

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

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Some argue that New Testament “baptism” refers to Spirit baptism rather than water baptism, making water baptism optional. The argument collapses once we notice the linguistic distinctions Scripture itself draws between different works of the Holy Spirit.

Different Manifestations of the Spirit

Scripture uses different prepositions to describe different works of the Spirit. Greek *epi* (ἐπί), meaning “upon,” describes external, temporary empowerment: “the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8); “the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard” (Acts 10:44). Whereas the Greek *en* (ἐν), meaning “in” or “within,” describes internal, permanent dwelling: “the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

This is not a New Testament innovation. The Old Testament uses the same pattern. Hebrew *al* (אֲלֵ), meaning “upon,” describes temporary empowerment: the Spirit came upon Samson in power (Judges 14:6), upon Saul to prophesy (1 Samuel 10:10), and later departed from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14)—because what comes “upon” can leave. God even enabled Balaam’s donkey to speak (Numbers 22:28), which was temporary and obviously not salvation. The Spirit came “upon” Old Testament figures for specific purposes, then the empowerment ceased. David pleaded, “Do not take your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11) because under the Old Covenant, the Spirit’s presence was conditional.

The New Covenant promised something different: “I will put my Spirit within you” (Ezekiel 36:27). Permanent internal dwelling, not temporary external empowerment.

Two Distinct Works of the Holy Spirit

The first is the Spirit coming “upon” (ἐπί)—temporary empowerment and signs. In the New Testament, this happened exactly twice: at Pentecost (Acts 2), marking the Spirit’s coming to Jews, and at Cornelius’s household (Acts 10), marking the Spirit’s coming to Gentiles. Peter himself connected these two events: “The Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). He reached back a full decade to find the only comparable event. Between Pentecost and Cornelius, thousands were

baptized. Each received the Spirit through water baptism, not through miraculous outpouring. The Spirit coming “upon” uses ἐπί—from above, external. It happened exactly twice in over thirty years and fulfilled its prophetic purpose.

The second is the Spirit dwelling “within” (ἐν)—the New Covenant promise and every Christian’s experience. Peter told the Pentecost crowd: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Two things promised at baptism: forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s permanent indwelling happens at water baptism—not before, not separately, but at the moment the believer is immersed in obedient faith.

The language of permanent dwelling reinforces this. Romans 8:9 and 1 Corinthians 3:16 both say “the Spirit of God dwells in you” (οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν). Paul tells the Corinthians “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you” (1 Corinthians 6:19). The verb οἰκέω means to dwell, to inhabit. Unlike the Old Testament pattern where the Spirit came “upon” and could depart, the New Covenant Spirit dwells within the believer permanently—beginning at baptism.

The command distinction matters here too. Water baptism is commanded throughout the New Testament: “Go therefore and make disciples ... baptizing them” (Matthew 28:19); “Repent and be baptized every one of you” (Acts 2:38); “Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins” (Acts 22:16); “He commanded them to be baptized” (Acts 10:48). The Spirit coming “upon” is promised and prophesied but never commanded, because it is *God’s* sovereign act. You can command someone to be immersed in water as an act of obedient faith. You cannot command the Spirit to fall.

Cornelius Still Needed Water Baptism

After the Spirit fell “upon” Cornelius as a sign, Peter immediately commanded water baptism: “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people? He commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:47–48). If the Spirit falling “upon” Cornelius had already saved him, there would be no reason to command water baptism. But the outpouring was God’s sign to Jewish believers that Gentiles qualified for salvation. Water baptism is when Cornelius and his household actually received what every convert receives: forgiveness of sins and the permanent indwelling of the Spirit. The Spirit fell “upon” (ἐπί) them as a sign. They received the Spirit dwelling “within” (ἐν) them through water baptism.

The “One Baptism” of Ephesians 4:5

By AD 60–62 when Paul wrote Ephesians, John’s baptism was obsolete (Acts 19:1–5), and Spirit baptism “upon” had fulfilled its prophetic purpose at Pentecost and Cornelius. Only water baptism was still being practiced, still being commanded, still ongoing, and still the means of receiving the indwelling Spirit. The “one baptism” is water baptism—the baptism through which believers receive the permanent

indwelling Spirit.

Table 15. Holy Spirit Baptism vs Water Baptism

Work of Spirit	Language	Nature	When	Examples
<i>Spirit "Upon"</i>	ἐπί (epi) / ָ (al)	Temporary empowerment/signs	As promised or needed by God	Samson, Saul, Balaam's donkey, Pentecost, Cornelius
<i>Spirit "Within"</i>	ἐν (en)	Permanent indwelling	At water baptism (Acts 2:38)	Pentecost, every Christian (Rom 8:9)

When Scripture commands baptism, it means water. When it promises the Spirit at conversion, the Spirit comes to dwell "within" through water baptism. The temporary empowerment "upon" and the permanent dwelling "within" are two different works of the Spirit, and confusing them is what makes water baptism look optional.

This appendix is reproduced from *Eternal Stakes: The Response Grace Demands* by Joe Tenga.

For the full argument, including Chapter 13, see the book.

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