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BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT— WRONG UNDERSTANDING

In the previous message, we noted that before the death of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit, it was uncommon for the Holy Spirit to come upon and fill people. Such isolated occurrences involved people whom the Lord specially called and empowered for specific roles and responsibilities, such as to speak on God's behalf and to prophesy. However, under the New Covenant, the scenario is different. It is God's intention for all His children to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and be led, taught and empowered by the Spirit in every aspect of their lives. Sadly, many of God's children are not filled with the Holy Spirit. This has significant implications on their spiritual growth and their contribution to the advancement of God's kingdom.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and in church life is enveloped in much confusion and controversy. You may have come across such controversy in your interaction with other Christians or read about them in Christian literature. This is a very real issue confronting the church today. This shouldn't surprise us because in an area as vital as this, the powers of darkness would seek by all means to confuse and divide God's children.

It is therefore important that we have a good grasp of this issue both for our own lives and also for the lives of those we seek to help.

Some preliminary observations and comments

Failure to pay due attention to the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit

There are many believers who do not pay due attention to the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives. As a result, they experience little of the life and power of the Spirit. This significantly hinders their spiritual growth and service. This is so even though they may be intellectually capable and may participate in many programmes and activities. There are various reasons for their neglect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, such as being ignorant of this area of truth and being over-reliant on personal capabilities and effort to work out their faith. Some are put

off by what they hear and observe of the excesses of those who over-emphasise spiritual experiences.

Over-emphasis on dramatic spiritual experiences

There are many believers who think they are paying much attention to the ministry of the Holy Spirit when in reality they are over-emphasising spiritual experiences and not properly appreciating the true ministry of the Holy Spirit. They seek dramatic experiences such as seeing visions and having “direct communication” from God. They also tend to desire the more dramatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues, healings and miracles. When such over-emphasis goes together with lack of wholesome understanding of the Scriptures and insufficient emphasis on wholesome development of the inner man, these believers will find it hard to discern whether their experiences are of God or of the powers of darkness. They become very vulnerable to the attacks and wiles of the evil one and the door is thrown wide open for the powers of darkness to deceive, confuse and bring them under spiritual bondage.

The evil one can give us many spiritual experiences. He can pretend to be God or disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13) and speak to us directly. He can give us dreams and visions that appear to be from God. He can also enable us to speak in tongues and perform healings and other miracles and even “answer” our prayers. If we accept what comes from him as from the Lord, we may enter into a relationship with him and come under his influence.

We must exercise great care and not readily accept spiritual experiences or readily act on promptings and instructions from a spiritual being if we are not clear they are from God. It is often not easy to be clear. We must learn to base our lives on and act according to clear scriptural principles and the character and ways of God. The Scriptures clearly teaches us not to believe every spirit but to test the spirits to see whether they are from God (1 John 4:1). And the Lord Jesus warns us that in the last days, there will be false Christs and false prophets who will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect (Matt. 24:24). For a fuller discussion of the issues involved, please refer to the edited text messages AR144-146.

Wrongly equating spiritual experiences with spiritual health and maturity

Some believers are confused about spiritual experiences and spiritual health. They fail to discern the difference and tend to equate the two. These people think that if they have spiritual experiences, it means that they are spiritually healthy or they have attained a degree of spiritual stature. This is not so. Firstly, the spiritual experiences may not be of God. Secondly, even if the spiritual experiences are of

God, it does not mean those who experience them are spiritually healthy or spiritually mature. What is critical is the meaning of that spiritual experience and the context in which it occurs. Take for example, the experience of Balaam in the Old Testament. It is clear from the Scriptures that Balaam was not in a healthy spiritual state, yet he experienced God speaking to and through him. Even Balaam's ass had a "spiritual" experience. God spoke through Balaam's ass. But clearly the issue of spiritual health and stature has no relevance in that context.

Wrong understanding about baptism with the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit

There is much controversy and debate about the baptism with the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit. A good grasp of this subject can facilitate a deep experience of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Conversely, wrong understanding of the issues involved can hinder.

In this message, I will mention some aspects of wrong understanding of this subject and explain on the basis of the Scriptures why I do not agree with these views. In subsequent messages, I will consider with you how a person can be baptised with the Holy Spirit and be filled with the Holy Spirit. I will also reflect on the meaning of a Spirit-filled life.

