



A Decade of Pentecost
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Acts in Africa Initiative



How to Preach
on the **Baptism**
in the **Holy Spirit**

Denzil R. Miller

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Introduction

Possibly the most significant trend in global Pentecostalism during the last half of the 20th century, and into the first decade of the 21st century, has been the precipitous decline in the number of people being baptized in the Holy Spirit in their churches—along with the growing number of Pentecostal ministers who have all but abandoned the Pentecostal message. As a result, across the globe much of Pentecostalism has been “nominalized,” that is, the churches have become Pentecostal in name only. Statistics startlingly reveal that today an overwhelming majority of those attending Pentecostal churches on every continent have not been personally baptized in the Holy Spirit evidenced by speaking in tongues and zealous witness for Christ (Acts 1:8; 2:4).

This troubling decline in spiritual experience is the result of many factors. One primary cause, I am convinced, rests squarely in the lap of Pentecostal ministers, among whom there has been a conspicuous decrease in preaching and teaching on the subject. In many instances the practice is almost nonexistent. In my travels throughout America and Africa I have observed this trend firsthand.

If this troubling trend is to be reversed there must be a reawakening among Pentecostal preachers. They must once again learn how to effectively preach and teach on the empowering work of the Spirit, and to pray with their members to be filled. In this study I attempt to address this issue (I have dealt with the issue of praying with believers to be filled with the Spirit in another booklet entitled, “Leading Believers into the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.”)

Chapter 1:

Four Preliminary Considerations

As we approach the subject of preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is encouraging to note how this message was a principal emphasis of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts. The message of the Spirit's empowering was an integral part of what is known as the apostolic *kerygma*, that is, the message proclaimed by the apostles in the New Testament. In the very first message of the new "Age of the Spirit" the subject of Spirit baptism was a prominent theme. In fact, 40% of Peter's Pentecost sermon (10 of 25 verses) addresses the subject of Spirit baptism (Acts 2:14-18; 32-33; 37-39; then 47b). Significantly, this strong emphasis on Spirit baptism occurred in a clearly evangelistic setting where the message of Christ was being proclaimed to the unconverted!

It has often been noted that 120 disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. That, however, is only part of the story. Judging from the context, and comparing the content of Peter's sermon and his instructions to his hearers (2:38) with the crowd's response (v. 41), it can be logically inferred that those 3,000 people who repented and were baptized in water were also baptized in the Holy Spirit.

One compelling lesson we learn from this narrative is that, if the church is going to become and remain a powerful force in the earth, then every new follower of Jesus Christ must be immediately lead into the empowering experience of Spirit baptism. And, in order for this to happen, Pentecostal preachers today, like Peter and

the other apostles, must speak frequently and persuasively on the subject.

However, before we begin our discussion of *how* to preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is important that we deal with some other important preliminary considerations. Understanding these foundational concepts will help to prepare us to more effectively develop and preach our sermons on Spirit baptism.

Must be a priority

As I have stated above, if the ebbing tide of spiritual fervor in Pentecostal churches is going to be reversed, Pentecostal preachers around the world will be required to re-prioritize preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If we will, as in the book of Acts, revival will come as believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, if we as preachers once again begin to emphasize Spirit baptism, we will be traveling in good company, for Jesus Himself prioritized preaching and teaching on the subject. It is striking how much He dealt with the subject, especially during His final days on earth (see Mark 16:18-19; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21-22; Acts 1:4-8). We would do well to follow His example.

The apostles also prioritized preaching and teaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. As I have already noted, Peter emphasized the topic at Pentecost. He also emphasized the empowering work of the Spirit in His sermon to the household of Cornelius at Caesarea resulting in many being filled with the Spirit (Acts 10:38, 44-47). On another occasion the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to address the issue and to pray with the new believers in Samaria to receive the Spirit (Acts 8:17-18). And it was Paul's first concern with the twelve disciples upon his arrival in Ephesus (19:1-6).

