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HOW TO RECEIVE THE BAPTISM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MAINTAIN THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT 2

In the previous message, we considered 15 points on how we can prepare ourselves to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit and maintain the fullness of the Spirit. In this message, we will consider six other points.

How to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit and maintain the fullness of the Spirit (continued)

16. Longing for power to overcome sin generally

As believers, we long to overcome sin – not just specific sins, but sin generally – so as to live a righteous life. However, in the realities of life, we often find ourselves overcome by sin. How then can we live an overcoming life? Romans 8:2 provides the answer.

Romans 8:2

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” is a reference to a principle or way of life, to be lived continuously, not sporadically. The apostle Paul is saying that we are in Christ, and the Spirit, who is the Spirit of life, can help us in Christ Jesus, to overcome sin and set us free from “the law of sin and of death”, that is, set us free from bondage to sin.

How does this come about? A crucial issue has to do with the fullness of the Spirit in our lives. When we experience the fullness of the Spirit and we learn to walk by the Spirit, we enter into this reality of “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. This life in the Holy Spirit is an overcoming life. It enables us to overcome the tendency to sin.

We may think believers would readily satisfy this point because they would long for such a life. We do not want to be in helpless bondage to sin. The overcoming life is also the kind of life the Lord desires for all His children. The Scriptures clearly states that it is feasible for us to live in this way. It can become a general feature of our lives. Such a life seems very attractive. Surely all of us would long for such a life. But is it really so? Are we really prepared to live out such a life if the Lord were to enable us?

Such a life would mean we no longer live on the basis of personal inclinations and desires; nor do we run away from difficulties. It would also mean we have to say no to the desires of the flesh and to the many attractions of the fallen world. If we want such a life, we must be prepared to persevere in the path the Lord desires of us, whatever it entails. It is a life in which we submit to God and walk according to the Spirit's guidance and enabling.

The Spirit of God desires to fill us so that we can live out this life that God desires of us. Yes, God has provided for us power to overcome sin and live an overcoming life. Do we really long to enter into this reality?

17. Concern for true unity among the brethren and outworking of church life

Being filled with the Spirit is vital for believers to live well at the personal level as well as in the expression of body life and the outworking of church life.

Ephesians 4:1-3

- 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,
- 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,
- 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In verse 3, the apostle Paul urges believers to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". How can true unity among the brethren come about? It can come about if we learn to be guided and empowered by the Spirit because the Spirit of God will lead us in the path of truth and the will of God.

For church life to function well, the brethren, as individual members of the congregation and as a whole body, must submit to the headship of Christ and be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We may want to submit to God, but without the empowering of the Spirit, we will not be able to truly submit to Him. We will also not experience much of the life of God, which is crucial for us to live well and for church life to function properly.

Healthy church life is very much in the heart of God. And over the years we have sought to understand and work out these realities. The potential is great, but any serious attempt to move in this direction will meet with intense spiritual opposition from the forces of darkness.

To work out healthy church life, we must prevail over the forces of darkness and all the wiles of the evil one, even as he attacks and takes advantage of the weaknesses of the flesh. To work out well in this way requires deep conviction, faith and commitment, and it is imperative that we be filled with the Spirit and learn to walk in the Spirit.

Do we really long to see the beauty of church life and true unity among the brethren, so that the power and wisdom of God may be manifested through His people and the kingdom of God advances? The fullness of the Spirit will help us to attain all these but we must be committed to the direction of working out church life as laid out in the Scriptures and be prepared to persevere with conviction and faith.

18. Longing for power for witness and service

After the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, He appeared to His disciples and told them how repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And He told them:

Luke 24:48-49

48 "You are witnesses of these things.

49 "And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

They were to be witnesses to the truth of the gospel in all the nations. In order for them to fulfil their mission, the Lord Jesus instructed them to wait for the promise of God the Father so that they would be clothed with power from on high. Acts 1:5, 8 tell us this empowering by the Holy Spirit refers to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, as recorded for us in Acts 2.

Acts 1: 5, 8

5 you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

8 you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

Many of us want power to serve. We also want to see the kingdom of God advance. But what is it that motivates us? Are we truly motivated by love for God and for those who do not yet know Him or by selfish desires? Are we seeking to draw attention to ourselves and to have a sense of power and authority? Throughout the ages, the element of self-exaltation and the desire for recognition, a sense of power and self-achievement have seriously tainted the motivations of God's children. These have hindered the Spirit of God from having the freedom to fill us and to work in and through our lives.

Together with the need to be pure in our motive, we also need to be prepared to pay the price for the advancement of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God advances at the expense of the kingdom of darkness. And so we can expect all-out opposition from Satan and the powers of darkness. We are engaged in spiritual warfare and there will be many difficulties and obstacles in the path. In the face of all this, are we prepared to align our hearts with God's heart and to cooperate with Him?

