

# **Water Baptism and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit:** *An outward sign of an inward reality*

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### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this paper is to outline a theological position for believer's water baptism, by virtue of its relationship to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In no way will this topic be exhausted here, but rather the goal is to highlight the importance of the relationship between water and Spirit baptism, as it serves to define our understanding of baptism as an ordinance of the church. Some have fairly questioned whether the two baptismal types (water and Spirit) relate at all, and if so, whether the link is direct enough to show any dependency between the two. Before we can suppose a relationship does in fact exist, it seems necessary to first grasp an understanding of each type its own right from a Biblical and historical perspective, so that we have some common language from which to work regarding the nature and content of each. It is my underlying assertion, however, that this preliminary discussion will only take us so far. For to understand water baptism in the New Testament (as it relates to the new covenantal people of God) we must understand it in light of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is my hope that this essay will show that an understanding of the latter is essential in defining the former.

### ***The historical and theological roots of water baptism***

The BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, defines the Greek word “βαπτίζω” in three distinct but interrelated meanings.<sup>1</sup> The first involves a ceremonial washing for the “purpose of purification”, with less focus on the mode used to accomplish this washing.<sup>2</sup> The point is the

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<sup>1</sup> BDAG = Bauer, Danker, Arndt, & Gingrich's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

ceremonial purification. We see examples of such usage in Luke 11:38 and Mark 7:4. The second definition implies the use of water in an initiatory rite for the purposes of “establishing a relationship with God”, with the modes of “plunge, dip, and wash” all tied to the act itself.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the third definition is “to cause someone to have an extraordinary experience akin to an initiatory water-rite”, where the mode is described as a “plunge”.<sup>4</sup> Both the second and third definitions involve initiatory rites. These latter two definitions, while similar, also provide some important variations on the rites of initiation. The second definition focuses on a relationship with God, and is generally spoken of as pertaining to an individual or group of individuals who have distinctively undertaken this rite of passage. Examples are found in Matthew 3:13, Luke 3:7, Mark 6:16, and Acts 2:41. Each example involves the understanding of a profession or voluntary undertaking associated with adherence to a rabbi or community of faith. As will be discussed below, we might go so far as to identify this type of use of the word βαπτίζω with adherence or commitment to a way of life. The term discipleship becomes an important area of investigation as we consider the meaning of baptism in this new covenantal context. The third definition, while similar to an initiatory rite involving water, focuses more on an overarching experience often associated with the divine or supernatural. The classic passage here is 1 Corinthians 10:2, where Israel’s passage through the Red Sea is said to be their baptism into the leadership of Moses. This experience becomes the foundation for understanding baptism through the typology of an entire community’s experience in faith, individually and collectively, from which they find representation and definition as a people in their relationship with God and an

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

earthly figurehead. Covenantal implications are in view here, with the roles of both a suzerain (superior/divine) and a vassal (inferior/earthly) king outlined in a prescriptive way to further the ongoing covenantal relationship. In the new covenant, it is the experience of being baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit that is akin to Israel's passage in the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 12:13). This understanding is paramount for our discussion below on the relationship between water and Spirit baptism. But for now, let us simply recognize the parallel that exists between 1 Corinthians 12:13 and 10:2, as it pertains to this third definition of βαπτίζω. Christ stands as a new kind of Moses, the figurehead and representative of the new community of faith, and the experience of being baptized by the Spirit is akin to the water-rites of initiation.

With these three definitions in mind, we can identify three general theologies regarding baptism in the local church.<sup>5</sup> The first general theology of baptism relies heavily on the first definition found above, conveying the idea that one is actually purified through the ceremony of baptism itself. This is not in absence of Christ's presence, or in absence from the community of faith, but the rite of baptism and the washing of original sin are interconnected and dependent upon one another. The experiential and relational aspects, found above in the latter two definitions of baptism, also come into play; however, in the case of infant baptism, they exist predominantly through the vicarious relationship of the parents to the church community. Much weight is then given to the ceremonial aspect of baptism, as it relates to salvation and the

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<sup>5</sup> While many traditions of baptism exist in the church at large today, our purposes will narrow our focus to the discussion of the Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Baptist understandings of water baptism.

washing of original sin. An example of this baptismal tradition can be seen in Roman Catholicism.

