

**The Gospel of John (9);
The Prelude to the Public Ministry of Jesus (1:19-51) (part 4)**

Introduction:

Last Lord's Day we were addressing the witness of John the Baptist which he rendered directly to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is set forth before us in John 1:29-34.

John bore witness of Jesus as the Messiah in two ways. First, he declared that Jesus was the promised Savior of the world (1:29-31). Secondly, he then declared that God had directly identified and confirmed to John that Jesus was the promised Messiah (1:32-34). Here are these two paragraphs of John 1:29-34:

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' ³¹I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."

³²And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)

We had proposed this outline of these verses:

- I. John revealed the identity of Jesus as the Promised Savior of the world (1:29-31)
 - A. John identified Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God (v. 29)
 - B. John identified Jesus as the One He had previously declared was coming (v. 30)
 - C. John declared his calling to reveal Jesus to Israel (v. 31)
- II. John bore witness of Jesus the Messiah Whom God identified to him (1:32-34)
 - A. John bore witness of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus (v. 32)
 - B. John tells how God identified to him that Jesus was the Messiah (v. 33)
 - C. John testified that he had fulfilled his mission to reveal the Son of God to the people (v. 34)

Let us review quickly what we found last week and then move on to the second of these two paragraphs.

I. John revealed the identity of Jesus as the promised Savior of the world (1:29-31)

God had called John to be a witness of the preincarnate Son of God in the Man Jesus Christ. We see first, that...

A. John identified Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God (v. 29). We read, "*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'*"

B. John identified Jesus as the One he had previously declared was coming (v. 30). Verse 30 reads, "*This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'*" Here we see John the Baptist again bearing witness of Jesus Christ, particularly with view to Him as

the preincarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity. We have already considered that John gave witness of to the divinity of Jesus earlier in this chapter. We read in John 1:15, “John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, “He who comes after me *is preferred before me, for He was before me.*”’” And then it is stated again in John 1:26f, “John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, *is preferred before me,* whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.’” And we have it here expressed for the third time in verse 30.

But there is a different emphasis in this statement of verse 30 than what we read earlier. In verse 30 there is more than just a recital of what the Evangelist already recorded. Here he gives emphasis to the *humanity* of the preincarnate Son of God. John declared, “*After me comes a Man...*” The eternal Word who was God is also a Man. The eternal Son of God took in union with His divine nature our human nature. Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. It is at this point we left off last Lord’s Day.

Let us next consider **verse 31** which concludes this description of John the Baptist’s witness to our Savior.

C. John declared his calling to reveal Jesus to Israel (v. 31)

We continue to read the words of John the Baptist in verse 31, “*I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.*”

John testified that he did not know Jesus to be the Messiah. This is somewhat of a mystery, in that Jesus was John’s cousin by natural birth, and that John had even “known” Jesus when he was in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:41). But much had transpired. Thirty years later John did not know that Jesus was the Messiah, until God signified to him that Jesus was the Christ. God did so by enabling John to see the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus at His baptism.

John declared that his entire ministry of baptizing was for the purpose of revealing Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah to Israel. John the Baptist declared, “*but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.*” God had called John to call the people to repentance and that they were to be baptized with view to the forgiveness of sins. The reason for this action was because the Promised King was about to appear before them. And then John was also called to baptize Jesus, because it was in this event that God revealed to John the identity of the Promised Messiah. And thereafter, John revealed to Israel that Jesus was the promised Christ.

One might have thought that John’s baptism was concerned largely with leading men to repent. But this was not John’s final purpose. John baptized in view of the coming of the Messiah. He baptized in order that the Messiah would be “made manifest to Israel.”¹

Let us now consider the second aspect of John’s witness to Jesus, in that John declared that God Himself had revealed and confirmed Jesus to be the promised Messiah.

II. John bore witness of Jesus the Messiah Whom God identified to him (1:32-34)

Let us again read John 1:32-34 from the New King James Version:

And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”

A. John bore witness of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus (v. 32)

¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 151.

This verse records John the Baptist's continual witness of Jesus as the Christ some weeks after John had baptized Him. We have already shown how the theme of "witness" is a major emphasis of this Fourth Gospel. This is the fifth occasion that John used this word, "witness", in this first chapter alone.

