

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is not some kind of vague, impersonal force or influence. He is a divine Person who speaks (Acts 10:19), hears (John 16:13), and acts (John 16:14). He can be lied to (Acts 5:3), grieved (Ephesians 4:30), and blasphemed (Matthew 12:31). The Holy Spirit is not just an emanation from God; He *is* God, in co-equal union with God the Father and God the Son.

This present age is pre-eminently the age of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus has now ascended to join the Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit is the member of the Trinity with whom we have the most direct contact. While God the Father is God *transcendent*, dwelling in the highest heaven above all creation, the Holy Spirit is God *immanent*, present everywhere in the midst of creation. While Jesus is Emmanuel, God *with us*, the Holy Spirit is the Comforter, God *within us*.

What does the Holy Spirit do?

The Holy Spirit is the divine agent who carries out the Father's will in His dealings with believers. His activity begins even before conversion, when He convicts the sinner of guilt and draws him to Christ (John 16:8). Then it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates the repentant sinner, reviving the dead spirit within and giving new life (John 3:5-6). He then comes to live within the believer (Romans 8:9), His presence a seal of ownership marking the Christian as God's property (2 Corinthians 1:22).

The Holy Spirit directs and empowers every step of the Christian life. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would take His place, becoming to all believers everything that Jesus was to His twelve disciples (John 14:16). Jesus called Him the Comforter (a term also translated Counselor or Helper), suggesting One who is with us at all times and upon whom we can depend completely.

The list of the Holy Spirit's activities is endless. He guides us into the truth, and reveals to us the things of God and of Christ

(John 16:13-15). He leads us to do God's will (Galatians 5:18). He speaks to us and through us (Acts 10:19; Mark 13:11). He fills our hearts with the love of God (Romans 5:5). He empowers us (Acts 1:8), inspires us (2 Peter 1:21), prays for us (Romans 8:26), and gives gift to us (1 Corinthians 12:11). Our Teacher, our Guide, our Strength, our Companion -- the Holy Spirit is all these things and more.

In all this, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit does not draw attention to Himself (John 16:13). The purpose of all His ministry is to glorify and bear witness to Christ (John 16:14). He inspired the Scripture whose theme is Christ, He convicts sinners to turn to Christ the Savior, He works to form the image of Christ in believers, and joins believers together into the Body of Christ. Just as Jesus sought throughout His ministry to glorify His Father (John 17:4), in the same way the Holy Spirit now seeks to glorify Christ. Everything He does is meant to exalt Jesus. Where the Holy Spirit works, Jesus is glorified.

What is the Baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Before Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem to receive the gift promised by His Father (Acts 1:4, 5). On the day of Pentecost, about ten days after Jesus' ascension, some 120 believers were gathered for prayer when they received the promised gift: the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Peter preached to the crowd that had gathered to see what was happening, and he made it clear to them that the promise was not limited to a certain group or a certain time, but was for all who would put their faith in Christ (Acts 2:38-39). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is for us today as well.

Baptism in the Spirit is compared to baptism in water (Acts 1:5), suggesting the image of being immersed or engulfed. The Holy Spirit dwells within every Christian, but baptism means being filled with Spirit in an abundant measure, even to overflowing. As we yield ourselves totally, the Holy Spirit

fills us completely.

Prophets and priests in the Old Testament were anointed with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, as a sign of being chosen and set apart to serve God. The New Testament teaches that all believers are priests set apart for God (1 Peter 2:9), gifted to serve Him (1 Corinthians 12:7). As Jesus was baptized in the Spirit at the initiation of His ministry (Matthew 3:16), our baptism in the Spirit is the anointing that equips us with the power to serve God (Acts 1:8).

What signs accompany the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

When the 120 believers received the baptism in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, several unusual signs or manifestations accompanied the experience: a sound like rushing wind, a vision of tongues made of fire, utterances of praise to God in languages unknown to the speakers (Acts 2:1-4). Similar remarkable things happened on other occasions when people received this baptism in the Spirit (Acts 8:14-17; 10:44-47; 19:1-6).

Different people react to the Spirit's infilling in different ways. Some laugh, while others weep. Some shout and dance, while others are more restrained. Some praise God for hours on end; others fall to the ground and lose awareness of what is going on around them. The common initial evidence, however, is "speaking in tongues": the Holy Spirit gives words to speak in a language we do not know, so that we praise God without understanding what we are saying.

Of course, the most important sign of the Spirit's infilling is what follows: a life yielded to God, directed and empowered by His Spirit for effective witnessing (Acts 1:8).

How do we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Like everything else in the Christian life, the baptism in the Holy Spirit comes by grace through faith. We must believe

that God has promised the gift to us (Acts 2:39), and then receive it.

The basis of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the exaltation of Christ (Acts 2:33). Because Christ died and rose again, we can be saved and sanctified. Because Christ has been exalted to the right hand of God, we can receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The experience comes to us as a gift, not because we do anything to earn or deserve it, but because it is the sign of Christ's ascension to reign.