1. The baptism with the Holy Spirit is always accompanied by speaking in tongues.

There are those who teach that baptism with or being filled with the Holy Spirit is always accompanied or evidenced by speaking in tongues. This is the official position of some groups and congregations. Confusion and negative consequences have flowed forth from this wrong understanding.

One problem arising from this understanding is that those who have never spoken in tongues are assumed not to have experienced the fullness of the Spirit when in fact they may have, while those who are not filled with the Spirit have the false sense of assurance that they are filled simply because they speak in tongues.

This association of speaking in tongues with baptism with the Holy Spirit has resulted in a preoccupation with speaking in tongues, giving rise to undesirable consequences. The apostle Paul addresses this issue in 1 Corinthians 14:26-28:

1 Corinthians 14:26-28

26 When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret;
28 but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

When believers gather and if anyone wishes to speak in tongues, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn. There must also be interpretation. When all or many speak in tongues at the same time, it can be noisy, jarring to the spirit and a hindrance to true worship. The apostle Paul writes in verse 23:

1 Corinthians 14:23

Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?

In spite of what is recorded in these passages, many groups which hold this wrong view often have large numbers speaking in tongues at the same time. It is not uncommon for such practices to be accompanied by emotional outbursts and loud crying.

The over-emphasis on tongues has led to earnest seeking for the ability to speak in tongues and indiscriminate welcoming of such spiritual experiences, thereby opening the door to spiritual deception and manipulation.

As a result of this over-emphasis leading to excesses in practice, and with the presence of spiritual counterfeits and deception by the forces of darkness, many have been put off and hindered from understanding and experiencing the baptism with the Holy Spirit. They distance themselves from this doctrine because they associate it with unwholesome and dangerous practices and experiences.

As with any position in doctrines, those who assert that baptism with the Holy Spirit is accompanied by tongues need to substantiate such a position clearly from the Scriptures. As far as I am aware, they have not been able to do so.

It is important to take note at the outset that the Scriptures does not teach explicitly that being baptised or filled with the Holy Spirit will always be accompanied by speaking in tongues. Those who advocate such a position often cite occurrences in the Book of Acts of those who spoke in tongues when they were baptised with the Holy Spirit. For example on the day of Pentecost, those who were filled with the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4). Likewise in Acts 10:44-46, while Peter was still speaking to Cornelius and those gathered in his home, the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they spoke in tongues. And in Acts 19:6, when Paul laid his hands on some

disciples at Ephesus, the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking in tongues.

I do not see that we can draw from these verses the conclusion that baptism with the Holy Spirit must be accompanied by speaking in tongues. These passages are narratives, accounts of what happened at that time. It does not mean that in all instances it must be that way. If, for example in the Book of Acts, there are accounts of people weeping when they were converted, it does not mean that all who are converted must weep. Even if in all the accounts in the Book of Acts, those who were baptised or filled with the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues, it does not follow that this is what the Scriptures teaches. At the most, a person may say that there seems to be a scriptural pattern, if there is no indication to the contrary and if there are other supporting arguments in favour of such a view.

As it is, while there are some records in the Book of Acts of people speaking in tongues when they were baptised or filled with the Holy Spirit, this is not uniformly so. This is another important point to note. For example, in the records in Acts 9 of Paul being filled with the Holy Spirit, there is no mention that the experience was accompanied by speaking in tongues. Instead, what is recorded is that it was accompanied by Paul regaining his sight.

Acts 9:17-18

17 So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;

Those who hold the position that baptism with the Holy Spirit is accompanied by speaking in tongues do not deny that on this occasion, Paul was filled with the Spirit, but there was no record that he spoke in tongues. But they argue that Paul could and did speak in tongues. So they say it is still consistent. However, the point is not whether Paul could or did speak in tongues. The point is that there is no record of Paul speaking in tongues when he was filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts 9.

When the believers in Samaria were baptised with the Holy Spirit, again the account in Acts does not mention them speaking in tongues.

Acts 8:12

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Acts 8:15-17

15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 2:17-21, Peter was explaining the experience of the fullness of the Spirit as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. Verse 17 mentions a few signs that are associated with baptism with the Spirit:

Acts 2:17

'And it shall be in the last days,' God says,
'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams;

It is interesting to note that there is no mention in this verse of speaking in tongues. If speaking in tongues will always accompany baptism with the Spirit, we would expect it to be listed here.

