

Baptism: Past, Present and Future

Holy Confusion – Part III

Acts 8:14-17

Introduction - Review

I have been overwhelmed by the number of comments based on our last discussion. The two things that nearly everyone told me were:

- I did not give enough information!
- I talked too slowly!

I will try to do better today. I am actually going to discuss several of the basic principles and elaborate a little more.

As I opened our last discussion, I made the statement, and even entitled the series, voicing my firm belief that we are living in an era of the evangelical church that could easily be called, “The Era of Holy Confusion”. The treatment and interpretation of scripture by Third Wave movements (that is, Tongues Speaking, Charismatic, Holiness, Vineyard, etc.), is a treatment that I believe leads to such confusion.

I want to reiterate first, that I am not questioning a Charismatic’s salvation. I have no doubt from what I have researched, from the conversations I have had, and from knowing pastors and individuals in such movements, that they hold to a correct doctrine of soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation. I am, however, somewhat concerned with the way speaking in tongues seems to be tacked on as a proof of conversion.

I am secondly, not doubting the Charismatic’s sincerity either. I know many people involved with Third Wave organizations and churches and they are

among the most sincere believers you will find anywhere.

However, as I stated in our last discussion, sincerity is never the litmus test for accuracy. Furthermore, miraculous or otherwise unexplainable experiences are also not litmus tests for true biblical faith.

False prophets

One of the most shocking revelations of the final judgment is found in Matthew, chapter 7, verses 15 and 21 through 23.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. . . . Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, . . . Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you, depart from Me . . .”

If anything, this passage should raise within every believer, including those who claim to prophesy, perform miracles, and exercise control over demons, a warning signal, rather than a welcome embrace of all who claim the name of Jesus. I find it interesting that in this passage, the Lord never denies the validity of their experiences! He simply suggests that their experiences were not empowered by Him, but instead,

that the underworld empowered these false prophets and miracle workers.

So, while we should be thinking critically, and even engaging an air of suspicion, we have instead, become sentimental.

You might say, “Well, I know that person means well. Surely it can’t be all bad. Just think of the people that he, or she, is telling about Christ. What’s the harm in it?”

When it comes to articulating and defending biblical truth, the writers of the New Testament are not sentimental, but are scorching with their call to discernment.

In I John, chapter 4, verse 1, we read,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Listen to Paul exhort the elders in Ephesus, in Acts, chapter 20, verses 28 through 31.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Notice, in verse 29, Paul says, “I know”! He does not say, “I think,” or “I hope not,” but “I know”! And, did you notice where the false teachers come from??? “From among your own selves”! From within the church, the false prophets will arise.

You might ask, “How do you know who they are?”

The only way to know them is to measure them against God’s Word.

How does a bank teller learn to spot a counterfeit bill? From what I have read, they spend so much time handling true currency that counterfeit bills stand out clearly.

You will not know how to spot false teachers unless you are handling scripture regularly and testing them against it.

Characteristics of false prophets

Read the book of Jude sometime, to learn some of the telltale signs of false prophets that he provides. Let me list some of the characteristics of false prophets that we find in Jude. They include:

- indulging in gross immorality (verse 7);
- rejecting authority (verse 8);
- commanding demons (verse 8);
- following after their own lusts (verse 16);
- flattering people for the sake of gain (verse 16);
- speaking arrogantly (verse 16).

By the way, church history tells us that it did not take very long before this very thing came true.

Christian History Magazine, a subsidiary of *Christianity Today*, published an article recently, entitled, “Testing the Prophets”. Let me read some of it to you.

Around the year 157, in the Roman province of Asia Minor, a professing Christian named Montanus began to prophesy ecstatically. Claiming the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he was soon joined by two prophetesses, Maximilla and Priscilla who claimed to be the last in a succession of prophets. Maximilla was the leading prophet spokesman. She said they were called to summon all believers to righteous preparation for the heavenly descent of the New Jerusalem. By 170 AD this “New Prophecy” movement, as it was known, spread. One convert to Montanism wrote of Maximilla, “We have now amongst us a sister whose lot it has been to be favored with gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic visions. She converses with angels and sometimes even with the Lord.”

