

Baptism of the Spirit

Some of the references to different baptisms

- Mark 10:38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?" [Death]
- Luke 12:50 But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! [Death]
- Matthew 3:11 He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [Holy Spirit and Judgment]
- John 3:23 Now John also was baptising at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptised. [Water]

All of the Direct references to baptism of the Spirit

- Matthew 3:11 "I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."
- Mark 1:8 I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."
- Luke 3:16 John answered them all, "I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."
- John 1:33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.'
- Acts 1:5 For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit."
- Acts 11:16 Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'
- 1 Corinthians 12:13 For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Other Phrases that refer to the baptism of the Spirit

The very same incident described in Acts 11:16 (15-18) is also described in Acts 10:44-48 and Acts 15:6-11

The different phrases are -

- Baptised with the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16)
- the Holy Spirit came on them (Acts 11:15)
- God gave them the gift (Acts 11:17)
- the Holy Spirit came on all who heard (Acts 10:44)
- the Gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45)
- the Holy Spirit was poured out on even the Gentiles (Acts 10:45)
- they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47)
- giving the Holy Spirit to them (Acts 15:8)
- purified their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9)

Conclusion: Baptism of the Spirit is the uniform experience of Christians when they receive the Spirit. This occurs when a person believes.

What is being spoken of in these verses ?

- Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- Titus 3:5-6 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour
- 1 Peter 3:21 and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also-- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ...

What do we make of Acts 8 ?

In Acts 8:12 the Samaritans believe and are baptised in water but they do not 'receive' the Holy Spirit until the Apostles lay hands on them.

- We cannot try to say from this that the Samaritans had received the Spirit when they believed, but had not yet been baptised by the Spirit. Baptism of the Spirit is not mentioned anywhere in the passage and the text is explicit that "the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them" until the apostles come and lay hands on them. When Peter and John lay their hands on them, the event is described as them "receiving" the Spirit (first time).
- What we are to see in this incident is the unique event in history of the gospel going out from the Jews to the Samaritans (half cast Israelites), just before going to full blooded Gentiles. We see in the passage the extra-ordinary event of God giving His Spirit to the first Non-Jews through His chosen apostles to the Jews. This occurs just as Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles is introduced in Chapter 8:1 and Chapter 9.

All the members of Christ's body have had the same baptism and have the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:13, Eph 4:4-5).

Some brief thoughts about 'Prophecy'

prophecy: the name (noun); prophesy: the activity (verb)

When we hear the word 'prophecy', we often think 'prediction'. However, prophecy only sometimes involves prediction. The Old Testament looked forward to an age when all God's people would prophesy (Joel 2). This age began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:17-18). This fits with the idea that *the testimony of Jesus* is at the heart of prophecy (Rev 19:10). All Christians living since Jesus are in the age of the Spirit and thus have the privilege of prophecy in this sense. Yet, on the other hand, there were people specifically given to the church as 'prophets' (Eph 4:11). Sometimes this involved miraculous reception of new revelation from God (Acts 7:55-56) but at other times it involved declaring what had already been said (Acts 7:2-53). These prophets were the foundation upon which it was built (Ephesians 2:20) and so seem unique and special. Thus, this is similar to all Christians being called to teach one another (Col 3:16) but not all being 'teachers' in the same sense (1 Cor 12:29).

New Testament prophets have a different character or status to the Old Testament writing prophets. Once the works of the Old Testament writing prophets were recognised as authoritative documents from God, they became part of the Old Testament Scriptures. They thus became the standard against which other ideas were measured. Whereas, in the New Testament times, the Apostles and their teachings become the new additional standard. Thus, the equivalent of the Old Testament prophets are the New Testament Apostles (2 Peter 3:2 and 3:15-16). New Testament prophecy is measured against the standard of the Apostles' teachings and must be subject to them (1 Cor 14:37-38).

It is interesting to consider how the Bible uses the word/idea of 'revelation.' Most often it refers to God speaking directly to Old Testament prophets, along the lines of 'The word of the LORD came to Ezekiel' (Ezekiel 1:3). Thus, the vast majority of the time 'revelation' refers to a *supernatural* declaration from God to people. However, there are just a few little references to where God reveals something through the normal functioning of a person's mind and thoughts. Since it was through their normal mind and thoughts, it doesn't seem to be immediately conclusive to the person that was a 'revelation'. However, because the conclusion they arrived at was in line with the truth then it is called a 'revelation.' Examples include:

Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. (Philippians 3:15, RSV)

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 16:15-17)

In 1 Corinthians 14:30 it says that a 'revelation' may come to a prophet. From the verses above this might be miraculous but it is also possible that it might not be. In 1 Cor 13:2 prophecy is associated with 'understanding' (RSV). It is quite possible that it comes through the normal processes of human understanding. In this case it might not be independent from the Apostles' message but realising further implications of what they have already said or further connections between ideas already said. This fits extremely well with the idea that what a prophet says is to be carefully weighed since it will not be clear to all if it was actually from God (1 Cor 14:29). This also goes very well with what was said above, that all Christians prophesy.

Prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14 is not defined for us. However, some of the *effects* that it had are mentioned. In verse 3, the speaking prophecy results in 'strengthening', 'encouragement' and 'comfort'. In verse 19 it seems to 'instruct'. Another effect is that people may well realise their sinfulness in verse 24. It is important to carefully note that these are some effects of prophesy rather than a definition. Reading the Bible, singing, preaching, teaching and a voice booming from heaven may all have the same *result* or *effect* but they are quite different activities in themselves. Realising some effects of prophecy from 1 Corinthians 14, does not give a definition of it. As with tongues, we have the issue of people taking a Biblical 'label' and placing it on activities seen in some charismatic churches today. But, as with 'tongues', caution here is also appropriate for those who rest on Scripture alone as the final authority.

Some brief thoughts about ‘Tongues’

The expression for ‘tongues’ is just the expression for ‘other languages’ used elsewhere in the Bible (1 Cor 14:21,10-11, Rev 5:9 &17:15, Acts 2:11). Note that there is more than one ‘language’ being spoken of since it is ‘tongues’ (plural). Even today people sometimes still speak of ‘what is your mother *tongue*’, meaning ‘what is your first language’. The ‘tongues’ at Pentecost (Acts 2) seem quite different to this since everyone could *hear* in their own language (Acts 2:11).

In 1 Corinthians 14 when Paul discusses speaking in ‘tongues’ he does *seem* to have in mind both ordinary languages (1 Cor 14:10 & 14:21) and also miraculous languages (14:13 & 14:2). When Paul says that he speaks in ‘languages’ more than all of them (14:18), why should we not just think of his ability in Latin, Hebrew and Greek?

Three things can be said about what seem to be miraculous languages in the chapter. Firstly, there is no reason from the text itself to conclude that what was said sounded like spooky gibberish. From the text itself we cannot say that it would have sounded any different to when we turn on to SBS and hear someone speaking in a language we don’t know. It *may* have sounded different to SBS but the text need not push us in that direction. Verse 2 speaks of ‘mysteries’ but that just means ‘secrets’ which is the result of any foreign speech you can’t understand. Verse 24 says that an outsider might conclude that they were out of their mind, but that is similar to what happened at Pentecost when people *could* understand in their own language (Acts 2:13,15). Secondly, are we really even forced to conclude that it is miraculous at all? Verse 13 makes us lean in that direction since they speak what they don’t understand. However, Muslims learn Arabic prayers and Jews learn Hebrew prayers off-by-heart but very often they do not know what they mean since they don’t understand those languages. Verses 13 to 17 make good sense without assuming it was miraculous. Having said that, the chapter overall still seems to give the impression that they speak not only in a language they haven’t learnt but also *the particular words that come out* are ones they haven’t consciously chosen to speak. Thirdly, regardless of the actual reality that Paul is referring to, there is a great deal of application for our church services with regard to foreign languages and principles to do with understanding what is said up front. Why do we use words like ‘Amen’ and ‘Hallelujah’, which are untranslated words from foreign languages? A constant point throughout the chapter is that an unknown language *must* be interpreted, otherwise it is not to be used in a church meeting (v28).

There is an issue as to whether the activity described in 1 Cor 14 is actually the same activity that is done by charismatic Christians today. With *many* charismatics it is clearly not the same. I have ex-charismatic friends who just learnt to do what everyone else was doing at their church. It was not miraculous but a ‘put on’, some intentionally and some unaware. Now it is rude and generalising to smear all charismatics with this same brush. However, there is something else that makes me wary of too quickly concluding that what we might see in some churches is necessarily the thing described in 1 Cor 14. It is that many non-Christian religions do the very same practice of what charismatics call ‘speaking in tongues’. This could be a counterfeit, I suppose, but it could also mean that Paul was referring to something else entirely in 1 Cor 14. On the other hand I am comforted when I hear of people who actually do obey 1 Corinthians 14 and have someone who can interpret. Let’s hope that that is not all a ‘put on’ too. Yet I have read about experiments with two tongue interpreters being given a tape of some tongue speaking and being asked to interpret. They gave two very different accounts of what the tongue message was.

So what are we to conclude? The activity referred to in 1 Corinthians 14 is speaking in unknown languages of some kind that seem not to have been learnt. Furthermore, it seems that words are spoken by the person without them consciously choosing what to say. What they do speak is a language which can and must be interpreted to be of any use in the church. However, there is much to cast doubt on whether 1 Cor 14 refers to what ‘charismatic’ Christians do in church services. We must not be too hasty to pin the label given in the Bible (ie ‘tongues’/‘languages’) onto the phenomenon done in some circles. Those whose highest authority is the Bible have a right to be cautious since they will subject all other authorities to the Bible, even tangible experiences. Those who give greater weight to their experience as an authority, relative to the Bible, might pin the label on the phenomenon more quickly. This feels a bit harsh but Paul says to all test things and hold onto what is good (1 Thess 5:21). Dealing personally with an individual requires love and giving them the benefit of the doubt.