Here in verse 32 John was speaking of what he had witnessed much earlier. John testified that when he had baptized Jesus he had seen the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus "like a dove", which we should understand to have been in the form of a dove. There are some who have rejected the idea that the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove, but rather they argue that John saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus as a dove descends, in other words, "which pretty much resembled the hovering and lighting of a dove upon anything."² It would seem to me, however, that it is best understood that John saw a dove descend upon Jesus, which he had recognized to be a visible representation of the invisible Holy Spirit.

The dove is an emblem of the Holy Spirit. How is the Holy Spirit like a dove? Some suggest it implies the simplicity, meekness, and love of the Holy Spirit. Others suggest the main thought is "the dove-like innocence, humility, and affection of Christ, on whom he lighted."³

What John "saw" was not only significant, it was quite remarkable. The verb the Evangelist used, which is translated "saw" in our text, is not the more common Greek word for "seeing."

"The verb John uses to describe what he "saw" (Τεθέαμαι) is used in the New Testament to denote seeing with the physical eye, though it can carry along with physical sight a sense of perception that is 'above and beyond what is merely seen with the eye.'"⁴

The tense of this verb is also somewhat unusual, in that it is a perfect tense verb. Perhaps the best way to translate this statement would be, "I *had beheld* the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him."⁵ John was testifying much later what he had witnessed firsthand on the occasion that he had baptized Jesus.

There is not a great deal of information about Jewish belief in the Holy Spirit *in the form of a dove*. Some see a correlation with the Holy Spirit "brooding over the deep" in Genesis 1:2, which speaks of the Holy Spirit ready to bring about the six day work of creation. In **Genesis 1:1f** we read,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And *the Spirit of God was hovering* over the face of the waters.

And so, in Genesis 1 the Holy Spirit "was hovering" over the face of the chaotic waters signifying the onset of God's work of creation of this world and all life upon it. Here in John 1 in which the Holy Spirit descends and lights upon Jesus Christ, signals that through Jesus Christ is the onset of *the new creation*. Through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is commissioned and empowered to effect the promised new creation.

Interestingly, there was an early Jewish writing that wrote of the dove that Noah had let fly forth from the Ark never to return. We read of this event in **Genesis 8:6-12**.

⁶So it came to pass, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. ⁷Then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. ⁸He also sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground. ⁹But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself. ¹⁰And he waited yet another seven days, and again he sent the dove out from the ark. ¹¹Then the dove came to him in the evening, and behold, a freshly plucked olive leaf was in her

² John Gill, *John*, Gill's Commentary on the Whole Bible, p. 71.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 135.

⁵ The New American Standard Version (NASV) translated v. 32, "...*I have beheld* the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him."

mouth; and Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth. ¹²So he waited yet another seven days and sent out the dove, *which did not return again to him anymore*.

The Jewish writing, to which I referred, expressed the belief that this dove, which did not return to Noah, would one day come carry the crown to rest upon the head of the Messiah when He appeared to His people. This is from the commentary on John's Gospel by **John Gill**:

However, who can read this account without thinking of Noah's dove, which brought in its mouth the olive leaf, a token of peace and reconciliation, when the waters were abated from off the earth? Give me leave to transcribe a passage I have met with in the book of Zohar; "a door shall be opened, and out of it shall come forth the dove which Noah sent out in the days of the flood, as it is written, "and he sent forth the dove", that famous dove; but the ancients speak not of it, for they knew not what it was, only from whence it came, and did its message; as it is written, "it returned not again unto him any more": no man knows whither it went, but it returned to its place, and was hid within this door; and it shall take a crown in its mouth, and put it upon the head of the king Messiah." And a little after, the dove is said to abide upon his head, and he to receive glory from it.

This suggests the belief on the part of some ancient Jews that the dove would set the crown of kingship upon the Messiah, thus it was God anointing the Messiah to serve as His king over His people. Now please do not misunderstand, we are not advocating this was actually a right understanding of the dove that departed from Noah but did not return to him, but it does connect the dove with the Messiah in at least some Jewish thinking from early times.

Nevertheless, in the days of Noah, when the dove departed from him, leaving the ark and not returning, it indicated that the dove came across new life in the post-diluvium world. And when God called forth Noah and his family from the ark, the Genesis account clearly sets forth the idea of God having set before them a new creation, having washed the old world with the flood waters, cleansing it of the corrupt human race that had populated its surface, and now Noah and his family would signal a new start in a new creation.⁶

We have already considered that the Evangelist's emphasis in this first chapter of John was on the new creation. Just as we read in Genesis 1:1 these words, "In the beginning", so we read the opening words of John 1:1, "In the beginning. And just as we read of the Holy Spirit hovering over the face of the waters in Genesis 1:2, here we read of the Holy Spirit coming down upon Jesus while He stood in the baptismal waters of Jordan, signaling that this One would affect the long-promised new creation in which God would dwell with His people.