When one understands the purpose of the experience, it is clear why Jesus and the apostles were so adamant about believers being filled with the Spirit. Jesus unambiguously stated the central purpose of Spirit baptism in His final words to the church: "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). One clear implication of Jesus' statement is that, since every believer has

been called to be Christ's witness to the lost, every believer must be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, one of the pastor's primary responsibilities is to mobilize his or her church for effective evangelism and missionary outreach, and the first step in that process is to see the people empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Context matters

Another thing one must understand when preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit is that *context matters*. In other words, the focus and overarching emphasis of the church community in which one is filled with the Spirit will significantly impact how he or she receives and lives out the experience. The proper scriptural context for preaching on and receiving the Spirit is preparation for, and participation in, fulfilling the Great Commission of Christ. In Jesus' final promise to the church He permanently wedded the experience to His mission: "You will receive power ... you will be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The first disciples received the Spirit on their way to fulfilling Christ's commission. Peter declared that God would freely give the Spirit to those who were obeying God by proclaiming the gospel to the lost (Acts 5:23, cf. vv. 28-29).

When Spirit baptism is received in a committed evangelistic context, a powerful missional synergy occurs. This happened repeatedly in the book of Acts. People who were filled with the Spirit became powerful proclaimers of Jesus to the lost. I have personally observed this phenomenon on numerous occasions in my ministry throughout Africa.

On the other hand, when the Spirit is received in a context where the missionary purpose of the experience is ignored or misunderstood, many who receive begin to do strange and unscriptural things. Rather than witness for Christ, they begin falling down, shaking, swooning, and the like. In doing these things they trivialize the experience. They don't understand that God has given them the Spirit, not so that they can swoon or fall down, but so that they can stand up and speak "all the words of this life" to the lost (Acts 5:20). In all of our preaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we must consistently teach that the biblical context for receiving the Spirit is active participation in the mission of God.

Stay focused

Another matter that we must consider is that, as we preach our sermons on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is important that we remain focused. Remember, our goal is to see believers filled with—and thus empowered by—the Holy Spirit so that they might effectively proclaim Christ to the lost. Therefore, everything we say and do must contribute to fulfilling that purpose. All must be aimed at directing the people to the altar to be empowered by the Spirit.

It is therefore important that we avoid “rabbit trails” as we preach. In other words, our sermon must not wander back and forth from one topic to another as would a child chasing a rabbit. If what you are saying helps to achieve your goal, use it; if it does not, discard it. Remember, you are not presenting a comprehensive survey of all the Bible says about the Holy Spirit; you are forthrightly calling people to be empowered by the Spirit. You will have other opportunities to preach and teach on the work of the Spirit, and on those occasions you can cover other vital topics. As for now, keep your message short and to the point—and then call the people to the altar to be filled with the Spirit. In doing this, you will allow plenty of time for them to pray. Remember, it is better to preach short and pray long than it is to preach long and pray short. Therefore, as you preach, make your point and move onto the next. And finally, move promptly to call the people forward to receive the Spirit.

Preach with faith

As you deliver your sermon on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is important that you speak from a heart filled with faith. Fully expect God to keep His promise and to baptize believers in the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind the wonderful promises of Jesus: “Ask, and it *will* be given you” and “*Everyone* who asks receives” (Luke 11:9-10).

Once a young preacher determined that he wanted to see people baptized in the Holy Spirit in his ministry, so he began to preach often on the subject. Sadly, very few were being filled, and as a result, he became discouraged. One day he decided to visit an elderly pastor who was known for leading many people into the

experience and to ask him for advice. He told the old preacher, “When you preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit many are immediately filled; however, when I preach on the subject, none are filled.” The old preacher rose from his chair, leaned forward, and looked straight at the young preacher. “Young man,” he bellowed, “you don’t expect God to baptize people in the Holy Spirit every time you preach on the subject, do you?” “No sir,” replied the young preacher, “not every time.” Then the old man smiled and replied, “And that’s why so few are filled.” When we preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, we should preach out of faith-filled hearts. We must confidently believe that, if we do our part, God will do His.

And because we are ministering in faith, we will not try to force the issue. We will simply present the message, pray with the people, and fully trust God to fulfill His promises. After preaching several hundred times on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and praying with thousands to be filled, I can assure you that God is faithful, and He will fill hungry seekers with His Spirit. There will, of course, be times when we preach on the subject and no one is baptized in the Holy Spirit. What should we do on these occasions? We should not be discouraged, but we must remain determined to preach the message with strong faith in God’s promises, and in Him that He *will* fulfill His word.

In this chapter we have dealt with four crucial issues that should be addressed as we preach on Spirit baptism. In the next chapter we will consider three central goals that we must keep in mind as we preach.