This use of baptism, however, ignores much of the Biblical testimony. In the opening verses of John 2, Jesus' supposed first miracle at the wedding in Cana<sup>6</sup>, Jesus turns the water used for ceremonial washing and purification into wine. Going forward in John, and in the New Testament overall, wine is symbolic of the blood of Christ. The point being made in John 2 is that only through the blood of Christ are we purified and washed clean. So the question now becomes, how do we become identified with the blood of Christ for purification? Is it through the sacrament of the church in baptism? Scripture makes clear that it is through faith and belief in Christ that we become identified with him - his crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>7</sup> One has only to consider the thief on the cross next to Jesus at Calvary to be reminded that salvation and forgiveness lie in the *person* of Christ and not the *ceremony* of baptism.

Acts 2:38 and 10:47 seem at first to stand in opposition to each other in the way they outline the norms for baptism, forgiveness of sins, and receiving the gift of the Spirit. It may appear at first glance that the former passage associates the forgiveness of sins with the act of baptism itself. But it remains disputed as to whether the forgiveness of sins is being identified with the name of Christ or the baptism into that name. Here, verse 10:47 may help clarify Luke's intent in 2:38. It is particularly noteworthy that a group of new Gentile believers had received the Spirit *before* receiving water baptism.

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<sup>6</sup> Some scholars who feel that the timeline of Jesus' ministry and calling of the first disciples does not allow adequate time for this sequence contest the assertion that this is Jesus' first miracle.

<sup>7</sup> This paper assumes some background understanding of the reformation principle of faith alone, and our purposes are not to outline the argument as such. However, Eph 2:8 should suffice as immediate Scriptural support for the proposition.

This refutes the idea that the water baptism must come first, or even simultaneous with the reception of the Spirit. Romans 8, particularly verse 11, states that salvation (of which forgiveness of sins is a part) belongs to all who have the Spirit of Christ within them. How then are we to interpret Acts 2:38 - as paradigmatic for associating forgiveness with baptism itself, or associating forgiveness with the name of Christ and the gift of the Spirit? Surely it is the blood sacrifice of Christ that pronounces us clean, irrespective of the water, so that the Spirit of God may dwell within us, continuing the work of sanctification. Temple imagery of sacrifice, imputation of innocence, and the presence of God in the holy of holies are all in view, and fulfilled by Christ in the new covenant. Thus, Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you", is not mere metaphor, but a reality that describes the redemption of the new covenantal people of God. In light of this reality, linking water baptism with actual purifying results again appears outside the Biblical witness.

For our purposes, the second baptismal theology worth noting is found in the Reformed tradition. This theology identifies baptism with the marker of the new covenantal people of God. In this tradition, baptism itself is not seen as regenerative, but rather the new covenant equivalent of circumcision in the Old Testament. The Scriptural support for this is dependant to a large, but not exclusive, extent on Genesis 17:7-14, as it relates to Genesis 15 and Colossians 2:11-13. The argument being that Genesis 15 outlines a covenant of faith between Abraham and God, and the sign of the covenant is circumcision (outlined in Genesis 17). Given that this sign is applied to children eight days after birth, it serves to reason that the sign of a faith covenant is applicable to the children of parents within that covenantal community. The passage in Colossians 2

speaks of our baptism into Christ as the true circumcision. Six times in verses 1-11 Paul mentions the phrase “in Him”, signifying the importance of the new covenantal people’s relationship to the person of Christ (rather than Abraham or one of the other patriarchs of old). Verse 11 goes on to say that through Christ we were truly circumcised having been buried with him in baptism. Our old self, often spoken of by Paul as “the flesh”, was cut away (the covenantal symbolism behind circumcision) in full through the burying in baptism and raising through faith. Water baptism is now the sign of the new covenant, as circumcision was the old. Therefore, children receive this new covenantal marker, like circumcision before it. Religions in the Ancient Near East and apostolic period were almost universally applied to households, into which children, and even servants in some cases, were adopted. Thus, in the New Testament we read of entire households being baptized.

While this tradition of baptism refrains from associating any power for salvation through the ceremony itself, and acknowledges the corporate identity that covenantal markers are applied to (i.e. faith exists in communities), there are some issues with the exegesis of the above referenced passages, and some hermeneutical discrepancies as to the dependency of the new covenantal markers on the old forms of application. Is there complete consistency with regards to the way covenantal signs are applied in the old and the new covenants of faith? Moreover, is the circumcision of Genesis 17 truly the sign of the faith covenant in Genesis 15? These are two important questions to answer as we look to the validity of pedo-baptism.

