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Baptized "By" and "In" the Holy Spirit

Does the New Testament distinguish between being baptized *by* the Holy Spirit and being baptized *in* the Holy Spirit? Seven passages contain the verb "baptize," the Greek preposition *en*, and the noun "Holy Spirit" or "Spirit." Do all these verses teach the same thing about the relationship between "baptize" and "(Holy) Spirit"?

The New Testament writers never speak about a baptism *of* the Holy Spirit. The term is ambivalent, and could be used for either of two experiences of the Spirit: (1) baptism *by* the Spirit, which incorporates a person into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), and (2) baptism *in* the Spirit, which primarily empowers a person (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16; see also Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Is this distinction valid?

The Pentecostal experience is properly spoken of as being "baptized *in* [Gk. *en*] the Holy Spirit." This rendering most clearly translates the Greek and most adequately conveys the meaning of the experience. The translation "in" is preferable for two reasons.

First, the Greek preposition *en* is the most versatile preposition in the New Testament and may be variously translated, depending on the context." Most of the English prepositions except such as *from* and *beside*, will have to be requisitioned at one time or another to translate it."¹¹

Of all the translation options available, the most viable are "by," "with," and "in." We may eliminate "by" in the Gospels and Acts passages since John the Baptist said Jesus is the One who baptizes. It is a baptism *by* Jesus *in* the Holy Spirit.

Second, "in" is preferable to "with" because it properly conveys the imagery of baptism. The Greek verb *baptizō* means to immerse or to dip. It would be very awkward to say, "He shall immerse (or dip) you *with* the Holy Spirit"; the more natural rendering is "*in* the Holy Spirit." The preference for "*in* the Holy Spirit" is strengthened by John the Baptist's analogy of the experience with the baptism he administered, which took place *in* water.

A preference for "in" as the correct translation of the Gospels and Acts passages involves more than semantic hairsplitting. It reflects a correct understanding of the nature of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, emphasizing that it is an experience in which a believer is totally immersed in the Spirit.

Being baptized *in* the Holy Spirit should be distinguished from being baptized *by* the Spirit *into* the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). The same preposition, *en*, occurs in this verse, the first part of which reads, "For we were all baptized by [*en*] one Spirit into one body." "By" designates the Holy Spirit as the means or the instrument by which this baptism takes place. The experience Paul speaks of is different from the experience mentioned by John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter in the other six passages.

The two groups of passages under discussion (the six in the Gospels and Acts, the one in 1 Corinthians) do indeed have a few similar terms. But it is questionable to insist that because

certain combinations of words occur in different passages, their translation and meaning must be the same in all. Apart from the similarities, some differences and disparities exist between the two groups of passages.¹² For instance, in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul mentions the "one" Spirit; he does not use the full two-word designation "Holy Spirit"; and he talks about being baptized "into one body" (v. 13). Furthermore, in the Greek text the prepositional phrase "*en* the one Spirit" precedes the verb "baptize"; in all the other passages it follows the verb. The one exception is Acts 1:5 where, curious to some, the verb comes between "Spirit" and "Holy."

Context often determines one's choice in translating a word or expression. Therefore we need to see how Paul himself uses expressions similar or identical to "*en* the one Spirit." The immediate context in 1 Corinthians 12, which contains four such phrases, is determinative.

Verse 3 reads, "No one speaking by [*en*] the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by [*en*] the Holy Spirit" (NASB). Verse 9, which continues Paul's list of spiritual gifts, reads, "To another faith by [*en*] the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by [*en*] the one Spirit" (NASB). In the Greek text, this last phrase is identical to the one in verse 13, with the exception that it contains the word "the." In all these occurrences in the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 12:13 where *en* is linked with the Holy Spirit, the translation "by" comes much more easily and is more readily understood than any other translation. Furthermore, the entire chapter talks about the activity of the Holy Spirit. Therefore the reading "by one Spirit" is preferable.¹³ This concept of being baptized into the body of Christ is mentioned in a slightly different way in Romans 6:3, which speaks about being "baptized into Christ Jesus," and in Galatians 3:27, which speaks about being "baptized into Christ." This baptism is therefore different from the baptism mentioned by John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter in the Gospels and in Acts. According to John the Baptist, it is Jesus who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. According to Paul, it is the Holy Spirit who baptizes into Christ, or into the body of Christ. If this distinction is not maintained, we have the strange idea that Christ baptizes into Christ.