19. Longing to be more effective in a life of love

The Lord Jesus tells us the great and foremost commandment is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and the second is to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). Do we long to truly love God and others?

It is not easy to live a life of love. There are those who are difficult to love and our patience may run out. Human love will fail us. To truly live a life of love, we need divine love, without which the Christian life and God's will for us in many contexts and situations of life cannot be properly lived out. Love is the first quality of the fruit of the Spirit. So we look to the Spirit of God to fill us and enable us to love with divine love. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will experience God's love filling us and overflowing through us to touch the lives of others.

20. Longing for a deeper, closer walk and relationship with God

This ought to be the primary longing in the hearts of those who desire to be filled with the Spirit. From the Scriptures, we know that it is possible to have a deep and close walk and relationship with God, and we recognise this is the most important issue in life. However, when we reflect over this aspect of our lives, we are aware it falls far short of what it ought to be and can be, and we long for a deeper and closer walk with God. When the Spirit of God fills us, He enables us to enter into such a relationship and fellowship with God.

The experience of the fullness of the Spirit is a deep experience of God because the Holy Spirit is God. When we satisfy the conditions for the Holy Spirit to fill us and work in and through us, we are at the same time fulfilling the conditions for a deep relationship with God and walk with God. Do we truly long for such a life, together with its implications?

21. Longing for a richer experience of the life God intends for us in Christ, and God's enabling in order to be faithful to Him

Do we long for a fuller, richer experience of the life God intends for us in Christ and what we can become in Him? Is there an earnest desire to be faithful to God and to contribute our part to the advancement of His kingdom? God fills us with the Holy Spirit so that all these can become true in our lives. And they take place in the context of true discipleship – the preparedness to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Christ (Luke 9:23). Such a life will be marked by difficulties and suffering, but it is also a life of richness and abundance.

As I share all these points with you on how we can prepare ourselves to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit, I have emphasised the difficulties involved, and the spirit of true discipleship that must go together with them. Otherwise, we may quickly say we agree with all the points and we do have such longings in our hearts, yet we may not be truly ready for the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Posture and approach, spirit and attitude

I will now highlight some important aspects about our posture and approach, spirit and attitude as we seek to be filled with the Spirit and maintain the fullness of the Spirit.

a. Humility and faith

Humility is an important aspect of our posture as we seek to be filled with the Spirit and to maintain the fullness of the Spirit. God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5). So we need to come before Him in humility, looking to Him to help us deal with pride in our lives.

We also need to come before God in faith. True faith must be grounded in the truth. So we need to know the truth about the baptism with the Holy Spirit and lay hold of it. As we recognise that it is God's will for us to be filled with the Spirit, and we have prepared our hearts accordingly, we know we can exercise true faith and ask the Lord to fill us with the Holy Spirit, trusting Him to do so, in line with the truth He has revealed.

b. Hunger and thirst

Our desire to be filled with the Spirit must not be a superficial desire but a deep longing that can be described as hunger and thirst. This is a hunger and thirst for God, for righteousness and for spiritual reality. This hunger and thirst is accompanied by a deep recognition of our frailty and our need of God, and a longing for a deeper relationship with God and closer walk with Him.

We see such hunger and thirst in the psalms. For example:

Psalm 63:1

O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,
In a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Psalm 42:1-2

1 As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?

In the Beatitudes, the Lord Jesus talks about hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Hunger and thirst for God is closely related to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Only God can satisfy our hunger and thirst for Him and His righteousness. The Lord Jesus says those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed and they shall be satisfied. When the Spirit of God fills us, we experience a deep sense of satisfaction and we enter a state of blessedness.

c. The treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great value

In Matthew 13:44-46, the Lord Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and went and sold all that he had and bought that field. The Lord Jesus also likens the kingdom of heaven to a pearl of such great value that a merchant sold all that he had to buy it.

The fullness of the Spirit and the implications involved are at the heart of God's intentions for us in His kingdom. Do we value the fullness of the Spirit the way the man values the treasure in the field and the way the merchant values the pearl of great value? Is it of supreme value to us? Are we prepared to give up all in order to have it? Will we take whatever steps necessary, do whatever is required, and fulfil whatever the conditions because we know it is worth it? That is the kind of posture and approach, spirit and attitude we ought to have, as we prepare ourselves to be filled with the Spirit.

d. Seek, knock, ask

Matthew 7:7-8

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

8 "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

We must not be passive or indifferent with regards to the issue of being filled with the Spirit. We must seek to understand the conditions, prepare ourselves and seek the Lord that we may be filled. If we are not filled, we seek to understand the reasons why and how we can be filled. As we seek, we will find. As we ask, it will be given to us. As we knock, the door will be opened to us – if our hearts are in the right condition. If we persevere in this direction, the Lord will respond to us.

e. "Not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42)

"Not my will, but Yours be done" is the heart attitude of the Lord Jesus. As His followers, it is important that we follow His example. The Holy Spirit fills us that we may live out the will of God. The Holy Spirit has not come to empower us to do whatever we want and to live as we please.

