



The Holy Spirit



by
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Jesus had said to the disciples, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." (John 14:16-17) The Holy Spirit was to enter and fill their hearts. This was an utterly new thing. John 7:39 says, "The Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." His disciples, although they were saved men who had been powerfully used by God (Luke 10:20), had never received the Holy Spirit in this fashion. Once given, He would abide in them forever. Never would a child of God who had received the Holy Spirit have His presence removed. This also was a new thing. (I Sam. 16:14; Psa. 51:11)

Notice that the Holy Spirit does not enter into unsaved people. Jesus indicated that only those who already know the Holy Spirit can receive the Holy Spirit. He finds a place only in the hearts of those who are saved. They know Him. He is with them. They have recognized and yielded to Him as God when He stirred their hearts to repentance and faith in Christ.

In the book of Acts, one more new thing is set forth concerning the giving of the Holy Spirit in this age. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was sent from the Father to the Church, Peter was moved by the Holy Spirit to say, "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many

as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39) The Holy Spirit's fulness and presence are now available to all who are called of God, that is, saved. He does not limit His presence just to those who need His anointing to do special tasks, as was the case in the Old Testament. This is new.

It should be understood that receiving the Holy Spirit is not the same thing as accepting Christ. If you doubt this, read in Acts eight, about those in Samaria who had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and been baptized, but who had not received the Holy Spirit. Or read in Acts nine, about Paul's conversion and how Ananias was sent three days later to lay hands on him in faith, so that Paul would have his eyes healed and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let your doubts be dissolved by the word of God.

Paul wrote, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free..." (I Cor. 12:13, New International Version) Many of God's people are confused about the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. Everyone who has believed on Jesus Christ for salvation has been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. This is the spiritual reality of which water baptism is only a symbol. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is God's saving work on our behalf. Any other definition of this baptism is unscriptural. We should use scripture terms in a scriptural manner.

Yet Paul went on in that same verse, "And we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Baptism by the one Holy Spirit is not the same thing as drinking of the Spirit, any more than water baptism is the same as drinking water. Nor is the fact that God has given us the Spirit to drink, a guarantee that all will partake.

Each person decides individually whether or not to drink and be full. Do you see that there is a difference between the Spirit's work at salvation and the fulness of that same Spirit?

We read in Romans 8:9, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Jesus said in John 4:24, "God is a Spirit." All three members of the Godhead are Spirit. All three are holy. This does not mean that we confuse them with one another. Only one member of the Godhead bears the title of "Holy Spirit." Anyone who receives Jesus Christ as Saviour has the Spirit of God within. God is a Spirit; Jesus is God the Son; by faith, we receive the Spirit of Christ and are saved. Yet we must not confuse the Spirit of Christ with the One we call the Holy Spirit. Just by way of example, my son bears my first name as his middle name, and we both have the same last name--we are members of the same family. Yet people who receive me into their homes are never under the illusion that I am both of us. What the Bible teaches about our need to receive the Holy Spirit does not take away from the reality of receiving Christ. It is simply a different matter.

In Luke 11:5—13 Jesus indicated that some time may pass between our first asking for the Holy Spirit and the eventual fulfillment of our request. He gave a parable in which a man was unwilling to get out of bed to fulfill his friend's request for bread. Finally, the man arose and gave him the bread because he would not stop asking. We know God is willing to give good things to His children. He has promised to give us the Holy Spirit. (Prov. 1:23; Acts 2:39) Therefore, the lesson concerns our attitude, and not God's. The man doing the asking was persistent. He refused to give up before His

request was granted.

After His resurrection, Jesus came to his disciples and "breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost." (John 20:22) While this made sure the promise of the Spirit to them, it was not fulfilled until later, on the day of Pentecost. Just before His ascent into heaven, He said, "Tarry ye," that is, wait, "in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high," and, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8) They had not yet received the Holy Spirit, and they were not to stop seeking and asking until they had received Him. This was Christ's will for them.

