

# The Baptism of John: Past or Present?

by Eli Brayley

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*The baptism of John is not obsolete, but rather a sign of repentance towards God, and it is still an essential part of the Christian faith today.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 3:11

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Repentance Baptism"

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## Description

Eli Brayley preaches on the importance of understanding the baptism of John and its relevance to the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Church today. He highlights the deception that has led many to believe they are filled with the Holy Spirit when they are not, resulting in a weak and ineffective Church. By examining the Scriptures, he reveals the true meaning of John's baptism as a baptism of repentance and emphasizes the need for believers to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit for power and effectiveness in spreading the Gospel.

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## Transcript

"I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" - Luke 20:3-4

I wonder how many people are aware that this question is still in doubt today. Is the baptism of water that John instituted in the days of Christ the same baptism that we, the Church of the 21st century, exercise today? Many of you, I'm sure, are wondering why this important. Read on:

It is generally accepted among most North American churches today that the baptism of John is not the same baptism we have today (bear in mind it is also generally lukewarm throughout the entire western church in these days as well). I want to show in this article that this is an erroneous interpretation of Scripture and one that produces severe consequences.

### A DISAPPEARING DOCTRINE

To lay the foundation before we begin, John states:

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." (Matthew 3:11)

So here we have a promise of another baptism, a baptism of Holy Ghost fire. This promise is later fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit falls upon the disciples as they wait in Jerusalem. It is the promise of power from on high; the supernatural infilling of God in man, enabling them to be effective witnesses of Jesus Christ. This gift of the Holy Spirit, often called "The baptism of the Holy Spirit" is an available blessing from the Lord even today, and He has been filling His people with power since the days of the early Church. (NOTE: Every great Christian leader of old has received and taught the baptism of the Holy Spirit without exception. Ex: A.W. Tozer, Charles Finney, John Wesley...)

But somewhere along the way Satan has deceived the Church on this one point in order to rob them of this blessing from God, rendering them ineffective and impotent. And here lies his tactic:

The Bible instructs us that the Holy Spirit is a gift to be received, that a person must ask to be filled with the blessing. The devil has said: "You already have the blessing! You don't need to ask for it." And so time takes its toll... erosion and corrosion... and we find ourselves today a weak and timid church, with no power, no passion, no strength and no authority... and yet we firmly declare: "We are filled with the Holy Spirit!" The truth is, we are a sick church surviving only on cold bread and lukewarm water.

Oh, the depths of our absurdity! Can anybody stand up and say our Church is ablaze like the church of the Apostles? But you say: "You are right, but times have changed." Do you think Jesus planned it this way, therefore our condition is satisfactory? No! I submit to you that our Lord Jesus Christ died for a Church alive and aflamed with the fire of God, more than conquerors and undeterred by the gates of hell!

So where does the problem lie, that we cannot just retrace our steps and realign ourselves with God's Word? As in the beginning, Satan has twisted what God has said in order to fool the people, and he has done it again with John the Baptist.

First of all, I give no credit to the devil, because his tactics in this case are feeble. The hindrance is man falling for his tricks. If we were to completely ignore the issue of the baptism of John, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit could easily be understood (Acts 8:5-19), however, because so many people are stuck in the bog of baptismal errancy, we must address it.

## SCRIPTURAL DECEPTION

The following is taken from the Book of Acts, chapter 18 verse 24 to 19 verse 7, which has blinded and confused our beloved western Church (NOTE: It would be advisable to use your Bible and read along):

"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ."

"And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve."

Firstly I will explain the general but false understanding of this passage, then I will bring to light the real meaning.

Right away, the doctrine of Satan insinuates that Apollos was not saved. This they reason because the Scripture says "he knew only the baptism of John." But what is the baptism of John? In order to justify his false belief, Satan declares the baptism of John obsolete, meaning, it was a sacrament only used BEFORE the death and resurrection of Christ and not after. He then submits that a brand new sacrament of baptism is instituted: "baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus" (as said in Acts 19:5). Thus, Apollos knew only the baptism of John, and not the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus, therefore he was not saved. Though this sounds good, it is dreadfully wrong.