Sometimes what we want to do may be consistent with the will of God. For example, we want to contribute to God's kingdom and to help people to know the Lord. But we

may not be motivated by the desire to be faithful to God and by our love for others. Our motive may be tainted by the desire for self-exaltation or self-importance. The principle of "not my will, but Yours be done" includes having the right motive that is pleasing to God, and should be our basic approach to life. We should be continually looking to the Lord, that we may know and do His will. This is the earnest longing expressed in the first half of the pattern prayer of the Lord Jesus.

f. Primary motivations of our hearts

Matthew 6:9-10

9 "Pray, then, in this way:

`Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

10 `Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Our concentration is on God, His glory, kingdom and will. The earnest and unceasing longings of our hearts are that God may be glorified, His kingdom advances and His will be done in our own lives and in the lives of others. This must be the primary concern and motivation of our hearts. Such a posture, spirit and attitude would be consistent with one who is ready to experience the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Practical steps – repentance and faith

Having considered various points on preparing our hearts to be filled with the Spirit, how do we actually go about looking to the Lord to fill us with the Spirit?

The practical approach can be summarised as repentance and faith. God has done and provided much for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is through repentance and faith that we enter into all that God intends and has provided for us under the New Covenant in Christ's blood. And the baptism with the Holy Spirit is part of what God intends for us under the New Covenant.

Repentance

In repentance, we confess our sins and reject them. We turn away from self-life, the ways of the world, and whatever is displeasing to the Lord. We consecrate ourselves to the Lord to live according to His will, guidance and enabling.

Faith

Having repented, we exercise faith and look to God for what He has done and provided for us in Christ and His will for us – in this context, it is that we may be baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit, on the basis of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Christ has been glorified and the Spirit poured forth. There is no need for any delay or waiting. We can now be baptised with the Holy Spirit, be filled and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And so in repentance and faith, with the proper motivations and longings in our hearts and the recognition of our need of God, we come to the Lord and ask Him to fill us with the Spirit, believing that He would be pleased to do so.

Repentance and faith – a continuing reality

Repentance and faith do not apply only to conversion; it should be a continuing reality in our walk with God. As we grow in our understanding of the truth and respond to God in repentance and faith, we enter more and more deeply into all that God intends for us. It is important for us to maintain a spirit of repentance and faith throughout our lives on earth.

Conversion and baptism with the Holy Spirit

The basic requirements for becoming a Christian and being baptised with the Holy Spirit are in the same direction. It is therefore feasible for a person to experience both at the same time, or almost the same time, though this is uncommon. When a person has sufficient understanding and readiness of heart and responds deeply to the Lord, he can be born again and at the same time also be baptised with the Holy Spirit, especially if he has been helped in that direction. So if we are the one helping the person, we should consider sharing with him the relevant truths, if he is ready to receive them, in order to facilitate his experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Of course it would be important for us to have experienced this reality in our own lives.

Indications of being baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit

How can we know whether we have been baptised with the Holy Spirit? What are the indications? For those of us who think we may have experienced it, how can we know whether we are still filled with the Spirit?

First of all, I want to emphasise that we should refrain from looking for a specific manifestation or gift of the Spirit, like speaking in tongues or specific manifestations experienced by someone else. This is a common error. The manifestations for the fullness of the Spirit can differ for different people. For example, there are some who may experience what can be described as "waves of liquid love" that come upon

them. Others may experience indescribable and overwhelming peace and joy. For others, it may be a quiet and undramatic experience. We must also be careful not to assume we have experienced the fullness of the Spirit because we have experienced any of these manifestations. They may be counterfeits from the evil one.

What is important is that there is a noticeable difference in our experience of inward realities consistent with the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit that we have considered. In particular, a noticeable difference in our experience of the reality and life of the Lord. It is not an emotional experience, but a deep reality within our hearts. And we know God in a deep and personal way.

When the Spirit of God fills us, He works within us a deeper love for the Lord, for truth, for people and for the things of God. It is not that we are trying very hard to love these things but the reality is there. The things of God's kingdom become more precious to us.

There is also that life and vitality in daily living. We are experiencing more of the life of God. And even though we may encounter various difficulties, there is no longer that sense of helplessness and despair. Rather, as we look to God in faith, there is an abiding sense of life and vitality and God's enabling.

