

Baptism of Power

The 120 disciples in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, received tremendous power because of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Whereas previously the apostle Peter was afraid of a servant girl (Mark 14:66), now in his new boldness he preached before thousands of people in Jerusalem. Along with preaching, other signs and wonders occurred, including the greatest miracles of all - that of transformed lives in Christ.

Throughout the centuries groups and individual Christians have known that same dynamic power of the Holy Spirit with far reaching consequences. For example, the Moravians during the eighteenth century when filled with power, left Europe and travelled thousands of miles in effective missionary endeavour. Even today, there are tremendous outpourings of the Spirit around the world where thousands of people are coming to know the Lord and new churches are being established.

This experience of power has been referred to by various names. Some refer to it as 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit', while others see this experience as the 'filling of the Spirit'. The important thing is not what we call this experience, but that we know it.

After Jesus commissioned His disciples to 'go and make disciples of all nations', He said, 'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. Acts 1:8.

Too many individual Christians and churches both in the homeland and overseas function without the power of the Spirit. As a result the church is impoverished. Some people recognise this lack of power, while others ignore it through the busied nature of ministry.

New Christians need instruction on the importance of receiving the power of the Spirit. It is an essential requirement in the Christian life. It is not an optional extra to be received five years down the track! Even the apostles were concerned that new believers knew the baptism of power (Acts 2:38, 19:1-7, etc).

How to receive power

The Holy Spirit comes in power in different and unexpected ways even without people seeking it. For some, He is like a mighty rushing torrent of water. For others, He may come in a gentle way. The danger is for us to impose our experience upon others as the right way. Do not put God in a box.

I am at times perplexed why it is that on some occasions people receive the baptism of power and the release of gifts without any effort while for others it takes much time and struggle to receive that touch from the Lord. Acts 1v4 makes it clear that the power of the Spirit is a gift which cannot be earned.

Furthermore, the disciples were to remain in Jerusalem for several days before the power of the Spirit came upon them. We live in an instant society where things must happen immediately, but that is not the way God has to work.

However, although there is no one way that people receive the power of the Spirit, generally believers need to;

Have *a thirst for the Lord* (John 7:37-39). Too many people want the power of God in their lives for selfish reasons - for what they can get out of God. God works in our lives so that He can primarily work through us. If a person is not prepared for that, then we should not pray for them. Also if a person has wrong motives or lacks a desire to walk with God, point this out to them. It is wrong to spend five hours a day watching T.V. if they are only prepared to spend 5 minutes in reading the Bible and in prayer each day. Sometimes a season of prayer and fasting is most useful in receiving the power of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a *Holy Spirit* so a person needs to experience *full repentance and have a clean heart*. This means that they do away with all foreign gods - whether it includes unhealthy relationships, wrong business dealings and sinful thoughts (Psalm 51:2). For myself it meant writing letters and personally asking people for their forgiveness. There are no short cuts.

A person may receive the power of the Spirit through the *prayer of faith*. To pray for them through the laying on of hands is helpful, but as they pray encourage them to think of Jesus. Sometimes it is helpful to hold out their hands to receive the gift of the Spirit.

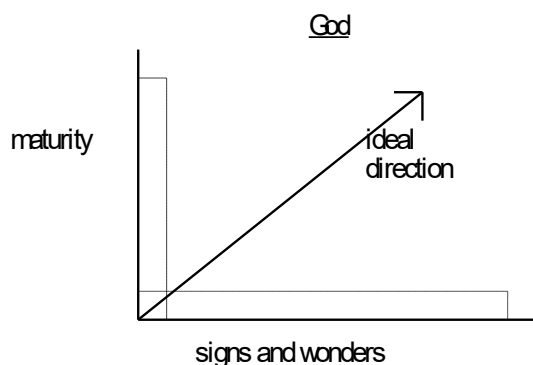
'If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who seek him.' Luke 11:13.

A personal experience of the living God is important, but a person must not rest upon feelings. Sometimes the experience occurs at the time of asking; at other times further down the road. If it is desired that they speak in tongues, encourage them to pray out loud, while you and others pray with them, praying in the special prayer language. Some people burst out into a fluent tongue, while others like myself only enter the use of this gift gradually. Never suggest that only those who speak in tongues are filled with the Spirit. That is erroneous teaching.

Points to note

- There should come a fresh love for God and His Word.
- The Holy Spirit's power is primarily given for effective service, so encourage the release of spiritual gifts. A boldness for witnessing is often evident. Learning to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting is a habit learned through obedience and this is how many people begin to move in the gifts.

- Watch out for spiritual pride when people receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Some of my biggest problems have occurred when people have received the power of the Holy Spirit and feel they have become 'spiritual'. Some have then felt that they were God's answer to the problems within the church. How wrong they were. They must become accountable to leadership.
- Do not minimise the importance of Christian experience. It was the experience of the disciples which turned the whole world upside down.
- Not all who perform signs and wonders know Jesus as Lord Matthew 24:24.
- Christian maturity is not the same thing as knowing signs and wonders. Maturity (the development of a Christ-like character) brings us into a deeper relationship with God and may come over several years, while signs and wonders allow us to see God at work in a visible way.



Unfortunately, there are many godly people around who have been on the Christian way for many years and yet have a very limited experience of God's power, while there are other Christians who have a much wider experience of the power of God, but who lack maturity in their Christian life. Ideally, the Lord wants us all to mature in our relationship with Himself and grow in the use of signs and wonders - not to copy others, but to become more Christlike. The power of the Holy Spirit enables both things to happen.

- 'Be filled with the Spirit' in Ephesians 5:18 is in the present passive tense in the Greek which means that believers must know the power of the Spirit as an *ongoing experience* and not as simply an experience.

The power of the Spirit working in a believer's life brings personal victory, joy, confidence and hope for the future. The world desperately needs Christ and He will be found as God's people know a baptism of power and learn to walk in full obedience to Him, willing to take Spirit directed risks of faith.