Eventually church leaders began to speak out. They were troubled by the word of God being seen as less important than the Montanists revelations. They were personally embarrassed by the prophetess’ “died hair,

painted eyelids and love of adornment.” Some things never change. They were also troubled by the Montanists lack of financial accountability. Eventually, Montanists came to be referred to as that “lying organization, even though their churches rang with the noises of the New Prophecy.”

While Montanists claimed direct revelations from God and teaching from God’s Spirit that was “fresh truth, for these last days,” eventually the movement died out. However, it took three hundred years before the movement died out. The primary reason? The prophecies of Maximilla didn’t come true.

The book of Acts as a “bridge”

Holy confusion has always been a threat to the New Testament believer. We are living in a day when people are craving evidences, miracles, proof and fresh revelation from God.

Much of the defense for such a pursuit comes directly from the book of Acts. I am grateful for that because it gives us the opportunity to go to the scriptures for ourselves to see if these things are so.

Our challenge today, by the way, is not to avoid truth that is controversial. Instead, we are to, as II Timothy, chapter 2, verse 15, tells us,

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Most of the problem occurs at that point – in handling or interpreting the word of truth. That is especially so in handling the word of truth found in the book of Acts.

The most controversial portions of Acts relate to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Differing interpretations of scripture related to the “baptism” and ministry of the Holy Spirit create differing expectations as to the Christian life. An incredible host of public and personal experiences result as well.

Since the book of Acts introduces us to the person of the Holy Spirit, we began in our last discussion, with an overview of the book of Acts. We need to understand the wonderful transition that Acts played between two vast eras. It was a bridge between Judaism and Christianity; between the Old Covenant

and the New Covenant; between the synagogue and the church. It even bridged the transition in the things a believer could eat and wear and become involved in.

By the way, in our last discussion, I mentioned that I had enjoyed the food at a new deli. After our third service, someone asked me for directions to the deli. One of our elders who went there, later told me that during lunch, the place was packed with people from our church! He even told the deli manager that the reason business was “booming” was because I mentioned in my sermon that I liked their turkey clubs. The manager told him to tell me I could have one on the house.

It makes me feel so good to see you immediately applying the heart of my message! All I did was say I liked the deli. We were joking about it in the office this past week, and our Student Pastor said, “Hey, next time I preach, I’m going to say I like Pontiacs.” Good luck!

The Changing Ministry of Christ

This is a good time to review many of the changes about the ministry of Christ as well.

Those in Third Wave movements love to quote Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 8,

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

That verse defines the immutability of Jesus Christ. In other words, in essence and by His eternal existence, He was God in eternity past, He is God, and He will be God throughout eternity future. As Colossians, chapter 2, verse 9, says,

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form

The Charismatic community and I would all heartily sign our names to that confession. However, the Charismatic community (Third Wave Movements, the Vineyard, Neo-Pentecostals, etc.) take that verse as a proof text for the continued ministry of Jesus through signs and wonders and miracles. In other words, what Jesus did in Acts through the church is exactly what He is doing today, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Four changes related to the function of Christ

Well, there are at least four significant changes related to the function of Christ. Let me give them to you.

A change in Jesus' position

1. First, there is a change in Jesus' position (sphere or location). There are also changes in the appearances of Christ.

In:

- the Old Testament – He was the angel of the Lord;
- the Gospels – He was the teaching, dying Messiah;
- Acts – He was the commissioning, ascending Son;
- the Epistles – He is the interceding Chief Shepherd;
- Revelation – He will be the conquering, reigning King.

A change in Jesus' commission

2. Secondly, there is a change in Jesus' commission.

In Matthew, chapter 10, verse 5, we are told,

These twelve Jesus sent forth after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans"

Yet, Christ changes His commission in Acts, chapter 1, verse 8b, as He commands,

. . . and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria . . .

A change in Jesus' revelation and instruction

3. Thirdly, there is a change in Jesus' revelation and instruction.

Let me give a list of that which is produced by the transitioning of Christ's revelation. In:

- the Gospels – the church is given a model of authentic Christianity;
- Acts – the church observes an example of Christianity;
- the Epistles – the church receives an explanation of Christianity;
- Revelation – the church experiences the fulfillment of Christianity.