Times of prayer and reading of the Scriptures become refreshing and richer in meaning. When we pray, there is that sense of fellowship with God and a growing appreciation and worship of God. When we read the Scriptures, it becomes more alive and relevant to us. We are also more able to understand and appreciate what we read.

Before we experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we may have to try hard to be conscious of God. But when we experience the fullness of the Spirit, there is, spontaneously, a greater consciousness of God and a greater recognition of the Holy Spirit's guidance and enabling in our lives.

We are also more conscious that we are experiencing the fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. In the Spirit-filled life, the evil one may make life difficult for us and try to discourage us. But as we look to the Lord and depend on Him, we experience His love, joy and peace filling our hearts and we find that we are more able to exercise self-control and be patient, gentle and kind.

There is also a noticeable difference in our experience of God's power. When the Spirit of God fills us, we experience power in witness and service. We also experience power to overcome sin, the evil one and the weaknesses of the flesh.

It is important to recognise that when we are filled with the Spirit, it does not mean we no longer stumble and fail, that we always overcome our weaknesses. But if we are prayerful and look to the Spirit of God, we will find a noticeable difference in our

experience of the empowering and enabling of the Spirit to overcome sin and our weaknesses.

Readiness to be filled

We need not and ought not feel that we are not ready and not worthy to receive the fullness of the Spirit because of a sense of weakness and failure. Although we can readily identify with Romans 7:19 which says: "For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want", we can be encouraged to note that the struggle with sin described in Romans 7 does not end in despair. Rather, it ends with a note of hope and victory: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25).

God knows we are weak and unable to overcome sin on our own. It is precisely because of this that God makes provision for us to be baptised with the Holy Spirit and be filled with the Spirit.

Recognition of our weaknesses and failures is in fact an important aspect of readiness. The sense of self-sufficiency and self-confidence is a significant hindrance. But it is not enough just to recognise our weaknesses and failures; we must want to overcome them. We must not be indifferent to our weaknesses and failures. We must look to God for His provision of the Spirit to enable us to overcome. The Holy Spirit draws us in that direction and prepares our hearts so that we can be ready for the baptism with the Holy Spirit. However, it is vital that we cooperate with Him as He draws us in that direction.

We can compare readiness for the baptism with the Spirit with readiness for entering God's kingdom. To be ready to enter God's kingdom, we do not have to first put right all areas of our lives. We come to God in repentance and we trust Him to forgive us and enable us to live for Him. We commit ourselves to be true disciples of the Lord and to honour God. In the same way, to be ready for the baptism with the Holy Spirit, we do not have to be working out our lives very well. We come to God in humility, recognising our weaknesses and failures, and trusting Him to empower us to overcome. We want to be overcomers and we are prepared to take the necessary steps.

There is a difference between worthiness and readiness. Worthiness implies "deserving of". We will never attain to the point where we deserve to be baptised with the Spirit. When the Lord Jesus baptises us with the Holy Spirit, it is grace. We do not deserve it. But we need to be ready. Readiness is the heart condition and attitude appropriate for receiving God's grace through repentance and faith.

If you are a young believer, whether in chronological or spiritual age, do not think that you need to build up your life first, and attain a certain degree of maturity before you are ready to receive the baptism with the Holy Spirit. No, the baptism with the Holy Spirit is intended by God for all His children, even those who have just

been converted. As mentioned earlier, a person can be born again and baptised with the Holy Spirit at the same time.

Not sure?

What if we are not sure whether we have experienced the baptism with the Holy Spirit? Or we may have experienced it but are not sure whether we are still filled with the Spirit. The freshness, life and vitality seem to have faded.

If we are unsure, we should prayerfully consider and pray over the matter. Have we grieved the Holy Spirit in any way? Have we become complacent? Have we lost the zeal and earnestness for the Lord? Perhaps the love of the world and the things in the world has crept in. Have we been distracted and choked by the affairs of this life? These are areas that can affect our experience of the fullness of the Spirit.

After putting right whatever we recognise is not right in our lives, we consecrate ourselves to the Lord and in humility, repentance and faith, ask Him to fill us with the Spirit, whether for the first time or afresh.

Concluding remarks

After experiencing the fullness of the Spirit, we must not have a sense of having attained or having arrived at the pinnacle of spiritual attainment. Baptism with the Holy Spirit is really the beginning of a truly meaningful walk with God and living the life God intends us to live. And there is so much more that God wants us to learn and enter into that He has provided for us in Christ.

In the next message, we will reflect on the Spirit-filled life and consider how to deepen the quality and meaning of the fullness of the Spirit and walk according to the Spirit.

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