Jesus then went on, in Luke eleven, to give assurance that those who will continue asking God to fill them with His Spirit will receive the Holy Spirit, and not something evil. "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" (Luke 11:11-12) A stone could look enough like a bread roll to deceive a child, but if he tried to eat it, he would likely break a tooth and lose confidence in the father who gave it to him. A serpent would bite and poison the child; a scorpion would cause terrible pain. No sane parent would be so cruel to his child, nor should we believe that our heavenly Father will deal with us in such a way. "How much more shall your heavenly Father give thee the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" (Luke 11:13) If you have never been filled with the Holy Spirit, you need not be afraid of asking God to give Him to you. If we ask God for what is good, He will not give us something bad.

Just a little farther on in that same chapter, an incident is recorded in which certain Pharisees claimed that things Jesus did by the Holy Spirit were actually done by the power of Satan. (Compare Matt. 12:22-30 with Luke 11:14-23) It is no accident that God caused these two passages to be placed side by side in His word. Throughout the Church age there have been similar charges made against the work of the Holy Spirit. Such accusations are no small matter. They tend to scatter and divide people who would otherwise be gathered together spiritually by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 11:23) Jesus rebuked His accusers sharply.

Coming back to what Jesus taught about receiving the Holy Spirit, how do we know when to stop asking for this gift? We are to ask, seek, and knock until we receive, but once He is given, our asking should become thanksgiving. If, as the Bible teaches, the Holy Spirit is not necessarily given at the time we receive the spirit of Christ, nor even when we first ask for the Holy Spirit, how do we know when we have received Him?

This question brings us to a controversial subject, speaking in tongues. According to the Bible, this miracle is the evidence that a child of God has received the Holy Spirit. Both the outpouring of the Spirit and the miracle of speaking in tongues, first occurred on the day of Pentecost. On that day those who had obeyed Christ and waited at Jerusalem to receive the Spirit "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4) The word translated "tongues" means "languages." They miraculously began to speak languages they had never learned and did not know, as the Holy Spirit enabled

them. That is quite a miracle. They apparently were not overly quiet about it, because a crowd gathered to see what was going on. At least fifteen different language groups were spoken and recognized on that day. (Acts 2:8-11)

When Peter was asked, "What meaneth this [speaking in tongues]," he replied, "This [speaking in tongues] is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh." (Acts 2:12, 16-17) You will notice I have inserted some words enclosed in brackets. This was done to emphasize that the question and the answer both concern the miracle of speaking in tongues. This miracle is what caused the crowd to gather. They did not ask the meaning of the words. "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." (Acts 2:11) They asked about the meaning of the miracle. Peter's reply was that this speaking in tongues is the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit. What could be more plain? The fact that speaking in tongues is the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost.

"Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine." (Acts 2:13) Some ask what God is doing. Others mock. Somehow, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit always seems to provoke scorn and anger. What happened on the day of Pentecost did not take place in accordance with ideas of human dignity. If it had, no crowd would have gathered. That little group of Christians would have sat quietly in the upper room, silently praising God in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, and no one but God would ever have heard them. There would have been no basis to suppose they were foolishly drunk.

Was speaking in tongues a special miracle, reserved for a single group, on the day of Pentecost? Not according to the Bible. Besides the day of Pentecost, there are four other occasions recorded in the book of Acts when people received the Holy Spirit. These passages do not record every detail about those occasions, but they all bear out the truth that when a person receives the Holy Spirit, that person speaks in another tongue by the Spirit's enabling.

In Acts eight, an account is given of Philip's preaching the gospel in the city of Samaria. The people listened to his preaching, and as they saw the miracles with which God blessed his ministry, they believed God's word and were baptized. No specific numbers are given as to how many got saved, but verse six says, "The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake." The spiritual awakening was widespread, reaching most of the population of the city. -Such a response would delight the heart of any godly preacher, and Philip must have rejoiced that God used him to gather so many souls to Christ.

Still, something was lacking. "As yet He," the Holy Spirit, "was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 8:16) They were definitely saved. Philip had baptized them in water, something he would never have done had they not been fully convinced of the gospel of Christ. (Acts 8:36-37) When word reached the apostles at Jerusalem that the people of Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. Upon their arrival, they prayed for the people that they might receive the Holy Spirit. God answered their prayers. "Then laid they their hands on them, and they received

the Holy Ghost." (Acts 8:17)

Speaking in tongues is not mentioned, but a question is raised. How did the apostles know that these people had not received the Holy Spirit? And how did they later know that the people did receive the Holy Spirit? Obviously, they believed that they could know. Just as obviously, they believed that there is some discernible evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, and this evidence was not manifested until after their arrival. Further, it was not something so secret or mysterious that only the apostles could recognize it. Anyone present when believers received the Spirit could observe it.