Following are the main translation options for 1 Corinthians 12:13 offered by various persons:

- Baptized by the Spirit into the body (the view of most Pentecostals and many non-Pentecostals)
- Baptized by the Spirit for¹⁴ the body
- Baptized in (the sphere of) the Spirit into the body¹⁵
- Baptized in (the sphere of) the Spirit for the body
- Baptized (charismatically) in the Spirit for (the purpose of) the body¹⁶

The precise meaning of the phrase "in/by the one Spirit" continues to be debated. Even if Paul meant "in" (sphere), the phrase would not necessarily mean what it does in the other six passages. Paul and Luke could use similar terms but with different nuances of meaning. But in no event should Paul's meaning determine Luke's meaning.¹⁷

The distinction between being baptized "by" the Spirit and being baptized "in" the Spirit is not attributable to a Pentecostal hermeneutical or doctrinal bias. A comparison of the translation of *en* in 1 Corinthians 12:13 in major versions of the Bible shows a decided

preference even by non-Pentecostal scholars for the rendering "by." That translation appears in the following major versions: King James Version, New King James Version, *New American Standard Bible*, New International Version, Revised Standard Version, *The Living Bible*, Today's English Version, *The New Testament in Modern English*.

How do the two clauses in 1 Corinthians 12:13—"We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" and "We were all given the one Spirit to drink"—relate to each other?¹⁸

The main interpretations are these:

1. The first clause refers to baptism in water, and the second clause to the Lord's Supper. But "were given to drink" is in the aorist (simple past) tense, indicating a completed action, and thus eliminates an allusion to the Lord's Supper.

2. Both clauses refer to conversion and are in the literary form of Hebrew synonymous parallelism; that is, the same thought is expressed in two different ways. The baptism is the baptism predicted by John the Baptist. This seems to be the view of many scholars. It is rejected by most Pentecostals.

3. The clauses refer to conversion and are an example of Hebrew synonymous parallelism, but they do not refer to the baptism predicted by John the Baptist. This is the position of many, perhaps most, Pentecostals. In my judgment, it is the most tenable. .

4. The first clause refers to conversion, and the second to a subsequent work of the Spirit. It is the position of some Pentecostals and charismatics.¹⁹

5. Both clauses refer to a postconversion work of the Spirit. This is the position of some Pentecostals.

ENDNOTES

¹¹C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1959), 75.

¹²John R. W. Stott says, incorrectly, "The Greek expression is precisely the same in all its seven occurrences." *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, 2d ed. (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1976), 40.

¹³E. Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 141; and David Petts, "Baptism of the Spirit in Pauline Thought: A Pentecostal Perspective," *European Pentecostal Theological Association Bulletin* 7, no. 3 (1988): 93.

¹⁴Gk. *eis*, "for the purpose of/with a view to"; "with respect to." Petts, "Baptism of the Spirit 93-94.

¹⁵Turner, "Spirit Endowment," 52.

¹⁶Donald A. Johns explains: "To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation into charismatic ministry that is directed toward the body, the local church, promoting healthy function and unity." *Some New Dimensions*, 161.

¹⁷Oss, "Pentecostal/Charismatic View," 259. Some, however, insist that Paul's meaning is primary because it is "didactic." Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, 15; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Holy Spirit Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1972), 23-24.

¹⁸"We were given to drink" is one word in the Gk. text—*epotisthēmen*, the aorist indicative of *potizō*. For a discussion of whether the word in 1 Cor. 12:13 means "drink" or "water/irrigate," see E. R. Rogers, "EPOTISTHEMEN Again," *New Testament Studies* 29 (1983): 141 (prefers "drink"); and G. J. Cuming, "EPOTISTHEMEN (1 Corinthians 12.13)," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 285 (prefers "water/irrigate").

¹⁹See Howard M. Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984), 98-102.

Excerpt from review of *Perspectives on Spirit Baptism: Five Views*, Chad Owen Brand, ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 338 pages, by Robert W. Graves, in http://www.pneumafoundation.org/article.jsp?article=article_0064.xml (accessed 11/11/09). [Augmented 2011.]

. . . Kaiser, taking his cue from John R. Stott, uses 1 Corinthians 12:13a at least 14 times in structuring his Reformed position of Spirit baptism or rebutting the Pentecostal position. I was disappointed that Horton did not take him to task for his heavy dependence upon a single verse. His entire argument hinges upon a two-letter Greek word, the preposition *en*, which, according to him, must be translated *in* (“*in* one Spirit we were all baptized”) and must be univocal in meaning with the other six non-Pauline occurrences. Furthermore, this Pauline *baptism in the Spirit*, once asserted, must be the one passage that controls the other six. Hence, the one-verse soteriology of Paul trumps the prophetic empowerment contexts of John the Baptist, quoted by Jesus, who was in turn quoted by Peter (and all by Luke).

Because of Kaiser’s misuse of 1 Cor. 12:13a, I took a closer look at it and the other six that mention Spirit baptism. This is what I found:

- (1) Paul’s clause contains 11 words, seven of which do not occur in any of the other six passages (actually eight, since *kai* is not used in the same sense);
- (2) Of the 15 different words that are used in the other six, Paul matches only two of them *identically* (“in,” and “Spirit”), and even then, not by order;
- (3) Two words that Paul uses (“one body”) that are critical to his intent and Kaiser’s view do not occur in any of the other six passages;
- (4) Two of Paul’s words that are common to all the verses are separated by another critical word, “one,” transforming the critical phrase “in the Holy Spirit” in the six non-Pauline verses to “in one Spirit,” which is balanced semantically by “in one body,” a phrase totally foreign to the six;
- (5) The verb in Paul’s verse (“were baptized”) occurs in a tense and person not found in the six non-Pauline verses.

