirit" is linguistic, based on the Old Testament and is used by St. Luke to indicate some action, normally preaching the Gospel, which the indwelling Spirit of God
enables His servants to accomplish or else some abiding character of the Christian such as joy or faith or wisdom or goodness. In the former case we are reminded of what Jesus promised, that the Holy Spirit would speak through His disciples when they were called upon to witness for Him (Matt. 10:20); and in the latter case of what St. Paul says is the fruit of the indwelling of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, faith, goodness, etc. (Gal. 5:22-23).

It should be noted that the phrase "fullness of the Spirit" is not a biblical one, and that "full of the Spirit" is normally an opening for a phrase to indicate in what way the Spirit is expressing itself and that, with the one exception of Eph. 5, it is entirely a Lucan phrase.

With regard to the phrase "baptised with the Spirit", this phrase was first used by John the Baptist, who baptised with water those who had been alerted by his preaching to the imminence of God's reign, i.e., the imminence of God's judgement.

The only way to prepare for this coming event was repentance including, of course, the consequent life which accorded with repentance. John called his hearers to this radical repentance, to be expressed by baptism at his hands in the River Jordan. Baptism was the outward sign of repentance (that is, death to the old life), in view of the hope which his preaching set before them of the coming of God's kingdom. That kingdom would come when the Messiah came. John described the Messiah's ministry of judgement in terms of baptism, a metaphor drawn, naturally, from his own activity. John, however, contrasted the Messiah's baptism very sharply with the baptism of water.

The Messiah's baptism is not a baptism of water but a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire,
that is to say, it would be a baptism of judgement, for when the Messiah came he would purify His people as a refiner’s fire and wash them as with fuller’s soap (Mal. 3:2 and Isaiah 66:16). His coming then would be a baptism or washing of fire. Isaiah 4:4 speaks of the same events as a purging of the people of God through the Spirit of Judgement and the Spirit of burning. That is to say, God’s Holy Spirit would judge and so purify His people by burning up the dross. This was doubtless the background of John’s thoughts when he foretold that the Messiah would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. Jesus himself acknowledged this was the purpose of His coming, to come with the fire and the sword of judgement (cf. Luke 12:49-51 and Matt. 10:34, 35 with Isaiah 6:16). But the time for the judgement, “the day of vengeance of our God” was not yet.

It is important to note that the Messiah’s baptism was baptism with the Spirit; John’s baptism was baptism with water. The Messiah’s baptism is not baptism with water and the spirit.

It was part of the Old Testament prediction of the messianic age that the Messiah would not only be united with the Spirit but that in all God’s people the Spirit would be poured out. This is what Jesus confers as a consequence of His victory and exaltation. He pours out (note the water metaphor based on the Old Testament) His Spirit on all His disciples (Acts 2:33).

It is the baptism with which the Messiah baptizes, pouring out His spirit as John, presumably, poured water on those who were his disciples. It is worth perhaps noting that the phrase ‘baptism of the spirit’ is always used in a group context.

At the beginning the gift of the Spirit was accompanied by outward manifestations; there are
five occasions in the New Testament when the Spirit is given for the first time; to Jesus at the beginning of His ministry; at Pentecost when the disciples of Jesus received the Spirit; at Samaria; Caesarea when the Gentiles received the Spirit; and at Ephesus when John the Baptist's disciples received the Spirit. The gift of tongues is mentioned on three of these occasions but it would seem that from the time of Pentecost onwards tongues were absent from the Jerusalem church for when tongues occurred at Caesarea Peter remarked that it reminded him of what they had experienced "in the beginning" (Acts 11:15).

God always gives his gifts in accordance with our natures, of which He himself is the creator and giver. Consequently, speaking in tongues will be based on a psychological and physiological characteristic in human nature. The elevation of spirit, which the Holy Spirit brought to those who were hearing for the first time the wonderful truths of the gospel, and who were brought into a new fellowship with God, led to the speaking of tongues. And we may ask whether this was not intended to be evidential. The Holy Spirit's presence is not now indicated by the speaking with tongues so much as by the transformed character and the power to live the Christian life and to testify to the gospel in whatever way God calls us to.

However, the psychological and physiological ability to speak with tongues will still remain in the human frame, so that if our spirit is elevated from whatever cause, it may well lead to glossolalia that is, speaking with tongues. But unless it is the work of the Spirit, glossolalia is of no spiritual significance, merely psychological. I am of the opinion that the modern phenomenon of glossolalia, or speaking with tongues, is psychological and not in itself a manifestation of the Spirit of God.
The Spirit of God is the presence of God. He has promised His presence to all who believe in Christ (John 7:39; Acts 2:38). If we open the door of our life, He will come in, and He will join us in fellowship round a meal, as it were (Rev. 3:20). We have only to ask for God's presence, for Christ's presence, in our heart to receive Him. Jesus said that God will give His Holy Spirit to those who ask (Luke 11:13). This is the great privilege and experience which the Christian religion brings - to know God through His indwelling Spirit.

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