Believing in Christ's exaltation and the Father's promise, we have only to ask Christ to baptize us. Sometimes He pours out this blessing even before we ask (Acts 10:44-45). Sometimes the gift is given through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17). But we are encouraged to ask in faith, assured of God's desire to give us this gift (Luke 11:13).

The Holy Spirit invariably comes in an atmosphere of praise (Acts 2:11; 10:46). This is only natural, for it is the Spirit's ministry to exalt Christ. Therefore, we are most likely to receive the baptism when we are praising God with our hearts and mouths. We should focus our attention on Christ, not on our surroundings, our feelings, or the words we are speaking. Remember, too, that speaking in tongues is a cooperative effort: the Spirit gives us the words, but we must open our mouths and speak.

What if we don't receive the baptism right away?

We must be willing to persevere in seeking this gift (Luke 11:8-10). We mustn't become discouraged if there is some delay in receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit. If there is some hindrance in our life, our faith, or our understanding, God will reveal it to us. He is faithful, and will reward those who seek Him and His gifts (Hebrews 11:6).

What are the gifts of the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit gives various gifts to believers to be used to build up the church (1 Corinthians 12:7). Some Christians

believe that these gifts ceased after the time of the apostles, but this is not taught in Scripture. In fact, the gifts have continued to be exercised off and on throughout the history of the church. Since the beginning of the 20th century, there has been a renewal of belief in the operation of the gifts. In the past few decades, a Pentecostal revival has swept through many denominations and dozens of countries all over the world.

Some spiritual gifts are *manifestation* gifts. These are given to an individual for use on a particular occasion, and are not the permanent possession of the individual. The Holy Spirit uses the individual as a channel through which the gift operates at that time. Manifestation gifts include the following, but we should not assume that the list is exhaustive (1 Corinthians 12:7-10):

- A *word of wisdom* enabling us to solve a problem or handle a difficult situation we are faced with (see Acts 15:13-29).
- A *word of knowledge* imparting information beyond our natural means of knowing (see Acts 5:1-5).
- Extraordinary *faith* to believe God for the impossible (see Acts 27:21-25).
- Gifts of *healing* to effect miraculous cures of various diseases (see Acts 3:1-8).
- *Prophecy*, a message of revelation from God to His people (see Acts 11:27-30).
- *Miraculous powers* of various kinds (see Acts 5:12).
- *Discernment* to detect the spiritual source of someone's words or deeds (see Acts 13:6-12).
- *Speaking in tongues*, the supernatural ability to deliver a message from God in a language unknown to the speaker (see Acts 2:4-11).
- *Interpretation of tongues*, the supernatural ability to interpret a message delivered in tongues so that others can understand (see Acts 10:44-47).

In addition to the manifestation gifts, the Spirit also gives *ministry* gifts. These gifts are given to an individual on a long-term basis to be exercised regularly in his or her ministry. Every Christian is gifted to contribute to the functioning of the church body. Body ministry gifts comprise all the multi-faceted gifts distributed to the believers to do the work of the church (Romans 12:6-8). Equipping ministry gifts are given and used especially for training the believers to carry on the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16).

How are spiritual gifts to be exercised?

There are four principles to guide us in the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit:

(1) The gifts are given for the building up of the church, not for the exaltation of any individual (1 Corinthians 12:7).

(2) The gifts are given by God's grace, and are not a sign of holiness or spiritual maturity (compare 1 Corinthians 1:7 and 3:1).

(3) The exercise of the gifts is under the control of the individual, who is responsible to use them in obedience to the will of God (1 Corinthians 14:31-33). We are not infallible, and we can misuse God's gifts, so our exercise of them is subject to the judgment of those in authority (1 Corinthians 14:29).

(4) The gifts are always to be exercised in love (1 Corinthians 13:1, 2).

What are the fruit of the Spirit?

Perhaps the most important ministry of the Holy Spirit is the development of Christ's character in His people. The Holy Spirit's presence in our lives is seen most clearly by the fruit that comes forth in our attitudes and actions. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control -- these are the fruit of the Spirit's activity in our hearts (Galatians 5:22, 23). Unlike the gifts of the Spirit, which vary from believer to believer, all of these qualities are meant to be found in every

Christian. This bouquet of qualities will fill our lives with the fragrance of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and a Spirit-filled Christian is a Christlike Christian.

May the Lord fill us with His Spirit, in order that Christ may be formed and exalted in us!

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Read John 14:15-27.

1. What names does Jesus give to the Holy Spirit?
2. What does Jesus say the Holy Spirit will do?
3. Why do you think the Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of Christ"?

Read Ephesians 4:30.

What do you think it means to "grieve the Holy Spirit"?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

What do you think it means to "quench the Spirit"?