To clarify: What this means is... if Apollos was NOT saved, then he only needed to be instructed in the way of salvation. But if Apollos WAS saved, then Aquila and Priscilla needed to teach him about the baptism of the Holy Spirit (just like I am teaching right now).

The second passage of Scripture is a story of Paul meeting several disciples on the back road to Ephesus. Satan's doctrine implies that the disciples were NOT saved (like Apollos was not) and that Paul needed to instruct them in the way of salvation, because the baptism of John was an obsolete sacrament (read the passages again for clarity).

The point the devil is trying to make is that there is no need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit, because he has fooled the church into thinking the Spirit is already within us from the moment of salvation. Therefore, he must succeed in misleading us to think that these two stories are not speaking of the baptism of fire, but are simple conversion stories... when truly, the inspired text is trying to tell us that there is a second blessing! These two stories are all about the baptism of the Spirit!

Let me now explain the true meaning of the passages, dealing with one story at a time:

#### THE BAPTISM OF JOHN: REPENTANCE

We must take note of five deliberate points the Bible gives us about Apollos which proves he was in fact a Christian:

1. An eloquent man
2. Mighty in the Scriptures
3. Instructed in the way of the Lord
4. Fervent in spirit
5. Spake and taught diligently the things of Jesus

Only the fifth point directly indicated his affiliation with Christ, however, all four other points suggest this man was saved with a solid understanding of prophetic truth. Yet Aquila and Priscilla had to "expound unto him the way of God more perfectly." What was his error? Not his eloquency... not his might in the Scriptures... not his instruction in the way of the Lord... not his fervency of spirit... not his diligence in preaching about Jesus... The Bible clearly tells us his problem: "but he knew only the baptism of John."

So then, as I said earlier, here lies the problem. Is John's baptism the same as ours (which means Apollos WAS saved but wasn't filled with the Spirit) or is John's baptism obsolete (which means Apollos was NOT saved and needed salvation)?

Therefore we must discover what exactly John's baptism is. And here it is: we find the answer plainly in 1 Peter 3:21:

"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Baptism by water is the baptism of repentance; and what is repentance? A pledge of a good conscience towards God. This is exactly what John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness! Repent! A person baptized by John did not have to be baptized for repentance all over again. The only difference is John did not know who the Messiah was, so he told people to believe in the one who was to come... we now know Jesus is the Christ, so when we baptize people in water, we baptize them "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost" as Jesus commanded, but let no man fool you: the baptism of water is still the baptism of repentance, and this has not changed one bit. Water =repentance.

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." - (Acts 23:8)

Here we have Peter giving the same command. So when a person is baptized today in our churches, understand fully that they are carrying out the baptism of John, which is the sign of repentance towards God.

Therefore, Apollos was saved, for all points indicate this, for he had undergone the baptism of repentance for the remission of his sins. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside to teach him about the baptism of fire, the filling of the Holy Ghost!

Likewise in the second portion of Scripture, Paul asks: "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" Notice he doesn't ask, "when you believed." These men were disciples who already believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. They also knew only the baptism of repentance, but had not yet experienced the second blessing, the filling of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Paul goes on to say: "John baptized with the baptism of repentance" and then baptizes them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ah, but here the devil objects: "See? They had to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus!" Absolutely, but what exactly IS the baptism of Jesus? It is not the baptism of repentance... That was the baptism of John, and these men were saved. The baptism of Jesus is the baptism of fire! "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire." (Matthew 3:11) And to prove this, what happens next? Do they jump into the water? No, Paul lays his hands upon them and they are filled with the Spirit.

## HAVE YE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT?

A contemporary question to ask yourself, like Paul asked, is: "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" The power of the Spirit is not just a feeling you get inside you at conversion. He is the promise of Jesus Christ to make us witnesses to the world of the truth. As said before, the Church of west is in terrible shape because of the lack of power, because of the lie that we are full of the Spirit. We will never see our nation impacted with the gospel until we admit to our fruitlessness, our fleshy attempts to do God's work, and our complete lack of the anointing of the Spirit.

So the question remains: Have you been baptized in Holy Ghost fire?

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