Chapter 2:

Three Important Goals

In the last chapter we discussed the importance of remaining focused on our goal as we preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit—that is, the goal of seeing people come forward and be empowered by the Spirit. One way we remain focused is to, in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “keep our eyes on the prize.” That is, we must know clearly the goals we are trying to accomplish and then build our entire sermon around those goals. I have found that my preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit is most effective when I keep three important goals in mind:

Goal 1: Create desire

The first goal we must keep in mind as we preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit is that we seek to create a desire in the hearts of the hearers to be filled with the Spirit. Jesus spoke of this desire. On one occasion He said, “Blessed are *those who hunger and thirst* for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6 NKJV). On another occasion, when speaking about the Holy Spirit, He said, “*If anyone thirsts*, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:7:37-38).

God gives His Spirit to those who ardently desire a deeper relationship with Him, and to those who want to be effective in reaching others for Christ. It is therefore important that one of the preacher’s goals should be to create such desire in the hearts of the hearers. This, then, begs the question, how can we create this desire in their hearts? There are at least three ways we may do this:

1. *Show them how this experience with the Spirit will enrich their lives.* By being baptized in the Holy Spirit they will be

brought into a more intimate relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. With the baptism in the Holy Spirit will come an overflowing fullness of the Spirit (John 7:37-39; Acts 4:8), a deepened reverence for God (Acts 2:43; Heb. 12:28), an intensified consecration to God and dedication to His work (Acts 2:42), and a more active love for Christ, for His Word, and for the lost (Mark 16:20).

2. *Show them how being baptized in the Spirit will empower them to be more effective witnesses for Christ.* Let them know that when they are baptized in the Holy Spirit, they will receive power to be Christ's witnesses (Acts 1:8). Along with this power to speak effectively for Christ will come additional power to do the works of Christ and to challenge demons in the name of Jesus (John 14:12, 16). As they walk in the Spirit and in faith, God will begin to release spiritual gifts in their lives and ministries.

3. *Help them to picture themselves full of the Spirit.* As you tell them these things, help them to picture themselves actually doing them. You can do this by telling Bible stories and stories from history of people whom the Spirit empowered and God used. Then, show them how God will use them too. You may use the testimonies and stories of other Christians whom you know. And don't forget to share with them your personal testimony of being filled with the Spirit and how it impacted your life. These things will help them see how God often uses common people to do uncommon things for Him.

Goal 2: Inspire expectant faith

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is received by faith. Paul wrote, "We ... receive the promised Spirit *through faith*" (Gal. 3:14). Jesus said, "*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'*" (John 7:38).

When we preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, one of our main aims must be to inspire expectant faith in the hearts of the hearers. Note that I use the term "expectant faith." By this I am talking about a certain state of mind and heart in the believer where he or she fully expects and keenly anticipates that, in the immediate present, God will fulfill His promise. Jesus taught us

how to pray like this when He said, “Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours (Mark 11:24). Note carefully that Jesus did not say, “Believe that you *will receive*,” placing the answer in the indefinite future, but “believe that you *have received*,” placing the answer in the immediate present. In fact, some New Testament manuscripts read, “Believe that you *are receiving*, and it will be yours” (ESV margin note). One primary goal in preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, therefore, is to inspire such faith in the hearts of the hearers. I can think of three ways we can accomplish this:

1. *Tell them about the promises of Jesus.* The Bible teaches that “faith comes from hearing ... the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). Remind your hearers of the promises of Jesus: “Ask and it *will* be given to you ... *everyone* who asks receives ... the heavenly Father [*will*] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:9-13). Assure them that, if they will ask God out of a sincere heart, He will hear and answer their prayer (see 1 John 5:14-15).

2. *Remind them that the gift is for everyone.* It is significant that in the book of Acts every time the Spirit is poured out everyone present is filled (see Acts 2:4; 4:31; 8:17; 10:44; 19:6). On the Day of Pentecost “they were *all* filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4), thus indicating God’s will for His church until Jesus returns (compare 1:10-11 with 2:33). He wants every believer to be filled with the Spirit and become His Spirit-empowered witness (Acts 1:8). After the Spirit was poured out on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, Peter encouraged the people who witnessed the miracle: “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 2:39). Assure your hearers that the promised gift of the Holy Spirit is for all of God’s children until Jesus comes again—including them!

3. *Let them know God’s desire.* The wonderful truth is that God desires to give us His Spirit even more than we want to receive. He is not withholding His Spirit, nor is He playing a game of hide-and-seek with us. If we are prepared to obey Christ, and become His witnesses to the lost, God is prepared to empower us with His Spirit (Acts 5:32; cf. vv. 29). Right now He is standing with His hand outstretched offering to freely give us the gift of His

Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12). We simply need to confidently reach out by faith and receive.

