School of Life
2013-2014

Foundations: Exploring the Foursquare Gospel
(Fall and Winter)

Christ in Culture: Connecting Jesus to Life
(Spring)

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As we begin our second series focused on Jesus Christ as “Baptizer in the Holy Spirit” let’s remind ourselves of this central fact: the Godhead is not divided. As we study the Holy Spirit, let’s remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit’s purpose is to bear witness to the reality of Jesus Christ.*

Since we’re fond of calling ourselves “Pentecostals”, we’ll start by providing an explanation of that term from Scripture and then proceed to examining the various instances - there are four - in which the Holy Spirit “fell upon” or “baptized” believers in the book of Acts.

**Pentecost**

Pentecostals are so named because, according to Acts 2, the Holy Spirit rushed upon the believers praying together in the Upper Room “when the day of Pentecost had fully come” (v. 1). Pentecost** is so named because it falls 50 days (Pente is Greek for 50) after the Passover celebration. {You may recall that Jesus was crucified on the eve of Passover.}

Both Passover and Pentecost - or Feast of Weeks, or Feast of Harvest - were rich Jewish traditional feasts that celebrated the agricultural harvests. It was a time of celebration and remembrance of what the Lord had done in providing another year of sustenance for the people.

Is there any significance for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be on Pentecost? There is certainly an appealing “agricultural harvest = spiritual harvest” motif that lies close to the surface. Extending that motif further, the Passover...
represents the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. This leaves the Feasts of Booths/Tabernacles which represents the return of Christ and the conclusion of our wilderness wanderings as we pass over the spiritual Jordan to our true home of rest.*

The Promise of the Father

Jesus made several promises to His disciples prior to His ascension regarding the promise of a gift Jesus would soon send through the Father to the disciples. In the Upper Room, He tells the disciples:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever. (John 14:16)

A short while later, Jesus clarifies who the Helper is:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. (John 14:26)

Later still, Jesus reiterates how the Spirit will come and what He is sent to do:

But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. (John 15:26)

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13-14)**

*How practically useful or biblically consistent this kind of spiritualizing is remains to be seen. But it’s nice to see the continuity between Old and New Testaments.

**If you haven’t noticed already, John chapter 14-16 is a fantastic place to begin any study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the theme of the Holy Spirit comes up several more times:
And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-5)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

This is exactly what the disciples did. You’ll remember that Jesus had just said “Go!”* and is now saying “But not yet.” These two statements should inform us of the following:

• The Holy Spirit is given for the sake of evangelistic, church-planting, disciple making, suffering-for-the-gospel ministry. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is empowerment for ministry, not superior spiritual status.**

• The Holy Spirit is so crucial in the life of the church and its members that Jesus restrained His disciples from carrying out their mission until this empowering had taken place.

Keep Acts 1:8 in mind, for it not only serves as a useful outline to the book of Acts, but a template for how the Holy Spirit fell on new believers throughout the early church. We’ll trace this narrative as it unfolds in four parts.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

Luke is making a key point: this experience is specifically intended to read as the fulfillment of the promises Jesus made in John 14, 16 and Acts 1. The result of this instance of Holy Spirit baptism is multi-lingual speech; and the disciples spill into the streets proclaiming the “mighty works of God” (v. 11) in languages the pilgrim crowds could understand.*

Peter, of course, uses the opportunity to preach a message rooted in Old Testament prophetic passages that proclaim this day as being a day of fulfillment (most notably of Joel 2:28-32) where God would pour out His Spirit. The response is dramatic:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. (Acts 2:37-39)

Thus, the Holy Spirit came exactly as Jesus promised He would. Those who had placed their faith in Him received the indwelling power of God for life and ministry. The church was born, and God’s people were moving forward.

*I’m not the first person to point out that what’s happening here is the undoing of the Tower of Babel. Whereas in Genesis, language was confused to scatter the people; at Pentecost, the disciples were scattered to speak the language of the people.
Part 2 - Samaritans

There was only one problem - the early church was still behaving as though Jews were the only ones eligible to receive the gospel.* Jesus’ mandate to spread the gospel to “Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth” was getting stymied at the “Jerusalem” part.

Oddly enough, the solution was persecution - read all about it in Acts 6:8-8:3. The church began to scatter, and the first place it went was to the geographically near but socially distant region of Samaria.** One of the early disciples, Philip, went to Samaria and a revival broke out. Salvations, signs, wonders, exorcisms, magicians getting converted, the whole works. Things were so fabulous, apostolic delegates from the mother church in Jerusalem stopped by to investigate:

> Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but 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.  
> (Acts 8:14-17)

This is what we call a “threshold moment” in which God uses the presence of the apostles to affirm that the Holy Spirit - and thereby salvation and full entrance into the family of God - was given to the Samaritans. This was central to the early church’s self-understanding: God was working outside their ethnic boxes to bring all people from all nations into saving faith.