Those who are preoccupied with the issue of speaking in tongues because they associate it with being baptised with the Holy Spirit should also take note that the Scriptures does not exhort all believers to speak in tongues. Neither does the Scriptures teach that it is God's intention for all believers to speak in tongues. On the contrary, Paul's rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 12:30: "All do not speak in tongues do they?" tells us this is not God's will for all believers.

However, there are those who advocate that it is God's intention that all believers should speak in tongues. They refer to 1 Corinthians 14:5 to support their position.

1 Corinthians 14:5

Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

These people infer from this verse that Paul wants all believers to speak in tongues. But in this context, Paul is comparing prophesy with tongues. Let us read verses 1 to 4:

1 Corinthians 14:1-4

1 Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

2 For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

3 But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

The apostle Paul is arguing that prophecy is superior to tongues, that while speaking in tongues can be helpful, prophecy is even more helpful. Paul is not saying that it is God's will for all to speak in tongues. This is clear from his rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 12:30: "All do not speak in tongues do they?"

However, some may say that Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:30 is referring to the gift of tongues, that it is not God's will for all to have the gift of tongues. Although 1 Corinthians 12:30 may be a reference to spiritual gifts, it may also include speaking in tongues in general. If we accept the argument that verse 30 is a reference to the gift of tongues and not just the ability to speak in tongues, then the same argument would also apply to 1 Corinthians 14:5.

Paul is talking about spiritual gifts in the context of 1 Corinthians 14. So if we interpret 1 Corinthians 12:30 as referring to the gift of tongues and not just speaking in tongues in general, to be consistent, we would also have to interpret 1 Corinthians 14:5 in the same manner. If this is so, we cannot use this verse to support the view that Paul wants all believers to speak in tongues because we would then be saying that Paul wants all believers to have the gift of tongues. This would be contrary to what he says in 1 Corinthians 12:30.

Mark 16:16-18 has also been used by some to support the view that all believers should speak in tongues.

Mark 16:16-18

16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

17 "These signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues;

18 they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

My response to this argument is in two parts:

a. The notation in the margin of the NASB for Mark 16:9 states: "Later manuscripts add vv. 9-20". Textual criticism or study of copies of ancient manuscripts indicates that this portion is unlikely to be in the original text. It is not advisable to base doctrinal teaching on verses of this nature. Important doctrines should be based on clear, unambiguous verses in the Scriptures.

b. Even if we accept the reliability of verses 9 to 20, we cannot infer from verse 17 that it is God's intention for all believers to speak in tongues. What verses 17 and 18 are saying is that believers will manifest various signs, including speaking in tongues. It does not mean all believers will manifest all the signs. If we argue from these verses that all believers will speak in tongues, we would also be saying all believers who pick up serpents or drink deadly poison will not be hurt, which is clearly not the case.

The Scriptures does not explicitly exhort all believers to speak in tongues, but the Scriptures clearly exhorts all believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 5:18: "Be filled with the Spirit". This exhortation is addressed to all believers, which indicates it is God's intention for all believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

As I have tried to reason out from the Scriptures, it is difficult for one to maintain the position that the experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit will always be accompanied by speaking in tongues. This is not the teaching of the Scriptures.

2. Confusing the baptism with the Holy Spirit with being baptised into the body of Christ

The second area of wrong understanding has to do with confusing the baptism with the Holy Spirit with being baptised into the body of Christ. Let us refer to 1 Corinthians 12:13:

1 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.

Those who equate being baptised by the Spirit into one body with the baptism with the Holy Spirit go on to assert that this takes place at the point of conversion. This means that all believers have been baptised with the Holy Spirit.

Such a view hinders those who have not experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit from seeking to enter into its reality.

It is true 1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches us that all believers have been baptised by the Spirit into one body, that is the body of Christ. It is true that this takes place on conversion. However, being baptised by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ is different from the baptism with the Holy Spirit. In the former, it is the Holy Spirit who baptises the believer into the body of Christ. In the latter, it is Christ who baptises the believer with the Holy Spirit. This is the testimony of John the Baptist in Mark 1:8 and John 1:33.