Now, John had not only seen the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove, but he saw that the dove landed upon and then "remained" upon Jesus. The Greek verb translated "remained" emphasizes a continual abiding of the Spirit that had landed upon Jesus.

The Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus at His baptism was God empowering Jesus of Nazareth to fulfil His office as the promised Jewish Messiah, the Son of David who would rise to reign over Israel. This was God anointing His Son to His office as Messiah, which would be realized through His roles and functions as anointed High Priest, anointed Prophet, and anointed King, the Son of David.

This event at the Jordan River is to be understood to be the fulfillment of God's promises that He gave through His prophets of the Old Testament. Perhaps the prophecy of Isaiah is most pronounced in this regard. For example, we read **Isaiah 11:1** and **2** these words:

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.

⁶ For example, God gave the same command to Noah that He had originally given to Adam and Eve: "be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth" (Cf. Gen. 8:17; 9:1; 1:22, 28).

²*The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,*
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:1-2)

We also read the words of **Isaiah 42:1-4** regarding the coming Servant of God:

“Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,
My Elect One in whom My soul delights!
I have put My Spirit upon Him;
He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.
²He will not cry out, nor raise His voice,
Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.
³A bruised reed He will not break,
And smoking flax He will not quench;
He will bring forth justice for truth.
⁴He will not fail nor be discouraged,
Till He has established justice in the earth;
And the coastlands shall wait for His law.”

And lastly, we may read **Isaiah 61:1-3**:

“***The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,***
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
²To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
³To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

Regarding this last passage, our Lord applied this prophecy to Himself in the synagogue at Nazareth. We read of this in **Luke 4:20f**:

²⁰Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

This event took place not long after Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River.

Now we cited three passages from Isaiah (chapters 11, 42, and 61), that speak of the Messiah, or the Servant of the Lord, being anointed with the Holy Spirit. These were prophecies of the promised age of salvation to Israel that would commence with the arrival of the Messiah. With the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism, God was announcing and declaring that the days of fulfillment had arrived. Later, on the Day of Pentecost, when the risen and enthroned Son of David poured out His Spirit upon His people,

the days of fulfillment commenced. **Thomas Schreiner** wrote of these themes as having been set forth in the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah:

The servant is endowed by the Spirit (42:1; 61:1). Only by virtue of the power of the Spirit does he carry out his ministry, by which he suffers for the sins of Israel. If we put all of Isaiah together, we see that the son of Jesse, the Davidic king, is also anointed with the Spirit (11:2). What is remarkable is that in chapter 11 the Spirit-endowed one brings in the new creation, which, as was argued above, is the same blessing brought by the servant of the Lord in chapters 40-66. It seems fair to conclude from Isaiah's own narrative that the servant of the Lord and the future Davidic king are the same person, for both are Spirit empowered and bring about the new creation. Of course, this fits well with the New Testament witness, as we will see, Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Messiah, the royal son of David, the one who will bring in the kingdom of God. But he is also the servant of the Lord, the one who dies as a ransom to deliver his people from their sin (Matt. 20:28).

The coming of the Spirit in Isaiah signals the fulfillment of Yahweh's (Jehovah's) promises to Israel. Israel suffers judgment because of its sins (32:10-14), but when the Spirit is poured out, the new creation will dawn (21:15-16). Israel will be secure, at peace, and live righteously in the land (32:17-18). Similarly, the end-time blessing for Israel will come when Yahweh pours His Spirit upon Israel (44:3). When the Spirit is dispensed, Yahweh's covenant with Israel will be fulfilled (59:11). We see another indication that the Isaianic themes cannot be asundered from one another. The Spirit is the eschatological Spirit who brings eschatological salvation, and the servant of the Lord is endowed with that Spirit, showing that the new creation cannot arrive apart from the Spirit or apart from the servant of the Lord. In the New Testament Jesus, as the exalted and resurrected Lord (see Acts 2, especially 2:33), is the one who pours out the Spirit on His people (cf. John 7:37-39). The Spirit is poured out when Jesus is glorified, and the coming of the Spirit signals the arrival of the last days, the fulfillment of all of God's saving promises.⁷

Now in this statement of John 1:32, of John's witness of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus at his baptism, John's ministry was coming to a conclusion. Of John the Baptist it was written,

The Baptist is not Elijah or the Prophet, and is certainly not the Christ; rather he is the one who sees and points, the one who understands in order to testify to what he has seen. He is nothing more, for nothing more is needed. Once the Spirit descends "upon him," all attention has moved appropriately from the witness to his subject matter.⁸

After the account of John in these few verses before us, the Lord Jesus Himself becomes the central person of this Fourth Gospel.