Let’s begin by looking at the passage in Colossians 2. While baptism has undoubtedly replaced circumcision as the new covenantal sign of God’s people, nowhere

does it suggest that it must be applied in the same way as circumcision. In fact, Jeremiah 31:31-33 states that the new covenant “will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts (NIV).” There will be something *within* the new covenantal people of God that defines them. It may be rightly argued that personal conviction is so foundational to the new covenantal people of God that it may be unjustified to divorce the *sign* of the people from the *belief* of the people. This is not to diminish the importance of faith, or circumcision of the heart, in the old covenant, but rather a caution not to diminish the unique ethnic role Abraham’s seed played in the old covenant. We could argue with some effectiveness that the cutting away of a portion of the male reproductive organ, and the significance of Abraham’s seed bringing forth the Messiah, are intricately related. In view here is the theology of Christ as incorruptible seed. It may be that the entire relationship of circumcision in Genesis 17 to the covenant of faith in Genesis 15 warrants review.

In the Ancient Near East there was standard language and form regarding the making (or more properly termed “cutting” in the Hebrew context) of covenants.<sup>8</sup> The components of covenant were as follows: two parties (often between the suzerain and a vassal representative of the people), historical prologue, divine witnesses (though this is left out of Hebrew covenants because strict monotheism leaves no room for other divine witnesses), stipulations, prohibitions, a ratifying oath or vow, and a sign of the covenant that demonstrated either the blessing for obedience or the curse for disobedience (sometimes both were in view). Genesis 17 is often thought to be merely outlining the

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<sup>8</sup> Regarding the components of covenant in the ancient near east, I am indebted to Dr. Gordon Hugenberger, at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, for his insightful lectures in the class *Theology of the Pentateuch*.



sign of the covenant in Genesis 15. However, Genesis 17 has each of these covenantal components in its own right. Of particular interest is the historical prologue found in verse 5, “I have made you a father of a multitude of nations.” This suggests not only the beginning of a new covenant, but also a fulfillment of at least a portion of the covenant in Genesis 15. Moreover, it infers a distinct gap in time between Genesis 15 and 17. This may cause us to further question the notion that Genesis 17 is the sign for the covenant in Genesis 15, and not a separate covenant in its own right. The stipulations and prohibitions associated with circumcision suggest that this covenant is one of works, not faith like that of Genesis 15. The covenant of circumcision is “eternal” in so far as its stipulations are met, but breakable as a result of disobedience. In light of this, circumcision appears to be a sign reflecting not only the blessing of Abraham’s seed (Christ), but also the curse for disobedience as it points toward the “cutting away” from God’s covenantal people.

In order to view Genesis 17 as a separate, albeit related, covenant to Genesis 15, we must also see that the covenant in Genesis 15 can stand alone. Do all the necessary components surface? A solid argument can be made affirming the uniqueness of the covenant in Genesis 15, apart from the covenant of circumcision. Verse 7 provides the historical prologue, and two parties are clearly present. What is interesting, however, is what appears to be missing – stipulations and prohibitions. But this covenant is one of faith, with no works attached for it to hinge upon. Stipulations and prohibitions would therefore be unnecessary. Of further notice is the vow, which comes not from the vassal (Abraham), but from God himself. God makes the vow, and since he cannot break his own vow and still be God, the covenant is eternal and guaranteed. How can we be

assured that God's vow will come to pass? This is the very question that Abraham asks. Most people have assumed circumcision to be the sign of the covenant of faith made here between God and Abraham, but God's response to Abraham's question is indicative that a sign is already present here in Genesis 15:9-21. There is a cutting in blood (verse 10), followed by a deep sleep upon Abraham in verse 12. This Hebrew word for "sleep" is the same one used to describe Adam's sleep when his rib is "cut" to make Eve (which some scholars believe is suggestive of a marriage covenant). But particularly noteworthy is the strange scene in verse 17. Bearing in mind that the sign of a covenant points to either the blessing or curse associated with the vow, and remembering that it is God who has made the vow in this covenant, the passing of the torch (symbolic of the presence of God himself<sup>9</sup>) through the carcass remains signifies that God himself should cease to exist, as do these dead remains, should His sovereign vow not come to pass. Note carefully verse 18, which states that on *that day* God made a covenant with Abraham, having given the sign to accompany His ratifying oath. A solid claim, therefore, can be made for seeing circumcision as a separate covenant of works than the covenant of faith here in Genesis 15. Given that the new covenant is also one of faith, cut in the blood of Christ, the argument for administering baptism in a similar way to circumcision (i.e. infant baptism) is brought into serious question.