If Samaritan conversion was a tough pill to swallow, an even bigger one was coming: the conversion of Gentiles.

* Of course, Jesus was a Jew and the early Christians still practiced Judaism - note that the very next episode after Pentecost is Peter and John going to the temple to pray.

** You may recall the Samaritan woman’s shock when Jesus, a Jewish man, struck up a conversation with her in John 4. Relations between Jews and Samaritans were strained at best, and downright racist at worst.
Part 3 - Cornelius

If Samaritans (Jewish half-breeds) were acceptable, then the conversion of full-scale pagans pushed the envelope even further. In fact, it took some divine intervention at a beach-front resort involving a bed sheet and some BBQ to convince Peter that the Holy Spirit was available to all.

The story of how Peter came to regard Gentiles as “clean” is compelling - you can read about in Acts 10:1-33, and hear Peter’s retelling of it in Acts 11:1-18, and allusion to it in Acts 15:7-11.* The part that interests us for now is the result of Peter’s proclamation of the Gospel. Let’s pick up the story towards the end of his sermon in the house of a Roman soldier named Cornelius:

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.

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:42-47)

Let’s not underestimate the significance of what has just happened. As an orthodox Jew, Peter would have never stepped foot in the house of Roman soldier, much less share a meal, preach the Gospel and baptize them.** Yet the full manifestation of the Holy Spirit - including speaking in tongues (Acts 10:46) - was given to the Gentiles. This became an incontrovertible fact for the early church: God

* Q:Is the fact that one story is told three times a clue to its significance?  
A: Yes.

** The response of the church at Jerusalem is telling: “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.” Acts 11:2-3
was smashing down walls of cultural, ethnic and racial boundaries to expand His Gospel to the end of the earth.

It wouldn’t be until Acts 15 that the Church finally settled the issue of who and how a person becomes a Christian, but the baptism of Cornelius by the Holy Spirit in Acts 10 was a central piece of evidence.* From the decision made there, the church expanded throughout the known world to Jew and Gentile alike.

Part 4 - The Old Guard

There is one final episode in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit falls on a group of new believers. In Acts 19, our hero Paul comes across a small band of men in the city of Ephesus. Here’s what happens:

* Acts 15 - known as the “Jerusalem Council” - is the record of the most important church meeting in history. Paul, Barnabas, Peter and James ally to lead the church towards full inclusivity for all those who receive the Gospel - no matter their spiritual or ethnic background.

And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. (Acts 19:2–7)

What’s happening here is that a group of “disciples” had, at some point, been under the ministry of John the Baptist and then traveled to different parts of the Roman Empire before encountering the message that John the Baptist pointed to: salvation through Jesus Christ.

Having been brought up to speed about Jesus by Paul, these men were then baptized into Christ. Paul laid on his hands
and they began “speaking in tongues and prophesying”* (v.7).

Thus the circle is complete: The first Jesus followers get baptized with Holy Spirit in Acts 2; the first Samaritans in Acts 8; the first Gentiles in Acts 10; and the old guard of folks living ‘between the Testaments’ gets mopped up in Acts 19.

**Analysis**

- Each time the Gospel crossed a racial, cultural or theological threshold, the baptism of the Holy Spirit attended that event as an indication of God’s pleasure in that situation.

- Of the four “threshold moments,” three explicitly mention speaking in tongues. The fourth (the Samaritan experience in Acts 8) implies that something obvious and unusual was happening, based on Simon the Magician’s desire to purchase that gift from the Apostles. We can tentatively conclude tongues was present there.

- However, we must be careful to point out that even though speaking in tongues often attends the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it is not a pre-requisite or requirement.**

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* Whether they *all* spoke in tongues and prophesied or some spoke in tongues and others prophesied is unclear. The text could be read either way. Regardless, it was a cool moment.

** For instance, there’s no record outside these four instances of believers speaking in tongues in Acts, and Paul seems to imply that not believers will either (1 Cor. 12:30-31)
Key Points to Remember

• The Baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus and initially fulfilled in Acts 2.

• The Holy Spirit was given to help the disciples glorify Jesus and make disciples.

• While speaking in tongues attended the baptism of the Holy Spirit on three (maybe four) occasions in Acts, an inability to speak in tongues should not be seen as a lack of Spirit baptism or second-class Christianity.

Reflection

• What has been your personal experience with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

• Do you personally speak in tongues? If not, are you receptive or resistant to the idea?

Further Reading

• Millard J. Erickson’s *Introducing Christian Doctrine* has a very helpful section on the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

• Foursquare’s own theology reference, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, is also a helpful resource.