Mark 1:8

“I [John the Baptist] baptized you with water; but He [the Lord Jesus] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

John 1:33

“I [John the Baptist] did not recognize Him [the Lord Jesus], but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’”

In these two verses, John the Baptist highlights the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One who baptises us with the Holy Spirit. The testimony of John the Baptist in these two verses also indicates to us the Lord Jesus baptising us with the Holy Spirit is an important aspect of His role and ministry. This communicates to us the importance of being baptised with the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 1, the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples to wait for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. These disciples were already believers, regenerated but they were not yet baptised with the Spirit. Some may argue this was before Pentecost and that after Pentecost, all who believe in Christ are baptised with the Spirit. However, even after Pentecost, it is not true that all are baptised with the Spirit at the time of conversion. Let us look at Acts 8:12-16.

Acts 8:12-16

12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.

14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,

15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

We read in verse 12 that some people believed in the Lord when Philip preached the good news to them. And in verses 14 to 16, we are told that the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to pray for these believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit, “for He had not yet fallen upon any of them” (v. 16). So these were believers, after Pentecost, born of the Spirit, but the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon them, they had not yet been baptised with the Spirit. So even after Pentecost, a person can be a believer and yet not baptised with the Spirit.

It is also clear from Paul’s exhortation in Ephesians 5:18 that not all believers are filled with the Spirit. If all believers are filled with the Spirit on conversion, there is no need for Paul to exhort believers to be filled with the Spirit. Paul’s own conversion experience suggests that being filled with the Holy Spirit does not always take place at conversion.

Acts 9:17

So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

The Lord Jesus sent Ananias to Saul to pray for him that he may regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is clear that by this time, Paul had already responded to the Lord. As a believer, he would have been born of the Spirit, but he was not yet filled with the Spirit. It was only at the coming of Ananias that Paul was filled with the Spirit.

3. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a gradual process of the believer yielding to the Holy Spirit so that the Holy Spirit has more of the believer rather than the believer having more of the Holy Spirit.

There are those who say that being filled with the Holy Spirit is a gradual process. They say that the Holy Spirit is already dwelling in all believers and being filled with the Holy Spirit is a question of the believer yielding to the Holy Spirit, allowing the Holy Spirit to have more of us rather than we having more of the Holy Spirit.

This is a view propounded by an influential preacher and writer. To him, believers need not seek to understand how to be baptised with the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is already dwelling in us. We just have to yield to the Holy Spirit. He also

argued that the Holy Spirit is a person, and we cannot have more of a person. We either have the Holy Spirit or we do not have the Holy Spirit. All believers already have the Holy Spirit, so we do not have to seek to have more of Him.

The testimony of John the Baptist shows us that when the Lord Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit, it takes place at a moment in time. This was what happened on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:2-4

2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.

4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

We are told in verse 4: "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit". This happened at a moment in time. When they were baptised with the Spirit, they were all filled with the Spirit. It was not a gradual process; it was not a question of yielding to the Holy Spirit already dwelling within them. It was the Holy Spirit coming upon them and filling them. This becomes clearer as we look at other passages in the Book of Acts that describe how believers were filled with the Holy Spirit. For example, when Peter preached to Cornelius and those who were with him, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-45).

Peter recounted this event in Acts 11:15-16:

Acts 11:15-16

15 "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning."

16 "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

Peter explained that what took place was the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fell upon them. It was not that they yielded to the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.

Of course, submission to God, yielding to the working and guidance of the Holy Spirit are important issues in our lives, but being baptised with the Spirit or having the fullness of the Spirit is not merely yielding to the Holy Spirit already dwelling in the heart of the believer. It is the Holy Spirit coming upon the believer and filling him.

We can see this also in Acts 8:15-17. In verse 15, the apostles prayed for the Samaritan believers that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Then we read in verses 16 and 17:

Acts 8:16-17

16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

They were already believers, they already have the Holy Spirit within them, but the Holy Spirit was now coming upon them and filling them. They were experiencing and receiving more of the Holy Spirit, not just the Holy Spirit having more of them.

The argument that we cannot have more of the Holy Spirit because He is a person is not consistent with the scriptural presentation. The Holy Spirit is different from a human being and we must refrain from thinking what is not feasible for a human being will also not be feasible for the Holy Spirit. For example, a person can only be present at one geographical location at one point in time but the Holy Spirit (His whole person) can be present in many places at the same time. The whole person of the Holy Spirit is dwelling in many believers at the same time. In the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is likened to water (John 7:38-39). Just as a container may have water but may not be filled with water, so likewise the Holy Spirit may be dwelling in a person, but the person may not be filled with the Spirit.