Goal 3: Bring to clear understanding

A final goal that we must keep in mind as we preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit is that we seek to bring the hearers into a clear understanding of what the experience is and of how it is received. Let's look at each of these things:

1. Teach them what the baptism in the Holy Spirit is. As we prepare and preach our sermon, we must realize that most Christians have no clear or accurate understanding of the true nature, purpose, and importance of the experience. We must, therefore, clearly explain these things to them. Concerning its nature, the baptism in the Holy Spirit is a powerful, life-changing encounter with God. It is a deeply spiritual and truly supernatural experience. It is when God the Spirit comes mightily upon a yielded child of God and fills him or her with His awesome power and presence.

Its purpose is to bring the committed believer into a more intimate relationship with the triune God and to empower them to be witnesses for Christ both at home and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). As a result, second only to being born again, baptism in Holy Spirit is the most important experience in the life of any follower of Jesus. It is therefore essential to emphasize that Jesus has commanded every one of His followers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5; cf. Eph. 5:18).

2. Teach them how the gift is received. The gift of the Spirit is received by asking, receiving, and speaking in faith (more on this in the next chapter). Consequently, it is not received by begging, crying, or getting worked up into some hyper-emotional state. In fact, these actions can, and often do, hinder one's being authentically baptized in the Holy Spirit. Neither is the baptism in the Holy Spirit passed on from one believer to another as one would pass on a piece of merchandise. The experience comes directly from heaven into the heart of the seeker (Acts 2:2). It is a gift from the heavenly Father (Luke 11:13) and from Jesus Himself (Acts 2:32-33). While laying on of hands can, and often does, inspire the seeker's faith, and help to facilitate the Spirit's presence

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upon the seeker, only Jesus can baptize in the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16-17), and only the seekers themselves can receive the Spirit by faith. The gift is received as the recipient exercises a bold, present-tense, appropriating kind of faith.

It is essential that we keep these things in mind as we prepare and deliver our sermons. In the next chapter we will continue our discussion by talking about the sermon itself.

Chapter 3:

The Sermon Itself

Our discussion now brings us to the sermon itself. In this chapter we will focus our discussion on two things, the content of the sermon and the delivery of the sermon. But first let's talk a bit about the nature of the sermon.

Keep it simple

In Chapter 1 we discussed the importance of keeping the sermon short. We will now discuss the importance of keeping it simple. One mistake many preachers make when preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit (or, for that matter, on any biblical subject) is to over complicate the sermon. One of the greatest compliments I receive when preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit is "You make it so simple!" Remember, you are not giving a college lecture, you are presenting a simple message to non-theologically trained people. Therefore, you should resist any temptation of trying to impress the people with your great knowledge of the subject. And by all means, don't come to them with some "new revelation" from God. When you stand before the people, simply and clearly tell them what the Bible says.

Oftentimes, when I have heard certain people preach, I get the strong feeling that they are telling more than they really understand. On the contrary, as you preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the people should sense that you know more than you are actually telling them. Take them step by step through what they must know and what they must do to receive the Spirit. In your message aim at achieving the three critical elements of good communication: *clarity* (your message should be easy to follow and easy to understand), *conciseness* (your message should be

short and to the point), and *cogency* (your message should be strong and compelling).

The content of the sermon

In preaching on the baptism in the Holy Spirit it helps to see the sermon as having two main parts. I call these two parts the message and the instructions.

1. *The message.* When I speak of “the message,” I am referring to what we commonly think of as the sermon itself. While the instructions (discussed in the next section) remain essentially the same in every sermon on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the message changes. During this part of the sermon you will teach or preach on some fresh, pertinent biblical insight concerning the work of the Spirit in the life of the church or individual Christian. The message includes the text, the introduction, and body of the sermon. Time wise, it will make up about half of the sermon. Thus, in a typical 40 minute sermon the message will take approximately 20 minutes to deliver. Again, work to make your message clear, concise, and cogent.