Apparently, Luke and Paul were not describing identical Christian experiences, but I do not come to this conclusion merely because of the grammatical differences; these serve only as clues. The greater point is made not with grammar but with contexts, that is, Paul’s and Luke’s contexts (see Stronstad’s comments below). In the immediate Pauline text, the preposition *en* with the dative *pneuma*, is best rendered “by” in the three contexts wherein it occurs in chapter 12, i.e., 12:3 (2x) and 9 (2x), simply because the prepositional phrases in these verses function as datives of *agency* (because the Holy Spirit functions as a person; see Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek NT in the Light of Historical Research*, 532[j]; Wenham, *The Elements of NT Greek*, 70; see Smythe, *Greek Grammar*, #1504). Since the Spirit is the agent and the body the location, this

baptism is apparently an initiation-incorporation act performed by the Spirit (as in its Pauline parallels in Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27; see Palma above). If it isn't performed by the Holy Spirit, who is the baptizer? If the exegete makes it the elliptical (assumed) Jesus, then he is creating an exception to all other occurrences of Spirit baptism in the NT, wherein the baptizer is specifically stated to be Jesus or refer back to John the Baptist's statement that compares his baptism in water to *Jesus'* baptism of believers in the Spirit (in the Acts occurrences). (The statistical number of prior stated subjects in this context militates against the claim of the commonness of the divine passive.)

In reference to $\epsilon\nu$, Robertson said, "Fierce polemical battles have been waged over its usage, but the theological bearing of the preposition can come only from the context" (*A Short Grammar of the Greek NT*, 120). The next important question should be *Does the context of 1 Cor. 12:13 allow the dative $\epsilon\nu$ to be interpreted as a dative of agency? The cotexts of 12:13, i.e., 12:3 and 9, contain the datives of agency best rendered with "by." But it is verse 11 that is operative: "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." This verse appears to, unequivocally, put the Spirit in the agent position, with power to will and distribute, and I would argue that he is still in that position two verses later.*

In the Lukan text, John the Baptist's statement, later quoted by Jesus, is adequately explained by Jesus (through Luke). It occurs in Acts 1:8, where Theophilus learns that this baptism, yet to come to the disciple-believers, will be for *power to witness*—elements not in view in 1 Cor. 12:13a.

So, the Pentecostal can agree with the non-Pentecostal that the baptism of 12:13a incorporates the new believer into the body of Christ; the Pentecostal, with some charity and the turning of a blind eye to nuancing, can even agree that it is a "Spirit-baptism"; where the Pentecostal would disagree would be in designating it the Spirit-baptism of which Luke (and Matthew, Mark, and John) wrote, for that Spirit-baptism clearly occurs after (or possibly simultaneously with) conversion and is repeatable (see Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9 [52?]) and has a manifestly different function. Whereas Paul's "Spirit baptism" functions to incorporate the believer into the body of Christ, Luke's Spirit baptism fills the believer with power to witness (Acts 1:8). I think we get a glimpse of this usage in Paul in Eph. 5:17–19, 1 Cor. 2:4–5, and 1 Thes. 1:5.

Roger Stronstad, "On Being Baptized in the Holy Spirit: A Lukan Emphasis," in *Trajectories in the Book of Acts: Essays in Honor of John Wesley Wyckoff* (ed. Paul Alexander et al.; Eugene, Oreg., 2010), 161.

The term "baptized in the Holy Spirit" appears just seven times in the NT. Yet its value outweighs its limited number of references. Of the seven, one is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian Church. He writes, "for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (12.13). This passage references initiation-incorporation (cf. 1 Cor 12.18). The four evangelists also report John the Baptist's prophecy regarding his successor who "will baptize in the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3.11–12; Mark 1.7–8; Luke 3.16–17; John 1.30–34). But Luke, and Luke alone, reports Jesus' reference to the Baptist's prophecy as the day of Pentecost approached (Acts 1.4–5) and Cornelius' reception of the Spirit as a fulfillment of the Baptist's prophecy (Acts 11.16). Thus, Matthew, Mark, John, and Paul each

have one reference to being baptized in the Holy Spirit; yet Luke has three references to this experience. From these numbers one may infer that being baptized in the Holy Spirit is more important to Luke than to any other NT writer. As a corollary, one may also infer that the meaning of the term in Luke's narrative is the normative meaning. A further corollary is that Paul's use of the term in his letter to the Corinthians does not determine its meaning in Luke-Acts. One final observation is that each of Luke's three references to the term is interpreted in its immediate context (Luke 3.16–17; Acts 1.5/2.1–21; Acts 10.44–48/11.15–17).