Returning briefly to Colossians 2, one last thought needs to be stated regarding the interpretation of these verses. It is not immediately clear whether Paul's use of "baptism" in verse 12 relates to water baptism or the baptism into Christ Spirit. Given

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<sup>9</sup> Again, this paper does not allow for a thorough exegesis of this claim, but a careful word study should prove the point sufficiently. For example, the presence of God lights and leads the tabernacle as a fire by night.

the noted references to “in Him” leading up to this verse, it could well be argued that Paul has in mind the latter. Still more convincing is the reference to “putting off the body of the flesh” in verse 11, and the comparison in verse 13 between the dead flesh and being alive with Christ. Classic Pauline theology contrasts the flesh and the Spirit, specifically in terms of our being dead in the former and alive in the latter. For this very reason, we may begin to see the significance of understanding water baptism at least in terms of its relationship to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. What remains in question is whether or not the baptism in the Spirit relates to the indwelling of the Spirit. This will be discussed below in the section on Spirit baptism.

Looking now to the Baptist tradition of regenerate believer’s baptism, it is imperative to note the importance of understanding baptism as an external sign of an already existing inward reality. The centrality of faith in the new covenantal body has already been highlighted above, over and against any specific ethnic line that would point to a new seed beyond Christ. But we can expand on this claim by noting Jesus’ words correlating baptism with discipleship. Matthew 28:19, the Great Commission, links discipleship with baptism. Bearing in mind the second definition of βαπτίζω above – an initiatory rite undertaken to establish a relationship with God – we are reminded that John’s disciples were baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, baptism, discipleship, and the relational stance before God had at least vague connections to each other at the time of the New Testament.

While direct associations between baptism and the path of discipleship are isolated to John the Baptist and Jesus’ Great Commission, we can show a previous link

between water-rites and the practices of a community desiring a closer walk with God<sup>10</sup>.

Most notably are the water-rites that existed in the life of the Qumran community.<sup>11</sup>

While it is contested as to whether or not the Qumran community baptized its members, it is certain that their Manual of Discipline speaks of purification baths as a normative experience in their community. This act, while holding no actual power in of itself, reflected their desire for complete purity of body and soul.<sup>12</sup> While much could be said regarding the nature of these baths to baptism and the initiatory rites of a community seeking proper stance before God, suffice it to say that at least a connection can be made between water-rites and the intent to renew the covenantal relationship with God.

Implicit in these water-rites are an adherence to a set way of life. Without much contention, we can see a progression from these initial water-rites of Qumran (community's desire for purity before God), to the baptism of John (identified with repentance and the beginnings of a context of discipleship<sup>13</sup>), to Jesus' own claim that his disciples are to be baptized.

Some in the Baptist tradition have tried to link believer's baptism directly to the ministry of John the Baptist. But this may cause us to miss something of paramount importance in the relationship of baptism to the person of Christ. The movement from

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<sup>10</sup> Due to the highly contested nature and the limited literature regarding baptism and proselyte conversion to Judaism, we will merely note its potential relevance here while abstaining from its discussion in this essay.

<sup>11</sup> G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers 2006), pgs. 11-18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pgs. 11, 14. The former page speaks of the desire for purity and the latter attests to the understanding that the water held no power for atonement.

<sup>13</sup> Some ambiguity exists here, because we do not know how strong the link was between John's disciples (those that followed him) and John's baptism (often done with crowds for repentance). What we can say with some degree of confidence is that this was a rite that John's disciples undertook.

John's baptism of repentance to the baptism associated with Jesus is an important step that must be explored further. In it, I believe, we will find a crucial link to understanding baptism as the outward sign of an inward reality, namely the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This inward reality goes beyond discipleship, though it is crucial for understanding the new covenant context for discipleship.

