GOD GIVES THE BEST GIFTS

Catechism Two, Lesson 20

Reading: Acts 2

1. Should We Study The Baptism In The Spirit Under “Doctrine Of Baptisms” Or “Laying On Of Hands”?

We could consider the Baptism in the Spirit under either baptisms or the laying on of hands. We should not be too rigid in compartmentalizing these first principles or foundations. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews lists six separate truths to experience Christ as the foundation. He does this only for the purpose of instruction. He is addressing himself to those who “should already be teachers” (Heb. 5:12–14). For this reason, he is talking in educational language about the ABC’s of Christian experience. In real life, these principles are experientially interrelated.

A. The Holy Spirit is always closely related to water baptism.

Jesus received the Spirit as soon as He came out of the waters of baptism. It was normal procedure to lay hands on people for the gift of the Spirit immediately following their water baptism. If this had not already occurred, the apostles corrected it as soon as possible.

B. It was standard procedure to impart the gift of the Spirit through the laying on of hands.

Of the five recorded instances where believers received the Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, three clearly indicate that this was conferred by the laying on of hands. By the time of the first century, laying on of hands and the impartation of the Spirit were solidly connected.

C. The Greek words translated “doctrine of baptisms” really mean “doctrine of washings.”

The word “baptisms” in Hebrews 6:2 is not the usual one, but a related word meaning “any washing or religious ablution.” The total context of the book of Hebrews is one of comparison between the Old Covenant and the New. Taken in this context, then, the writer of Hebrews is contrasting the living reality of New Covenant baptism and the Old Covenant washings. He is here emphasizing the necessity of doctrine—systematic teachings—which gives understanding and faith to prepare us to meet Christ in the waters of baptism. In the case of the Jews who knew only ritual washings, this pre-baptismal instruction was even more important. We must expect real spiritual change through water baptism in contrast to any other religious rite involving water!

D. Paul speaks of only “one baptism” and “one Spirit.”

In Ephesians 4:1–6, where Paul lists the basic unifying factors of the Church, he considers the “baptism” and the “Spirit” as distinct entities. Throughout the New Testament we find water baptism and the gift of the Spirit very closely associated, but not automatically linked. Thus we see, often, but not invariably, a pattern whereby baptism cuts away the old while the laying on of hands served to impart the new.

2. What Term Does The Bible Most Often Use To Talk Of The Baptism In The Spirit?

This familiar term of today, “Baptism in the Spirit,” was not the usual Biblical term. The more common

term was the “Gift of the Spirit.” In many ways the Spirit is shown to be the gift of God Himself through the hands of His Son. The Son in turn bestows this gift through the hands of those joined to Him and acting in His name.

A. The term “Baptism in the Spirit” was primarily used by John the Baptist.

John was sent to baptize in water and to herald the coming of the Messiah. It is natural for him to use immersion in water to picture the coming immersion in the Spirit to be performed by the Messiah. He uses what is at hand to illustrate what people are to expect. He uses the good teaching techniques of contrast and comparison.

B. Jesus encouraged believers to expect God to give only the best gifts to those who asked.

This lesson is two-fold: we must ask in order to receive from God; we need not fear the Holy Spirit because God gives even better gifts than we do to our children.

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:11–13).

(Compare with Matthew 7:9–11.)

C. The gift of the Holy Spirit as a permanent abiding presence only became available after Jesus was glorified.

Not until sin had thoroughly been removed through the death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ could God indwell His people permanently. He could not take up residence within us until the blood of Jesus had opened an unobstructed way into His presence. This priceless gift was shed forth as proof of the Father’s total acceptance of Jesus’ atoning work on our behalf effecting total reconciliation between God and man.

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36).

3. Exactly What Do We Mean By “Gift Of The Spirit”?

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of God’s own personal presence. Since the beginning, God has desired to make His home within man, but sin made this impossible. Only through the completed redemption could God again find rest within the heart of His creature. God’s greatest gift is the gift of Himself, first in the person of the Son for our redemption, and then in the person of the Spirit as our permanent Comforter.

A. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a permanent well of living water within.

Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water (John 4:10).

B. The gift of the Spirit gives us power to partake of God Himself.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost (Heb. 6:4).

C. The gift of the Holy Spirit is the mark of belonging to God’s covenant people.

Forasmuch then as God gave them [the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius] the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:17).

D. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a real impartation of God’s life through the laying on of believer’s hands.

There are exceptions to this means of imparting the gift of the Spirit, but this was the more common way God gave the Spirit. Notice the humility of God in insisting that He be received through the channel of human hands. We learn from the beginning that life from God under the New Covenant requires true submission to other believers.

And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostle’s hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money (Acts 8:18–20).

4. What Other Terms Are Used To Describe The Gift Of The Spirit?

Many other terms are synonymous with the gift of the Spirit. Each term emphasizes some important aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work, and how He comes to live within us. We have already mentioned that John the Baptist emphasized the Spirit’s submerging of the believer into the presence of God, by calling this gift a “baptism.” The New Testament uses many other terms as well.

(1) We are “filled with the Spirit” (Acts 2:1–4).

(2) We “drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13).

(3) The Spirit “falls” upon us (Acts 8:16; 10:44–48).

(4) We are “endued” or “clothed upon” with power (Acts 1:8).

(5) A “river springs up within” from our innermost being (John 7:37–39).

(6) We are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13).

(7) We are given an earnest or down payment of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14).

5. How Is The Holy Spirit Related To The Hand?

Gifts are given by the hands. An open hand means favor and blessing. God uses people He has joined to Himself as the channel through whom He pours Himself. This is prepared for in the Old Testament where the presence of the Spirit came upon men sporadically as a foretaste of the permanent indwelling gift under the New Covenant. When He came upon men to give special power and ability, this was called “the hand of God.” Why? God was giving Himself. He was extending His personal presence and power in a form usable by man. The Old Testament gives several examples of the Spirit acting through men as “the hand of God”:

(1) Ezekiel

And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me (Ezek. 8:1).

(See also Ezekiel 33:22; 37:1; 40:1.)

(2) Elijah

And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel (1 Kings 18:46).

(3) Elisha

But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him [Elisha] (2 Kings 3:15).

The hand is the acting power of God. The Holy Spirit is God’s cutting edge of redemption, working deep within us where it counts. It is no accident that the Holy Spirit is very often imparted through the laying on of hands.

Home Study: Lesson 20

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Under what two foundation stones could we consider the Baptism in the Holy Spirit?

a.

b.

2. What other washings are mentioned in Scripture besides baptism?

3. Who most often used the term “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”?

4. What other terms are given in Scripture for the coming of the Holy Spirit to remain within us?

a. Luke 24:49a

b. Luke 24:49b

c. John 1:32

d. John 4:14

5. What is the most common word used to describe the Spirit’s coming?

6. In what way is the Spirit’s coming really a “baptism”?