A change in Jesus' activity

4. Fourthly, there is a change in Jesus' activity.

Is Jesus Christ the same yesterday and today and forever? As to His deity and decree, *yes!* That is what we call the immutability of Christ. But as to His program for mankind; as to His own function, location and ministry, there are vast changes revealed in the progression of His own written revelation.

For instance, according to Genesis, chapter 1, verse 28, God commanded Adam, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth".

Is that a command for us today as well? I heard, several years ago in a seminar, a well known Bible teacher, who teaches literally thousands of people every year, say, "Yes! It is God's will for every believing couple to have children and every couple ought to strive to match the example of Jacob and have twelve."

Certainly, I agree with the fact that barrenness in the Old Testament was tantamount to God's judgment. A sign of obedience to God for the Old Testament believer was a full quiver. However, in the New Testament, while children are seen as a blessing from the Lord, and we will continue to expand the nursery facilities of our church to try to keep up with that blessing, is it a command? No! In the New Testament we are never commanded to reproduce physically. However, we are commanded to reproduce spiritually, as recorded in Matthew, chapter 28, verse 19, "Go therefore and make disciples . . .".

You might say, "Stephen, I agree with you about Adam and Jacob. But since the apostles lived in New Testament times, why can't I do everything they did?"

Well, I invite you to go ahead and try. You will soon see that you cannot raise the dead, as Peter and Paul did, and that your handkerchiefs do not heal anyone.

The question related to Adam and Abraham and the apostles is not, "Why can't I do what they did?" but, "Why did they do what they did?"

Three Primary Principles

There needs to be an understanding of several basic principles. Without them, you will be like a rowboat in a stormy sea that is without oars or a rudder and is tossed about, as with every fad and whim of the Third Wave.

In the absence of the written word of God, supernatural signs confirmed the message of God

1. The first principle is that in the absence of the written word of God, supernatural signs confirmed the message of God.

Hebrews, chapter 2, verses 3 and 4, says,

how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard [apostles], God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit . . .

Does that mean that God does not miraculously heal people today? No, He still does! Does that mean that God does not release people from the demonizing bondage of the underworld at the moment of salvation? No, He still does.

However, to apply the experiences of the apostles to the experiences of all believers is as wrong as any Israelite going out to the Red Sea and commanding it to open wide.

As the written word of God came to completion, the miraculous witness of the apostles diminished

2. A second principle is that as the written word of God came to completion, the miraculous witness of the apostles diminished.

It is interesting that we can piece together from later passages, that even the apostles changed in their use of signs and wonders. For example, Paul healed extensively in his early ministry. In fact, Acts, chapter 19, verse 11, informs us that handkerchiefs that had touched Paul's body could heal a sick person. However, later in Paul's ministry, he seemed unable to offer his healing touch to Timothy (I Timothy 5:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2), and Trophimus (II Timothy 4:20).

To apply these miraculous powers and signs, such as healing, to the permanent ministry of the apostles is not even born out by scripture.

We are to follow the teaching of the apostles, not teach the experiences of the apostles

3. A third principle is that we are to follow the teaching of the apostles, not teach the experiences of the apostles.

In our last discussion, we looked at five of the powerful signs of an apostolic witness, spelled out in Mark, chapter 16, verses 17b and 18.

. . . in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

These verses include five signs, gifts, or wonders to be used during this period of transition to confirm the message that the apostles preached. They were past tense confirming signs. There is nothing in the text to indicate that you can choose a few of them for the twentieth century and leave the rest alone – either they all are operative today, or none are.

Instances of Spirit Baptism

In our last discussion, we also looked briefly at Acts, chapters 8, 10, and 19. These chapters include three instances of the Holy Spirit entering the scene at the hands of the apostles. There are four passages, including Acts, chapter 2, that refer to an outpouring or manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts.

These passages are also the primary proof texts used by the Third Wave to teach that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience that takes place after salvation.

