

ETHAN TEMPLE MINISTRIES
TOOLS FOR LIFE
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SPIRIT BAPTISM AND FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

The baptism of the Holy Spirit and fellowship groups go hand in hand. Both are necessary for the Christian to grow into the fullness of Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is essential for the core members of a fellowship group in order for the group to function as God intends. We see this clearly illustrated in the experience of Christ and the disciples. The 12 disciples were in a very close personal, group relationship with Christ and one another for three-and-a-half years. Yet we find them bickering among themselves on the way to the Passover supper just before Christ was to be taken by the mob and ultimately crucified:

“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.” (Luke 22:24).

They had not yet attained the level of loving, committed fellowship with God or each other during those years. Simply being a part of a fellowship group, of which Christ was the leader, was not enough to bring about the changes necessary for them to grow up into the fullness of Christ. Later, we find that they were changed dramatically. What made the difference? Their receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost made the difference. From that day forward they, and all others who were present, entered into the genuine Christian fellowship that God desires every believer to experience:

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:42, 46, 47).

The early church’s fellowship way of doing church cannot happen during the traditional Sabbath morning worship service because of the

interrelational dynamics required between Spirit-filled believers. The only way this kind of fellowship experience can happen is in small Christian fellowship groups. The traditional Sabbath worship service is important. The point is that alone is not enough.

The importance of Spirit-filled believers fellowshiping together in small groups is demonstrated by two illustrations. Paul gives us one illustration of the necessity of a continued living connection between believers in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12. He uses the analogy of the human body to describe the church and its members. He points out how necessary it is for each body part to minister to the body. Spirit-filled believers need one another. They are to minister to one another just as your heart, right hand, eyes, etc., minister to the other parts of your body. From this analogy it is evident that it is necessary for each body part to remain in close, living connection with the other body parts. It is the home fellowship groups that enable the Spirit-baptized believer to keep a close, living connection with the body of Christ, which enables members of the body to minister to one another:

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:7-12).

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That

we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:11-16).

Another illustration of the importance of home fellowship groups can be seen around any campfire. Think for a moment of a time when you were sitting around a camp fire and watching the embers burn. In order to keep the fire going it was important that you kept the embers close together and occasionally put on new wood. If a burning ember became separated from the other burning embers it would soon lose its fire and go out. This clearly illustrates the importance of close Christian fellowship. In order for the Spirit-baptized believer to keep the “fire” from going out in his life, he needs not only to continually ask God for the Spirit’s infilling (Eph. 5:18), but he must also continually keep in fellowship with other Spirit-filled believers.

Personal Reflection and Discussion

What is the relationship between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and Christian fellowship groups?

Was the disciples' association with Jesus for three-and-one-half years enough to prepare them for the close fellowship Jesus wanted them to have? Why, or why not?

What illustration did the apostle Paul use to illustrate how closely Christians should be associated with one another?

What illustration from nature also teaches this lesson?

Do you feel close, Christian fellowship is important for your spiritual life? Why?

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