2. *The instructions.* The message is followed by, what I call, “the instructions.” Some would see this as part of the altar call or conclusion of the sermon; I see it as more than that. I once read where Billy Graham was asked, “Billy, when in your sermon do you begin your altar call?” Dr. Graham answered, “My whole sermon is an altar call!” The altar call does not begin after the conclusion, it begins with the text, continues through the introduction and message, and intensifies during the instructions. In the message you sought to inspire people to be filled with the Spirit, now in the instructions, you will tell them exactly what they must do to receive. While the message varies, the instructions remain essentially the same each time you preach. As mentioned above, they will take up about half of your sermon.

You may begin your instructions by saying, “You may be asking, ‘Pastor, how can I receive this gift of the Holy Spirit that you’ve been preaching about? How can I be baptized in the Holy Spirit today?’” You then tell them as clearly and as cogently as possible what they must do to receive the Spirit, and what they can expect to happen as they are receiving. Your instructions may

proceed as follows:

The gift of the Holy Spirit is received by simply asking in faith. Jesus said that the Spirit flows through “whoever believes” (John 7:38). Paul taught that we “receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14; cf. v. 5).

In a few moments we will all come forward, and I will lead you in prayer. Together, we will take three “steps of faith.” First we will *ask* in faith, next we will *receive* by faith, then we will *speak* in faith. Let me explain what I mean:

First, we will ask in faith. Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you” (Luke 11:9). He also said, “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” So we will ask, and we will believe that God is answering our prayer. As we believe, we will sense the Holy Spirit’s coming upon us, just as He came upon the disciples in the book of Acts (1:8; 2:3, 17; 8:16; 10:44; 19:6). Be sensitive to the Spirit and you, too, will sense His presence coming upon you. We will then wait in the Spirit’s presence for a while. As you do, open wide your spirit to the Spirit of God.

Next, we will receive by faith. Jesus also said, “Everyone who asks *receives*” (Luke 11:10). He was not talking about passively receiving, as one might receive sunshine on his back, but about actively reaching out in faith and taking the gift that God is offering. We do this by “believing that we have received.” The moment you truly believe that you *have received*, the Holy Spirit will rush into your being and fill you to overflowing. Again, if you will remain open and sensitive to God, you will sense His Spirit deep within your spirit, in your “innermost being” (John 7:38 NASB). At this point we will take our third step of faith.

Finally, we will speak in faith. The Bible says that on the Day of Pentecost “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit *and began to speak ...*” As they began to speak, the Holy Spirit who had filled them now flowed through them, and out of them, and they “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave the utterance” (Acts 2:4). You, too, will begin to speak in tongues as the Spirit gives you the utterance. The speaking,

however, will not come from your mind as in regular speech, but from deep inside where you sense the presence of God. You will speak out of your spirit (1 Cor. 14:2 NASB). When this happens, don't be afraid, just yield yourself more and more to the Spirit of God. As you do, the words will come from deep within you. It will be God's sign to you that He has empowered you to speak for Him.

Once you have completed your time of instruction, it is time to call the people forward to be filled and refilled with the Holy Spirit. (We will discuss the altar call in the next chapter.)

Delivering the sermon

Let's now talk briefly about sermon delivery. Experience has taught me that my delivery is most effective when it contains three critical elements: anointing, passion, and authenticity.

1. Anointing. Jesus preached with an anointing on His life and words (Luke 4:18-19; John 6:36), as did Peter and John (Acts 4:8), the apostles (4:33), Stephen (6:8, 10, 15), and Paul (13:9-11). And so must we, if our words are going to have maximum impact upon our hearers. As we preach, the people must sense that the Spirit of the Lord is upon us inspiring our thoughts and empowering our words. Too often, however, we confuse anointing with a certain style of preaching (loud, boisterous) or with a certain way of performing on the platform. But it is neither of these. True anointing is that mysterious, manifest presence of God that comes to rest on the Christian worker as he or she speaks, or otherwise ministers, on Christ's behalf. It is that inscrutable God-given quality that can only be appropriated through persistent prayer, true humility, and genuine consecration to God and His will—and through complete openness to the Spirit of God.

2. Passion. Effective preaching is passionate preaching, and true passion arises from deep within one's being. It is a fervent gushing forth of the "well springs of the great deep" out from a man or woman's soul. True passion is the intense, driving conviction that what one says is true, and that those who are listening desperately need to hear and respond to what is being said. When we preach with such passion, the people will hear it in

our voices, see it in our eyes, and sense it in our words. And, because of this anointed passion, as on the Day of Pentecost, the hearers will be “cut to the heart,” and will cry out—if not with their voices, at least in their hearts—“What must we do? (Acts 2:37).