So, what is going on? First of all, we need to understand that each of these four instances are different. In fact, the reason why there is so much division, even in the Charismatic or Third Wave movement, concerning the formula for Holy Spirit power, is because Acts does not provide a formula.

To say that Acts provides a model for the believer is to create deep confusion. By comparing each instance, as we did in our last discussion, the following questions, not clarifications, arise. In order to be baptized by means of the Spirit:

- Do we need an apostle present, as they did (in all four instances)?
- Do we need the laying on of hands, as they did (in Acts chapter 8, but not chapter 10)?
- Are we to expect the new convert who has been baptized by the Spirit to speak in

tongues or not (in chapters 2, 10, and 19 they did, but not in chapter 8)?

- Do we expect the new convert who has been baptized by the Spirit to prophesy (in chapter 19 they did, but not in chapters 8 or 10)?
- What if the new convert who has been baptized by the Spirit prophesies, but does not speak in tongues, was it real?

The reason for so much confusion is that the Bible did not intend to provide an ongoing model. These were unique experiences during the transitional period of the people of God.

Three Illustrations of Spiritual Unity

So, just what can we understand to be the reason for this dependency upon the apostles and the delay of the Holy Spirit, and the outward manifestation of tongues on at least three occasions by the new converts?

These unique instances provided an illustration for the new church – an illustration of unity. Let me give three instances in which unity was illustrated.

The unity of the new church is revealed to be by means of apostolic authority

1. First, the unity of the new church is revealed to be by means of apostolic authority.

In:

- Acts 2 – the twelve apostles were present;
- Acts 8 – Peter and John were involved;
- Acts 10 – Peter was directly involved;
- Acts 19 – Paul was involved.

By the way, those who seek the subsequent baptism of the Spirit, as an experience after conversion, and claim that Acts, chapters 8, 10, and 19 are the model for the believer's experience today, seem to be overlooking the fact that there are no apostles living in Jerusalem who can come do that for them.

The authority of Paul (Acts 19) is seen as equal to that of Peter (Acts 10)

2. Secondly, the authority of Paul (Acts 19) is seen as equal to that of Peter (Acts 10).

Therefore, Paul's words to the church were confirmed by his power and authority, in the same way Peter's were confirmed.

The sign gift of tongues was expressed by both Jew (Acts 2) and Gentiles (Acts 10, 19)

3. Thirdly, the sign gift of tongues was expressed by both Jew (Acts 2) and Gentile (Acts 10, 19).

We are not to view these three instances as additional Pentecosts. The Spirit did not descend then ascend and then descend to Samaria, then descend to Caesarea, then to Ephesus. The Spirit descended once on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was an historical event, never to be repeated, just as Christ was crucified once, for all. Christ is not re-crucified every time a person places their faith in Him. So also, the Spirit does not descend each time someone trusts Christ. The Holy Spirit descended once. He is extended many times over.

Present Ministry of the Spirit

Now, let me summarize. Why do we have all the holy confusion today?

Most of the confusion related to the ministry of the Holy Spirit is a result of two points:

- The Third Wave movement has misunderstood the transitional nature of the book of Acts (and are frustrated in trying to duplicate the miraculous nature of a foundational era).
- Secondly, the Third Wave (Charismatics; Neo-Pentecostals; Vineyard and Assemblies) consistently confuse the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit. And, what you believe about these two activities has far reaching implications.

Let me diagram the differences.

Baptism of the Spirit	Filling of the Spirit
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<p>A past act I Corinthians 12:13 – “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.” (This is a fact, not a feeling.)</p>	<p>A present, ongoing experience Ephesians 5:18 – “And do not get drunk with wine (under its influence), for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit (under His influence)”</p>
<p>Immersion into the Body of Christ Romans 6:4 – “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”</p>	<p>Cooperation with the will of Christ I Corinthians 6:19-20 – “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”</p>

The baptism of the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ at conversion is a fact, not a feeling.

One author writes “This spiritual baptism is what connects us with all other believers in Christ and makes us part of Christ’s own body.”

By the way, Romans, chapter 8, verse 9b, tells us that it is impossible to be saved without the work of the Holy Spirit.

... But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

However to be dominated by the Spirit means to be in cooperation with the will of Christ.