4. It is wrong to ask the Lord to baptise us with the Holy Spirit in the context of fulfilling certain conditions.

This next area of wrong understanding has been put forward by another well-respected preacher. He was deeply impressed with the significance of baptism with the Holy Spirit and that it is different from and often subsequent to conversion or regeneration. However, he then went on to say that it is wrong to say that we can look to the Lord to baptise us with the Holy Spirit, in the context of fulfilling certain conditions. To him, whether we experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit or not is entirely dependent on God's sovereignty and God's prerogative.

We are then left in the unsatisfactory position of having recognised the importance of being baptised with the Holy Spirit and yet not being able to do anything about it.

Interestingly, this preacher agrees that Paul's exhortation "be filled with the Spirit" in Ephesians 5:18 implies we can fulfil the conditions for being filled with the Spirit so that we can be filled with the Spirit. However, he distinguishes being filled with the Spirit from being baptised with the Spirit. To him, baptism with the Holy Spirit is a

definite experience, essentially for power for service whereas being filled with the Holy Spirit, as in Ephesians 5:18, has to do with sanctification. He agrees that if you are baptised with the Spirit, you are filled with the Holy Spirit. But he says you can be filled with the Holy Spirit without being baptised with the Holy Spirit.

I do not see the way the preacher differentiates the baptism with the Holy Spirit from being filled with the Holy Spirit is helpful nor his inferences properly supported from the Scriptures.

It is important to recognise that it is God's will for all believers to be baptised with the Spirit and to be filled with the Spirit. The Lord Jesus emphasised to the disciples the importance of being baptised with the Holy Spirit in Acts 1 and this was fulfilled in Acts 2 when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:18 makes clear that even though it is God's intention for all to be filled with the Spirit, not all are filled. And the exhortation implies that we can do something about it.

When we are baptised with the Spirit, we are filled with the Spirit. We cannot experience the fullness of the Spirit without having experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus Christ has been glorified and the Holy Spirit poured forth. The Lord Jesus now wants to baptise us with the Holy Spirit. It is up to us to fulfil the conditions and trust the Lord to baptise us with the Holy Spirit. This issue will be considered in detail in the next two messages.

We ought not distinguish between baptism with the Holy Spirit as power for service and being filled with the Holy Spirit for sanctification because the Lord Jesus baptises us with the Holy Spirit so that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit and experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit effectively in all aspects of our lives. Sanctification and effective service are related. Effective service flows forth from the sanctifying work and the guidance and enabling of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Distinction between "baptism with the Holy Spirit" and "being filled with the Holy Spirit"

The scriptural presentation is that there is a very close relationship between the baptism with the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Those who are baptised with the Holy Spirit experience being filled with the Holy Spirit. However, my current understanding is that there may be a distinction between the two expressions. "Baptism with the Holy Spirit" may be a reference to the experience when Christ baptises us with the Holy Spirit whereas "being filled with the Spirit" describes its immediate consequence. And so, when we are baptised with the Spirit, we are filled with the Spirit.

This understanding of the two expressions is consistent with the scriptural presentation of the experience of the fullness of the Spirit when one is baptised with the Spirit and Paul's injunction in Ephesians 5:18 to be filled and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The injunction implies that a believer may or may not have experienced the fullness of the Spirit and those who have must take care that they continue to be filled. The fullness of the Spirit is a reality that we need to maintain. The original text of Ephesians 5:18 has the sense "be filled and continue to be filled". It is meant to be a continuing reality, not just an experience at a moment in time.

It is not possible to experience the fullness of the Spirit without being baptised with the Spirit, and it is not possible to be baptised with the Spirit without experiencing the fullness of the Spirit. However, it is possible to have experienced the baptism with the Spirit but not be filled with the Spirit at a particular moment or period of time because the fullness of the Spirit is not maintained. My understanding of the distinction between the two expressions will be more fully discussed in AR185.

Conclusion

The experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit and the fullness of the Spirit is extremely important for growth and service. An accurate understanding of the subject and the issues involved including how we can be filled and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit is very helpful. However, the critical issue is the experience of the reality in our lives. It is possible to experience this reality even though we may not have an accurate understanding of the subject. It is also possible to have an accurate understanding of the subject without experiencing the reality. It is most helpful to have a good understanding of the subject and at the same time experience the reality of the fullness of the Spirit. This is important for our own lives. It will also enable us to help others move in the same direction. The Lord willing, we will seek a reasonable understanding of the whole subject and the issues involved in this mini-series of messages on this subject.

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