

The Gift of the Holy Ghost

Introduction

The gift of the Holy Spirit has become the topic of much discussion in our day. Men and women of all persuasions and from all walks of life have become interested enough to search for greater understanding of this phenomenal spiritual experience. Capturing headlines, dominating the content of many religious periodicals, and generally creating excitement, this canon of apostolic faith deserves a sincere appraisal.

The Facts

The Holy Spirit is God. "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). "There is . . . one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:4). To become a subject in the kingdom of God, Jesus said a person must be "born again," or "born of water and of the Spirit" (John 3:3-5). The birth of the Spirit and the baptism of the Spirit are synonymous terms. The Apostle Peter understood this truth as he spoke to the multitude in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). This experience was received by the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the Samaritans (Acts 8:15-17), and the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48), plainly indicating that it was meant for all people, regardless of race, creed, color, or station in life. The new birth, consisting of water and Spirit, was never set forth as being optional or unessential. "Ye must be born again" are the words of Jesus in John 3:7. Until a person is born of the Spirit, he cannot be called a "son" of God.

The Privilege

But why concentrate only on the absoluteness of the command? It is a blessed privilege to experience a release of spirit, finding freedom of soul and expression in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is no other experience similar to it. "Incomparable" is the only adequate description of this filling. The transition is to an entirely new realm and way of life. A complete transformation takes place. The soul has an empty place "in the shape of God" that nothing else will fit or satisfy. The baptism of the Spirit completely satisfies every longing of the soul. In this experience is fulfillment.

The Evidence

There are two major evidences of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The initial, outward evidence is speaking with tongues, which means speaking miraculously in languages the speaker does not know.

Speaking with other tongues has been connected with Spirit baptism since the beginning of the church age. On the birthday of the New Testament church, the Day of Pentecost after Christ's ascension, approximately 120 disciples of Christ were inundated by the Spirit of God and "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). The household of an Italian centurion received the same spiritual experience, which the Jewish Christian onlookers readily identified, "for they heard them speak with tongues" (Acts 10:44-48). In Acts 19:1-6, a group of John the Baptist's disciples heard about the Holy Ghost from the Apostle Paul; they too were filled with the Spirit, "and they spake with tongues."

We cannot adequately express with our own words the ecstasy experienced in the baptism of the Spirit. Only through unaccustomed words of heavenly coherence can we utter what our souls would express.

There are perhaps several other reasons why God chose speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of this spiritual baptism. It is an objective, external evidence that recipients and onlookers can both identify with certainty (Acts 10:46). It is a uniform evidence—all the disciples on Pentecost, all the household of Cornelius, and all the believers in Ephesus spoke in tongues. "So is everyone that is born of the Spirit" are the words of Jesus in His description of this spiritual new birth (John 3:8). Speaking in tongues also indicates the complete control of the Spirit over our human wills. The tongue is the most unruly member of the body (James 3:8), and its being tamed by God is evidence of His complete control.

Further evidence of the Spirit's abiding presence in our lives is the fruit of the Spirit, which Paul mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

The Promise

Was the baptism of the Holy Spirit for the apostles or early disciples only? Is it today available to only a select few who are "superspiritual"? The obvious answer to these questions is no.

The Apostle Peter made it very plain in his message on the Day of Pentecost that the gift of the Holy Ghost is for everyone: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). (See Luke 11:13.) Our faith, obedience, and submission to the Lord Jesus and His gospel qualify us for this most joyous of all experiences. (See Acts 5:32; 11:15-17.) As Isaiah 12:3 states, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

Seek Him today, for "he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" (Isaiah 55:1). This means you!

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