Much of the holy confusion has been fed by a desire to get holy in a hurry. There is a quick approach to spirituality offered by the Third Wave – to have a short lived experience rather than a long lived obedience.

One healing evangelist in Oklahoma, plays a reading of the entire New Testament at a rapid speed on a sixty minute cassette. Her brochures promise that “positive suggestions are being stored in your belief system at the rate of 100,000 suggestions per hour.”

How easy!! Now you can absorb scripture without even paying attention to it. Disciplined prayer; fervent devotion, commitment to holiness and purity, confession and all of that is replaced by cassette tapes that you can hook up to your headphones. You can now become more holy even while you asleep.

There is no such thing as a shortcut to sanctification, it is a lifetime of pursuit and persistence.

Let me continue the diagram.

Baptism of the Spirit	Filling of the Spirit
<p>The fruit of baptism I John 2:20,27 – anointing I Corinthians 2:14 – instruction Ephesians 1:13 – sealing I Corinthians 3:16 – indwelling</p>	<p>The fruit of filling (control) Galatians 5:22-23 – “. . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . .”</p>

Let me read a quote that was given to me by a staff member recently,

When the Divine owner takes possession of a property, He has a two-fold objective: intense cultivation and abounding fruitfulness.

Since we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit! How do you know if you are walking by the Spirit? You will evidence the fruit of the Spirit. He has been at work, cultivating working!

Remember, your body is the field of the Holy Spirit. He is planting a spiritual orchard!

In addition, may I remind you that *the Holy Spirit was not given to us to provide an unusual experience; but to enable consistent obedience.* Look at Acts, chapter 1, verse 8,

but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon; and you shall be My witnesses . . .

In other words, not only will we be changed, but the Spirit through us, will change the world.

How Does God Speak Today?

Let me get a little more practical today and ask, “Just how does God speak to us today?”

Through the in-working peace of Christ

1. First, God communicates through the in-working peace of Christ.

We are told this is Colossians, chapter 3, verse 15, which says,

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body

...

Note that the word “rule” means literally, “to umpire or to call the shots”.

Now, we might confuse our peace of mind about something with the peace of Christ, so the next way that God communicates with us; the next half of this picture is vitally important.

Through the Word of Christ

2. Secondly, God speaks to us through the Word of Christ.

Colossians, chapter 3, continues, in verse 16a, to say,

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you . . .

“Dwell” means “to take up residency or to make a home inside you”!

God speaks through that inward peace, controlled, manipulated, and governed by His inspired Word.

Two Other Baptisms

Let me mention two other baptisms that we briefly discussed in our previous discussion. There are two additional baptisms mentioned in the New Testament.

The baptism of sin upon Christ at Calvary

1. First, there is the baptism of sin upon Christ at Calvary.

Look at Luke, chapter 12, verse 50, when Jesus, referring to the cross says,

But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!”

The baptism of God’s wrath upon unbelievers

2. Secondly, there is the baptism of God’s wrath upon unbelievers.

Look at Matthew, chapter 3, verses 11 and 12, which clearly explain this. Begin with verse 11.

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.

The Third Wave movement applies the first baptism literally (the baptism of the Holy Spirit) and the second metaphorically. They say the baptism of fire is a reference to the tongues of fire at Pentecost.

I believe that both baptisms are to be understood literally. In fact, all you have to do is read the very next phrase, in verse 12, to come to the correct interpretation.

His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

That is quite clear, isn’t it?

Compare this with the book of Revelation, chapter 20, verses 14 and 15.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus Christ promised that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit – that happened at Pentecost and it happens to everyone who believes in His name. He has also promised a coming baptism with fire, which is judgement for those who have rejected Him.

So, the age of grace or the church age is a time when people are clearly divided into two groups:

- those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit;
- those who will be baptized with eternal fire.

In which category are you?!

For those of us who have experienced the first baptism, may we take our eyes off our own selfish desires for fulfillment, comfort, and spiritual ease and tune our hearts to the desperate need of those who have never experienced the Spirit’s baptism, and who, without the gospel message, will one day experience the final baptism – the baptism of everlasting fire.

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