3. *Authenticity.* As we preach, we must resist any temptation to put on a show or to draw undue attention to ourselves. After all, it is not you nor I who baptizes believers in the Holy Spirit—Jesus is the baptizer! (Luke 3:16). We must, therefore, be like John who, when he first introduced Jesus as the baptizer in the Holy Spirit (John 3:32), reminded the people that He (Jesus) “is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandals” (Luke 3:16). And then he added, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (v. 30). So let it be with us as we preach on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We must decrease as Jesus increases.

This means that we must at all times strive to be authentic in our preaching. To be authentic is to be honest and transparent. While a few gullible people will fall for about anything a supposed “man of God” says from the pulpit, most truehearted followers of Jesus can intuitively sense whether or not a preacher is being honest with them. And, if he is not, they are repelled. On the other hand, when the people sense that the preacher is authentic, and that he or she honestly seeks what is best for them, they are compelled to listen and to eagerly respond.

Once we have preached our message on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and have given the people clear instructions on how they may receive the experience, the time has come to extend the invitation for the people to come forward and receive the Spirit for themselves. We will discuss this important matter in the next chapter.

Chapter 4:

Extending the Altar Call

Once you have delivered the “message” and clearly presented the “instruction,” it is time to proceed to the altar call. Everything you have said and done in your sermon has led to this point. It is now time to draw the net and call people to the altar to be filled with the Spirit. As you do this, it is good to keep the following things in mind:

Be clear with your instructions

As you extend the invitation for believers to come and be empowered by the Spirit, it is very important that you be very clear with your instructions. Often people fail to respond simply because they are confused about what the preacher wants them to do. Remember, they are already nervous about the prospect of going to the front of the church; therefore, unclear, confusing instructions will further cause them to hold back and not respond. On the other hand, clear, easy-to-understand instructions will help to settle their minds concerning what they need to do. This will encourage them to respond and come forward. Your instructions may go something like this:

I’m going to ask those who want to be filled or refilled with the Spirit (or better, “I’m going to ask everyone here”) to step from where you are now seated, come to the front of the church, and stand in front of me. When you get here, I will lead you in a prayer to be filled with the Spirit.

Once they arrive at the front of the church, briefly summarize the directions you gave to them during the “instructions” part of

your sermon. Tell them how the prayer time will proceed and how they will be expected to respond. If you will do these things, you will find more people responding to the altar call and being filled with the Spirit.

Call everyone to prayer

As you call people to the front of the church to be filled with the Spirit, it is almost always best not to aim at just getting a few select people to come forward. You should, rather, aim at getting everyone present into the altars to pray. Since being filled with the Spirit is an experience that must be repeated maintained, the plain truth is that every person present in the meeting needs either to be filled or refilled with the Spirit.

What's more, this "everyone-praying" method more fully conforms to the scriptural pattern for receiving the Spirit as presented in the book of Acts. Nowhere in Acts do we have the model of a few praying to be filled with the Spirit while the majority are looking on. The scriptural pattern is that new believers are filled with the Spirit for the first time as more seasoned disciples are being refilled with the Spirit. This model helps to ensure that the entire church remains full of the Spirit and equipped to win the lost to Jesus.

Notwithstanding, we persist in making the mistake of calling forward only those who have never been filled with the Spirit and have never before spoken in tongues. I can think of four negative results of following this flawed model:

1. *We send the wrong message.* When call forward only those who have never before received the Spirit, we send the unspoken message that one filling is enough. With our actions we are saying to the people, "Since you at some time in the long distant past spoke in tongues, you don't need to pray again to be filled with the Spirit. So, just sit back, relax, and watch the show!" The truth is, however, that everyone present needs to be filled again and again with the Spirit. To be once filled with, but not presently full of, the Spirit is no better than having never received the Spirit. However, when we call everyone forward to be filled, we remind them that every follower of Christ needs to be continuously and repeatedly filled with the Spirit.

2. *We discourage new seekers.* Secondly, when we call forward only those who have never been filled with the Spirit and have never before spoken in tongues, we make them a spectacle in front of the congregation. This situation is especially distressing to those with a shy disposition, and as a result they are discouraged from coming forward to receive the Spirit. Some even avoid Holy Spirit emphasis services for fear of again being embarrassed in front of everyone.