### ***The historical and theological roots of Spirit baptism***

John the Baptist distinguishes his baptism from that of Christ's in Matthew 3:11, "I baptize you with water *for repentance*, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (taken from the ESV, with emphasis added)."<sup>14</sup> We now have to ask the question, does our water baptism correspond with John's baptism of repentance, or with Christ's baptism of the Spirit? Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 speak of baptism in terms of a spiritual reality that goes beyond repentance, and points to our union with (and in) Christ. How is this union to be understood? The Galatians passage puts baptism specifically in the context of being "sons of God". In essence, our sonship (or daughtership) is a union with the Son. Being children of God is a reality of life in the Spirit (John 3:6-8). Essential to the response for Christ's call to discipleship is the reception of a new heart for God, as a result of being reborn of the Spirit. Ezekiel 36:26 makes clear the point, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you

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<sup>14</sup> A careful word study on the presence of God and fire in the Old Testament makes a strong case for seeing fire as part of the Spirit's baptism, not sequential to it. There is not sufficient room in this essay to flush this statement out completely, but its importance necessitates some follow up. Examples are Ex. 3:2, 13:21, 24:17, Deut 4:24, 1 Kings 18:24, and 2 Chronicles 7:3 (for the identification of the Spirit with the glory cloud see Numbers 11:25 and 1 Peter 4:14).

(ESV).” This new heart and indwelling spirit that God gives us corresponds to the idea of being born again as children of God. In turn, being children of God, as evidenced in the Galatians 3:27 passage, is central to the idea of being clothed in Christ through baptism. Our Christian baptism is then one that unites us to Christ, and should be understood in the full sense of being immersed into his Spirit. Note now the Romans 6:3 passage. Coupled with the imagery of immersion, being buried and raised with Christ, our baptism in him results in walking in the “newness of life.” Again, new birth is in view of the context for baptism. So implicitly is the Spirit, for Paul says in Romans 8:4 that those who are in Christ walk by the Spirit. As we view Romans 6:3 and Colossians 2:11-13, if it seems at all vague as to whether Paul refers to water baptism or the baptism into Christ’s Spirit, that is precisely the point. One is a pointer toward the other. We cannot speak of baptism in the Pauline texts and not have the baptism of the Spirit in mind. Again, 1 Corinthians 12:13 is paramount to this understanding, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (NIV).

Before we can truly make the case that water baptism is an outward sign of the inward baptism into Christ’s Spirit, we must ask the question, what is Spirit baptism? Some traditions have suggested that it is a charismatic experience, distinct in essence from salvation or regeneration.<sup>15</sup> Some have labeled it as a second act of grace in the life of a believer. This definition of Spirit baptism would negate the proposition that water baptism is an outward sign of the inward reality of the baptism of the Spirit in the life of

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<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive survey of various traditions’ views on Spirit baptism, see Chad Owen Brand, *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: five views* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers 2004).

all true believers upon conversion. So we must ask, is Spirit baptism for the indwelling of the Spirit or the giftedness of the Spirit? Let me first suggest that this “either, or” dichotomy may not exist at all. In his groundbreaking book, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, Roger Stronstad makes a persuasive argument that theologians and New Testament scholars, so singularly focused on seeing Luke as a historian, have often failed to see Luke as a theologian in his own right, independent (though not in conflict) from Paul.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, much of Luke’s understanding of the baptism of the Spirit is read into the Pauline texts. Perhaps it is best to see each as having a distinct theology on the Spirit’s baptism. As discussed in the paragraph above, Paul speaks of being baptized into one Spirit as a means of sanctification and union with Christ. Romans 8 is a classic Pauline text outlining the indwelling and role of the Spirit in sanctification and glorification with Christ, where Christ is the “first among brothers” (verse 29). For Paul, being baptized into Christ Spirit is to be identified with Christ. Romans 8:9 makes it clear that all who are in Christ have the indwelling of his Spirit. There is no distinction made between being baptized into Christ and being filled (immersed and washed) with the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Galatians 2:20 and Colossians 1:26-27 do not have the tone of metaphorical language, but rather point to the reality of this incarnational “mystery” of identity in Christ. This is generally how the Reformed tradition has understood the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as the fulfillment of the promised gift of God to all His people.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1984), pgs. 1-12.

<sup>17</sup> Brand, pgs. 15-46. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. was the contributing author to this chapter’s Reformed perspective.