B. John tells how God identified to him that Jesus was the Messiah (v. 33)

We continue to read the words of Baptist in verse 33, "***I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'***"

Here in verse 33 John repeated his statement of verse 31, "***I did not know Him.***" We touched on this last week when we considered the earlier verse. Different opinions have been expressed as to what John meant. After all, it could be reasoned, Jesus and John the Baptist were cousins and before John was born he had recognized Jesus in the womb of the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:41, 44). How, then, could John say that he did not know Him?

⁷ Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty; A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Baker Academic, 2013), pp. 344f.

⁸ Klink, *John*, p. 136.

Chrysostom (AD 347-407), an early noted preacher, said that “John is speaking of former times, and not of the times near to his baptism.”⁹ **Augustine** (AD 354-430) believed that John was saying,

“I had not known till the day that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Ghost, although I had long known him personally, and had recognized Him as the Christ of God. But when He came to be baptized, it was also revealed to me that He would confer on men the great gift of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰

Still others thought John was saying,

“I had not known Jesus by sight until the day when He came to be baptized. I knew that He had been born of the Virgin Mary, but was not personally acquainted with Him, having myself been brought up in the wilderness.”¹¹

And then **Matthew Poole** (1624-1679), who was one of Charles Spurgeon’s favorite commentators, believed that John the Baptist was declaring,

“I knew Him not perfectly or distinctly, though I had an impression when I first saw Him coming to be baptized, that He was one far greater than myself, and under that impression demurred to baptizing Him. After His baptism I saw clearly who He was.”¹²

This was the view that **J. C. Ryle** had preferred above the rest.

The last explanation is perhaps the simplest, and most probable. That John at one time did not know our Lord by sight at all, that he afterwards knew Him imperfectly, and that his perfect knowledge of Him, His nature, office, and work, was not attained till the time when the Spirit descended at His baptism, are points that seem clear. The time when he said, “I have need to be baptized of Thee,” would seem to be the time of imperfect knowledge, when the fact that Jesus was the Messiah began to dawn upon him, and made him cry out, “Comest Thou to me?”¹³

After John declared that he had not known Jesus, he said, “*but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’*” We are not told when or how God had communicated this sign of recognition to John. One could assume, however, it was when God had originally called and commissioned John to baptize them who had repented of sins with view to the soon arrival of the Kingdom of God.

By the way, here we see this well-used term by the Evangelist, “sent.” As we said earlier regarding this term that concept of being sent as a messenger on behalf of a sender was common in the ancient world. As such, (1) the one sent was viewed as the representative of the sender. And (2) obedience on the part of the one who had been sent is demanded. God *sent* John the Baptist. His witness was credible and legitimate. He came with the authority of God who had sent him. John, too, was faithful in the mission to which he had been sent, in that he faithfully bore witness of Jesus Christ. The point of emphasis is that God had sent John, therefore John came forth with divine authority to bear witness to Christ. John was a trustworthy and authoritative witness to the Word of God incarnate. Later in our Lord’s ministry He challenged the Jewish leaders regarding the legitimacy and authority of John to baptize because God had sent him to baptize. We read of this interchange in **Luke 20:1-7**:

⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 66.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Now it happened on one of those days, as He taught the people in the temple and preached the gospel, that the chief priests and the scribes, together with the elders, confronted Him ² and spoke to Him, saying, “Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things? Or who is he who gave You this authority?”

³But He answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing, and answer Me: ⁴The baptism of John—was it from heaven or from men?”

⁵And they reasoned among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ⁶But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, for they are persuaded that John was a prophet.” ⁷So they answered that they did not know where it was from.

⁸And Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

God had told John the Baptist, *‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’*” This is was a sign to John alone. The others who witnessed the baptism of Jesus did not see the sign that God had intended for John. Perhaps they had seen the dove descending upon Jesus, but they did not know that this was the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus to equip Him for His ministry.

God had shown John that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would baptize His people with the Holy Spirit. In the Synoptic Gospels, John’s baptism in water is set in parallel with Jesus baptizing in the Holy Spirit. Here are the statements of John:

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 fire.”