3. *The minister is tempted.* Another negative consequence of just calling a few to be filled with the Spirit while the rest of the congregation watches, is that the pastor sometimes feels pressured to produce results. He is tempted in two ways: First, because he fears failure in front of the congregation, he is tempted to neglect preaching on the subject altogether. Rather than suffer the humiliation of failing in front of the people, he simply ignores the subject of Spirit baptism. And secondly, when the pastor finally does bring himself to preaching on the subject, again, in order to save face, he is tempted to manipulate or coerce the seekers into speaking in tongues, or into displaying some other “appropriate” physical manifestation. After all, isn’t he God’s man of faith and power? How will he look if the seekers are not in some way dramatically moved by his prayer? These temptations, however, can be avoided if everyone is called forward where they can seek to receive the Spirit together.

As everyone prays together, the first-time seekers can simply join in with the others to be filled with the Spirit. In this corporate context they are more likely to be filled with the Spirit since everyone’s praying together creates an atmosphere permeated with the manifest presence of the Spirit. This atmosphere serves as a great aid to those seeking to be filled or refilled with the Spirit.

After this, once everyone has prayed together for a while, it is sometimes appropriate to ask if there is anyone who wants special prayer or laying on of hands. Now, as you minister to them, you can do so with greater confidence, knowing that their hearts have been made more ready to receive the Spirit of God.

4. *The Spirit is grieved.* In any given church service the Spirit of God has come to empower and equip God’s people for the task before them. However, when the pastor doesn’t give everyone an

opportunity to be filled or refilled with the Spirit, the will of the Spirit is thwarted, and His heart is grieved. We can avoid this by ensuring that we give every person present an opportunity to be filled or refilled with the Spirit. In doing this God will be honored, the people will be blessed, and the kingdom of God will be advanced in the world.

Offer post-prayer counsel

Since the issue of post-prayer counsel is discussed in another booklet of mine entitled, “Leading Believers into the Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” I will only briefly address it now.

1. *Those have been filled or refilled with the Spirit.* If the seeker has been filled or refilled with the Spirit, remind them that receiving the Spirit is not an end in itself; it is rather a means to a greater end. The primary purpose for being filled with the Spirit is power for witness for Christ (Acts 1:8). You may want to say, “Being filled with the Spirit is not the end in itself; it is rather a new beginning. God will now begin to use you in new and powerful ways. Expect to have new power in your life. Go out right now and tell someone about Jesus!” You will want to add, “You should also spend time each day praying in the Spirit, that is, praying in tongues. This will remind you of the Spirit’s presence in your life and will ensure that you remain full of the Holy Spirit.”

2. *Those who have not been filled with the Spirit.* To those who have not been filled or refilled with the Spirit you will want to give the following advice and encouragement: Tell them not to be discouraged and assure them that the promise of Jesus is still true: “*Everyone* who asks receives” (Luke 11:10). Tell them that they should keep asking and they *will* soon receive; keep seeking and they *will* soon find; and to keep knocking and the door *will* be opened unto him (cf. Luke 11:9). Ensure them that they will be given many more opportunities to be filled with the Spirit both in the church and in home settings.

Conclusion

Scripture teaches us that, from beginning to end, Jesus carried out His ministry in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. He began His ministry in the Spirit's power (Luke 3:22-23; 4:14, 18-19), continued it in the Spirit's power (Matt. 12:28; Acts 10:36), and completed it in that same power (Acts 1:2-3). Throughout His ministry Jesus went about "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God" (Mark 1:14, KJV; Acts 1:3), and His kingdom proclamation included the message of the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Mark 9:1; Luke 11:13; 24:49; Acts 1:4-8). And, as I have demonstrated earlier in this book, once the apostles were filled with the Spirit, they continued the ministry that Jesus began. Their ministry, like His, included both a demonstration and proclamation of kingdom power. They, like their Master before them, became powerful proclaimers of the message of the Spirit's empowering work (Acts 2:17-18; 38-39).

I thus end this study with a challenge. I challenge you, as one of God's Spirit-empowered messengers, to be like Jesus and the apostles. I challenge you to preach often and effectively on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Make this kingdom message a core value and common practice of your ministry. It is my sincere prayer that you will now go out and apply the principles you have learned from this study. I can assure you that, if you will consistently preach on the baptism and pray with believers to be filled, great blessings will follow. Believers' lives will be enriched, their ministries will be empowered, and the church will be mobilized for powerful evangelistic outreach. Decide right now that this coming Sunday you will preach a message on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Then be bold enough to believe God to confirm His promise and give the Spirit to all who ask Him.

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