

Baptism of Power

The 120 disciples in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, received tremendous power because of the baptism of power. 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 (Acts 2:14ff). Along with preaching, other signs and wonders occurred, including the greatest miracles of all that of transformed lives in Christ (Acts 3:6ff).

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 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. Before the disciples began to fulfil Christ's command to 'go and make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19), Jesus said:

'You will 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).

The empowering of the Holy Spirit is likewise essential for the task He had entrusted to us. Yet many Christians attempt to serve God without depending on the Spirit's power. As a result, lives and many churches are spiritually impoverished. While some recognise this lack of power and long for renewal, others fail to notice it because among other things they have become consumed by the busyness of ministry.

The early apostles were careful to ensure that new believers understood and experienced this empowering. Passages such as Acts 2:38 and Acts 19:1–7 demonstrate their concern that Christians receive the fullness and power of the Holy Spirit from the beginning of their walk with Christ.

How to receive power

The Holy Spirit often comes in power in different and unexpected ways, sometimes even when people are not consciously seeking such an experience. For some, His work may be dramatic and unmistakable, while for others it may be quiet and gentle. We should therefore be careful not to impose our own experience on others as though it were the only or correct pattern. God works sovereignly, and we must not limit how He chooses to move.

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 may take time to receive that touch from the Lord.

‘On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about’.

There is no one way to receive the power of the Spirit:

1. Develop a *genuine thirst for the Lord* (John 7:37–39). Some seek the power of God primarily for selfish reasons, rather than out of a desire to know Him and serve His purposes. Yet God empowers His people not only to enjoy their relationship with Him, but also to work through them in fulfilling His will.

If a person is unwilling to pursue a growing relationship with the Lord, it may be wise to delay praying for them until they understand the importance of wholehearted commitment. Where wrong motives are evident, or there is little desire to walk with God, these issues should be addressed graciously and honestly. A person's priorities often reveal the condition of their heart. If someone spends many hours each day watching television but only a few minutes reading Scripture and praying, they should be encouraged to re-examine those priorities. A season of prayer and fasting may also help prepare a person's heart to receive the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

2. 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 24 and 51:2). For myself it meant writing letters and personally asking people for their forgiveness.
3. 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.

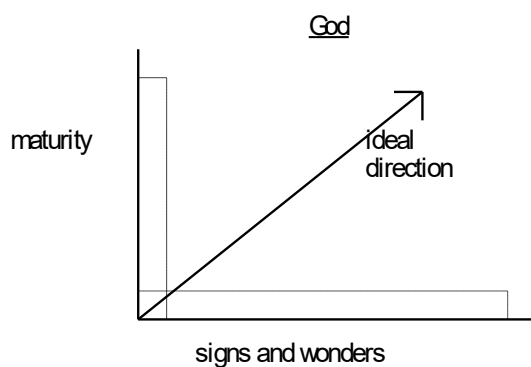
‘If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who seek him’ (Luke 11:13).

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 later. 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 with a fluent tongue, while others like me 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

- Through this baptism 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 in receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a problem when people having received the power of the Holy Spirit then feel they have become very 'spiritual'. Some have then felt that they were God's answer to any problems within the church or people's lives. Encourage them as they mature.
- 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).
- 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.



Many godly Christians have followed Christ for years yet have had little experience of God's power, while others have seen more of His power but still lack maturity. Ideally, the Lord wants us to grow both in our relationship with Him and in the use of signs and wonders—not by imitating others, but by becoming 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.

When Jesus was water baptised, He was immediately led into the wilderness, where He was tempted by the devil. That was not an easy experience, although His ministry was also marked by seasons of great joy and blessing. Likewise, the baptism and empowering of the Holy Spirit do not remove the challenges of the Christian life or exempt believers from testing and spiritual conflict.