Mark 1:8. “I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Luke 3:16. “John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’”

Jesus Christ baptizes His people with the Holy Spirit. The parallel is with John baptizing with water. In any baptismal setting, you have the baptizer, who is baptizing people, into the sphere of something. John baptized people in water. Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit.

This may sound rather simplistic, but it actually refutes an error that is commonly assumed and taught by many Christians. When they speak of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they are thinking in their minds of an experience in which the Holy Spirit baptizes people. But the Holy Scriptures never teach that the Holy Spirit baptizes, rather, what is taught is that Jesus baptizes His people in the Holy Spirit. John baptized people in water; Jesus baptizes people in the Holy Spirit.

After God had revealed to John the Baptist that this Jesus is “He who baptizes in the Holy Spirit”, then John thereafter announced before the people that Jesus was this promised One.

What is suggested or meant by Jesus baptizing His people in the Holy Spirit? This is an extremely important and relevant matter, which speaks to the very nature of the salvation that Jesus Christ bestows upon His people.

First, we should understand what being baptized in the Holy Spirit is not. It is not to be understood as a second blessing that a believer may experience some time after he initially comes to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The doctrine and experience of Pentecostals and those who advocate a Wesleyan view of sanctification is not biblical. The Lord Jesus baptizes His people in the Holy Spirit when they are converted to Him.

Second, being baptized in the Holy Spirit should not be understood as a blessing for only some Christians. The Lord Jesus baptizes in the Holy Spirit everyone who becomes a Christian, everyone who becomes His disciple. This baptism of the Holy Spirit is part of the experience of everyone who comes to salvation. On the Day of Pentecost, after the risen and enthroned Son of David, Jesus Christ, poured out His Holy Spirit upon those 120 disciples in the Upper Room, Peter declared that everyone who repents of sin and believes on Jesus Christ the Lord for salvation, would receive this gift of the Holy Spirit. We read from Acts 2:36ff these words:

³⁶“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

³⁷Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

³⁸Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹***For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.***” (Acts 2:36-39)

Everyone who receives salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, that is, everyone that God effectually calls to salvation, receives this gift of the Holy Spirit.

Third, we should understand that Jesus baptizing His people with (in) the Holy Spirit is the realization of God’s promises of the Age of the Messiah that the prophets foretold in the Old Testament. Again, Peter declared this on the Day of Pentecost. When the people of Jerusalem gathered because of the remarkable phenomena that was taking place among the disciples of Jesus, the people thought the 120 disciples were drunk with wine. They heard these disciples speaking in foreign languages that were unfamiliar to them. The people thought that they were drunk. But Peter declared otherwise. He said these words to the gathered people, many of who were hearing “the wonderful works of God” in their own languages:

“Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶***But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:***

¹⁷“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That ***I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;***
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.

¹⁹I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

²⁰The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.

²¹And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the LORD
Shall be saved.’ (Acts 2:14-21)

Now this is not saying that the phenomena that was manifested on the Day of Pentecost is normative for all Christians at all times and in all places. Joel's prophecy declared that when this event of Pentecost occurred, these phenomena would be manifested. And they were. And in other places in Acts some of these phenomena were also witnessed when the same experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit was received by Samaritans (Acts 8:17), Gentile God-fearers (Acts 10:46), and later still, Greeks in far off Gentile lands (Acts 19:6).

Fourth, the baptism of the Holy Spirit transforms people from living as sinners into His people living as saints. The Lord Jesus performs this act of baptizing in the Holy Spirit upon everyone who comes to true faith in Him. He thereby secures and enables His people to order their lives according to the law of God, which is the standard of righteousness that God has set forth in His Holy Word. This is very important to understanding the true nature of salvation. We read these words in **Romans 8:1ff**:

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. ³***For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh,*** ⁴***that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*** ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. ⁶For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷***Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*** ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹***But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.*** Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ¹⁰And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

¹²Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³***For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*** ¹⁴***For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.***

Fifth, this experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit was a blessing of the promised Kingdom of God, a blessing of the new covenant that God had promised that He would enact with the house of Israel. After God had declared His judgment upon Israel, He promised salvation for them, in which He would secure their desire and their ability to live in righteousness before Him. Here is God's promise to a remnant of His people, the ones He purposed to save through Jesus Christ:

²³And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. ²⁴For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. ²⁵***Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.*** ²⁶***I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*** ²⁷***I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*** (Ezek. 36:23-27)

The sprinkling of clean water in order to cleanse them is not a prophecy of baptism by sprinkling. It speaks of ***God forgiving His people of their sins*** but also of ***God purifying His people of their life of sinning against Him.*** This is accomplished with God putting His Holy Spirit within them, giving them both the desire and the ability to live in righteousness before Him. It is all due to God's work of grace which He

performs on behalf of, and within, the souls of His people. This began to take place at Pentecost, and it continues to take place in the life of every true Christian.

