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Four Questions About Being Filled with the Holy Spirit- Part 2

by Tal Davis

In the first installment of this two-part series we began a discussion of the concept of being "filled with the Holy Spirit." We are approaching the issue from a biblical perspective by answering four significant questions that Christians sometimes ask. In the first part we answered the following two questions. (1) What exactly does it mean to be "filled" with the Holy Spirit? And, (2) what is the purpose for being "filled with the Holy Spirit?" We answered the first by saying basically that being filled with the Holy Spirit means we allow God who dwells in us to use us, empower us, and control us. For the second we stated the primary purpose for being filled with the Spirit is to empower us for living the Christian life. (You can read part one at: <http://www.marketfaith.org/four-questions-about-being-filled-with-the-holy-spirit-part-1>)

Of course, we want to remember that the Holy Spirit is God Himself, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. That fact must govern our attitudes and opinions toward this subject. That being said, in this installment we biblically analyze two more key issues.

Question 3 - How do we know if we are filled with the Holy Spirit?

This is not such an easy question to answer. Some Christian teachers say that being filled with the Holy Spirit must be verified by some kind of subjective inward ecstatic feeling and/or by the objective outward sign of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*). Actually, neither of those ways is adequate for knowing if one is genuinely filled with the Holy Spirit. Both of those manifestations can

be counterfeited or manipulated. Feelings or mystical experiences are especially poor and even dangerous gauges of spiritual truth.

Many years ago I overheard a girl talking about how a then popular Hindu guru had imparted some sort of mystical "light" vision to her. Someone pointed out to her that the guru had less than a stellar moral reputation. The girl just shrugged and replied, "I don't care if he is honest or not – receiving light made me feel so good inside!"

Sadly, some Christians have bought into that same mindset. They are constantly going from one "anointed" preacher to another to receive the latest spiritual manifestation. Such experiences include speaking in tongues, being "slain in the Spirit" (feeling light-headed and falling down at the preacher's touch), and seeing visions. A few years ago the fad was "holy laughter" in which people would literally roll around on the floor in uncontrollable hilarity. Somehow, I just don't think that was what Paul had in mind as true spirituality.

The only real answer as to how we know we are filled with the Holy Spirit is the same way we know we are saved: by faith. The Scripture indicates faith is the only real way to please God (Hebrews 11). We must trust God and His word for the assurance that we are Spirit-filled. Feelings may or may not be present. Our faith is not driven by feelings which are variable and often affected by numerous circumstances. Our faith is driven by Truth which is found in Jesus Christ and God's Word.

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So then, we know what being filled with Spirit means. We know its purpose. And, we know if we are Spirit-filled. That directs us to the final issue.

Question 4 - What is necessary to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

To start with, in answering this question, we must acknowledge several essential prerequisites to being filled with Holy Spirit. The first absolute necessity is that a person must be born-again (i.e. saved/regenerated) and, therefore, baptized in the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself told Nicodemus that he needed to be "born again" in order to see the Kingdom of Heaven (John 3:3) He further indicated "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:5-6 NASB).

This birth in the Spirit is a one-time event that occurs at conversion. It is, in essence, equivalent to salvation. Once we have the Holy Spirit in our lives He will not desert us. This event is also referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist told his disciples in regard to Jesus, "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11 NASB; see also Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).

When we repent of our sins and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior we are then baptized (indwelt by the Holy Spirit). Some Christians believe that the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" is a post-conversion, second-blessing experience that is usually accompanied by speaking in tongues. I do not consider that

doctrine necessarily bad or heretical, but, nonetheless, there is simply no biblical basis for it. In every case in the New Testament when a person received Christ, he or she was indwelt (baptized) by the Spirit. In some special cases it was accompanied immediately by tongues, but in other instances no tongues are mentioned (see Acts 2:4; 8:17, 36-39; 10:44-46; 19:1-6).

As Paul indicated, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:12-13 NASB). Paul clearly states that all the believers had been baptized by (or in) the Spirit and they all had varying spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues being only one of them.

Some of my readers who have spoken in tongues, thinking it was their baptism in the Holy Spirit, may be asking, "So then what did my speaking in tongues mean? Did it not have any effect on my spiritual life? It sure seemed to strengthen my walk with Christ." That may be true, but some sincere believers become obsessed with this experience and feel all Christians must also receive it to advance spiritually. In that case it can become a serious problem and a divisive issue (as it apparently was in Corinth).

Respectfully I would say, based on my 45+ years of experience dealing with Christians of all varieties, that, though speaking in tongues initially may be a powerful experience, in the long term it has little effect on the growth and maturity of a believer. In any case, tongues-speaking is not an evidence of a special endowment of the Holy Spirit that is superior to that of other believers who have never done so. I recall, as a young Christian, I was

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sometimes confronted by well-meaning people who were convinced I needed to receive the "blessing" of tongues. However, as I observed their lives they sometimes seemed to be riding a spiritual roller-coaster. No Christian should be pressured or manipulated into speaking in tongues. There are no short cuts to spiritual maturity. Spiritual growth requires study and time.

So does that mean no one should ever speak in tongues? According to the New Testament, speaking in tongues is one of many Spiritual gifts meant to build up the church (so long as it is augmented by the gift of interpretation). However, the Apostle Paul suggested that a more edifying gift is prophecy. Why? Because it was one that everyone could understand and from which everyone could benefit. If you study carefully Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, you will see that was his main thesis.

Notice what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14: 6, 11-12: "But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? ... If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian (or foreigner [Greek: *barbarous*]) To a Greek, a barbarian was anyone who did not speak Greek) and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church" (NASB).

Also, keep in mind that Paul's most important principle in this section of his epistle was verses 12:30b - 13:13. "And I show you a still more excellent way...LOVE!"

Having said all that, let's get back to the subject of how we are filled with

the Spirit. As we said, we are all baptized in the Holy Spirit once and for all at conversion. However, being filled with the Spirit is not like that. The Holy Spirit will never leave us, but our sinful attitudes and behaviors can restrict His power and work in our lives. So, each day, we must appropriate the Spirit's fullness. That requires that we confess our sins to God and accept His forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Then, by faith, we can invoke the Spirit's power. (For more information on this principle also see: Knowing the Will of God - Part 3: How Do We Do the Will of God? - <http://www.marketfaith.org/knowing-the-will-of-god-part-3-how-do-we-do-the-will-of-god>)

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul commanded that Christians should be filled with the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. Every believer, when he or she comes to Christ, receives the baptism or indwelling of the Spirit. It is a permanent state of existence. Being filled with the Spirit, however, is a daily exercise of maintaining one's close relationship with God and thus being spiritually empowered by Him who lives in us. Every Christian can and should faithfully allow God's Spirit to work His will in our daily activities in order to live a successful Christian life and to glorify our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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