The gospel of John follows a similar understanding of baptism in the Spirit. Jesus' breathing of the Holy Spirit into the disciples in John 20:22 is the climax of John the Baptist's declaration that Jesus will baptize in the Holy Spirit. Likewise, John 4:13-15 describes the pouring out of the Spirit as a welling up within us (a filling from within). Kittel's Theological Dictionary has a variant meaning on the word βαπτω that describes this usage as akin to dye that would well up and pour out of a saturated cloth.<sup>18</sup> This description fits the water-type initiation rite outlined in the 3<sup>rd</sup> definition of βαπτίζω in BDAG. It is a fulfillment of Ezekiel 39:29, "I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will *pour out* my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord (NIV, emphasis added)."

Luke, on the other hand, speaks of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of Joel 2:28, where charismatic giftedness is in view. Luke highlights this Old Testament prophecy, as recounted by Peter, in conjunction with the appearance of the gift of tongues in Acts 2:14-21. Luke's concern is with the giftedness of the Spirit for empowerment in service to the gospel. Thus, Luke narrates the role of the Spirit as such.<sup>19</sup> The Spirit is still the gift of God (Acts 2:38, 10:45), but as the gift, the Spirit, in turn, is also the giver of spiritual gifts. Simply put, Christ gives us the gift of the Spirit, and the Spirit, in turn, gives gifts for service to Christ. Luke undoubtedly speaks of the baptism of the Spirit in regards to the latter (i.e. the Spirit's role in gifting the people of God). But this use of baptism in the Spirit ought not to negate the Pauline emphasis of

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<sup>18</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. I*, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Brombiley, D. Litt., D.D., (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1964), pg. 529.

<sup>19</sup> Stronstad, pg. 2.



being baptized into the Spirit of Christ for unity and identity with Christ, nor the Johannine emphasis of baptism in the Spirit, as given by Christ, for rebirth (regeneration). These different uses of baptism in the Spirit are to be seen as complimentary to one another in describing the experience of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

### *The relationship of water baptism to Spirit baptism*

When understood properly, a substantial case can be made for water baptism as an outward sign of the inward reality of being baptized into Christ's Spirit (as understood in the Pauline and Johannine texts). This view connects two biblical concepts that ought to be viewed in conjunction with each other; namely, walking in the new life of the Spirit and following Christ in his call for discipleship. In regenerate believer's baptism, the sign of baptism is coupled with the profession that Christ is Lord of our life. Baptism is then the first step of obedience in the new covenantal life of a disciple. We follow Christ in baptism, and are obedient to his call of discipleship on our life. It is this ratifying oath – that Jesus Christ is Lord, of which no one can say with sincerity except by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3) – coupled with the sign of baptism, pointing to the blessing of dying to the old self and raising to new life in the Spirit, that defines the new covenantal people of God. In this way, baptism is a covenantal marker. But not one associated with circumcision, as outlined above, but with circumcision of the heart.

Professing belief and the corresponding response of discipleship is then normative for the life of the Spirit filled community. There is the understanding that the visible church should strive to reflect what Reformers coined "the invisible Church" (i.e. true believers and thus true people of God). Moreover, to divorce the act of baptism from the

confession of being made alive in Christ and the desire to follow him takes the very act of baptism outside its historical and theological roots. But if in fact, as argued in this essay, water baptism is applied to those who are professing their belief and desire to follow Christ, as an outward sign of the inward reality of Christ baptizing us into his Spirit, then a fuller definition of baptism has been reached. Let us turn once more to the three definitions of baptism in BDAG: 1) water baptism relates to “purification and the washing” of sin only in so far as it points to Christ and the sanctifying work of his Spirit, in whom we are baptized with a refiner’s fire, 2) baptism is a “water rite for the purpose of renewing or establishing our relationship with God”, and is therefore connected to the proclamation that Christ is Lord and the desire to follow him in discipleship (proclamation as the oath and baptism as the sign of the new covenantal relationship), and 3) Christ is the “cause of an extraordinary experience akin to an initiatory water rite”, as reflected in being reborn of his Spirit (evidenced in John 1-4, with special emphasis on the outpouring “water” imagery in chapter 4).<sup>20</sup> Christ is now the figurehead that Moses was in the old covenant, with the baptism in the Holy Spirit paralleled in Israel’s passage through the Red Sea. But once again, we must keep in mind the words of Jeremiah 31:31-33. This new covenant will be unlike the covenant made with the forefathers of Israel, for the Lord declared, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Ezekiel 36:26 reminds us that this writing will be on new hearts and coupled with new spirits. To such an indwelling, the marker of baptism is given. For such an indwelling, the baptism in the Spirit is received.

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<sup>20</sup> Quotations are direct from BDAG

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