The Lord Jesus told His disciples that the Father would impart the Holy Spirit to them so that He would dwell in them. This took place at Pentecost. In the Upper Room the night He was betrayed, Jesus said to His disciples:

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--¹⁷the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you *and will be in you*.” (John 14:16f)

C. John testified that he had fulfilled his mission to reveal the Son of God to the people (v. 34)

We read in **John 1:34**, “*And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.*” John concluded his witness of Jesus Christ by again asserting the deity of Jesus Christ—Jesus is the Son of God. Later the Jesus Himself declared that He is the Son of God. And then the Jewish leaders sought to kill Him. We read in John 5:18, “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

The verb tenses of verse 34 are significant. John was saying that he had continually born witness that Jesus was the Son of God.

Again, the Greek perfects (i.e. perfect tense verbs) must be allowed their full force. “I have seen” means much the same as “I have beheld” in verse 32. “Have born witness” points to the continuing effect of the Baptist’s words. They were not the idle utterance of the moment, said and then over. They continued with full effect.¹⁴

Conclusion:

We have had the Lord Jesus set before us as the eternal Son of God who took upon Himself our human nature and dwelt among us in this fallen world. God the Father sent Him to be the Savior of sinners. This salvation that He works in His people is set forth in the two great depictions of His person to which John the Baptist bore faithful witness. *First, Jesus Christ is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (1:29); and secondly, “this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”* The first description sets forth the Lord Jesus as the Savior who can bring to His people God’s *forgiveness of their sins* that damn their souls. The second description sets forth the Lord Jesus as *the Savior who can enable His people to live holy lives*, “for without holiness, no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14). We need our Savior to be our sacrificial Lamb to bear our sin. We need our Savior to be our King to give us the Holy Spirit so that we may live as the children of God. Both are equally the work of salvation by God’s grace alone. We need both pardon and purity, and the Lord Jesus provides for both of these essentials for the eternal salvation of our souls.

But it is a very sad and tragic matter that in today’s Christianity, forgiveness of sins is often offered and pronounced upon those who claim to believe on the Lord Jesus as their Savior, but their lives are void of desires and displays of holiness. Many are promised the forgiveness of sins, even when there is no declaration of repentance from their sins. They declare Jesus as the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. But they fail to declare Jesus as the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. They offer people a form of godliness, while denying its power. The Apostle Paul had warned Timothy that the days would come when a perverted, powerless, Christianity would characterize the churches. Paul wrote,

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ²For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴treacherous, reckless,

¹⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 153.

swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.* (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

We live in days that Jude wrote about:

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, *who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.* (Jude 4, ESV)

They are ungodly men, but they are in the churches teaching a distorted form of grace that does not produce purity, but rather excuses perversion and perniciousness. We spoke with a man the other day who told of speaking to a so-called brother in the church he attends. The man began to spew out sentences laced with foul language, even the “F” word, and this within the church building. Our friend exhorted him about his foul language that it was sin to speak in that manner. He responded that it did not matter, for he was saved by grace. This is not biblical Christianity.

The Christian life set forth in the Holy Scriptures is a life of holiness before the Lord. The Lord Jesus bestows the power of the Holy Spirit upon His people to enable them to live before Him in righteousness. Now it is impossible for an unregenerate person to live the Christian life. But it is equally impossible for a truly redeemed man to live otherwise. Paul wrote:

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. ⁷Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. ⁸So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. *Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.* (Rom. 8:6 NKJ)

It matters not what a person claims to believe. It matters not if he claims he is trusting in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins. If he lives in disregard of God’s commandments, he is no Christian. As John wrote in his short epistle,

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, (1 John 2:3f, ESV)

May the Lord enable us not to suck the life out of biblical Christianity, presenting or believing that people can have salvation, a covenant relationship with our holy God, and yet not desire to live holy lives. Let us hold forth the Christianity that is set forth in the Word of God, a life that is impossible for anyone to live apart from the saving grace of God, but a life to which the Lord can enable any sinner to live, because He is the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world and He is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom. 15:13)