A man named Simon was present when the Holy Spirit was first given at Samaria. He had been a professional sorcerer and deceiver before Philip's arrival. "And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost." (Acts 8:18-19) Apparently, what Simon witnessed was so remarkable that his old, moneymaking instincts were aroused. What he imagined he could buy, he imagined he could sell. (Human greed does not make the power of the Holy Spirit less real.) What was it that amazed Simon? Peter told us on the day of Pentecost, didn't he? He said that speaking in tongues is the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit. If we take the Bible for our authority, there is no other miracle we can point to as evidence of receiving the Spirit.

You may find it hard to believe that the Bible would not state specifically that those people spoke in

tongues, if this is really the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. If so, read Acts 2:41. It records the fact that 3,000 people were saved on the day of Pentecost. It does not say they confessed with their mouths the Lord Jesus, and believed in their hearts that God has raised him from the dead. (See Rom. 10:9-10) That very important fact is omitted. Our knowledge that they did so comes entirely from other scriptures. If they had not followed this pattern, they would not have been saved. The pattern for recognizing when the Holy Spirit has been given to individuals is given in Acts two. There is nowhere else to look and no need to look further for an explanation of the miracle which impressed greedy Simon.

When the first Gentiles received the Holy Spirit at Caesarea, Jewish Christians who were present knew what had happened, "For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." (Acts 10:46) They were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on Gentiles, but they could not deny this evidence of speaking in tongues. When twelve men received the Holy Spirit at Ephesus, "they spake with tongues, and prophesied." (Acts 19:6) Acts 9:17 says that Ananias was sent to Paul so that Paul would receive the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is not mentioned there, but to convince us that Paul did speak in tongues, we not only have the authority of Peter's statement in Acts 2:16, but also the testimony of Paul. He wrote, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all." (I Cor. 14:18)

The teaching that people who receive the Holy Spirit will speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance is not a product either of human emotionalism

or of human reasoning. This teaching is an accurate and honorable picture of what the word of God says. Human reason and emotion may cause people to reject this Bible teaching, but those things did not produce it.

Coming back once again to the question of how we can know when to stop asking for the Holy Spirit, we now have a clear answer. We are to ask, seek, and knock until we have received the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. Until that takes place, we cannot say accurately that we have been filled with the Holy Spirit in accordance with the scripture. The Bible speaks plainly to any who will believe the truth. To those who would oppose, Paul said, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues." (I Cor. 14:37, 39) Let the Bible settle all controversy.

What will happen to you when you receive the Holy Spirit in obedience to Christ's desire, and according to the New Testament pattern? We are individuals, and God deals with each of us a little differently. For me to presume that I could tell you every detail of your personal experience with God would be wrong. Within the standard He set down in scripture, there is room for God to do what He chooses, room for Him to show His grace to you according to your particular needs.

My own experience on the night when I received Him was fairly typical, I suppose. I began, as many do, by asking over and over for the Lord to fill me with the Holy Spirit, but the longer I prayed, the more I was taken up with worshipping Jesus. When at last I began

to speak another language as the Spirit gave utterance, my interest was not primarily in the miracle that was taking place, nor even in the fact that I had finally been filled with the Holy Spirit, but just in giving praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. I was not dignified in my worship. I was loud and joyful. Some might have objected to this (though no one did) but I had asked the Lord to fill me with the Holy Spirit, and I knew that what He had given me was good. The glory and joy of the Lord Jesus Christ filled my heart in a way I had never known before.

On the other hand, there really is no typical experience of receiving the Holy Spirit. I have seen some begin to speak in another tongue almost as soon as they knelt to pray. I have heard some do their praising very quietly, not because they considered loudness to be wrong, but just because that was the way they worshipped God at that particular time. Although experience can deepen our conviction that what the Bible teaches is true, what we believe about Jesus Christ, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, or any spiritual issue, should not be based on experience, but on God's word--the Bible.

Still, when our own experience reflects what the Bible says, we do know our experience is right. Even though our Christian walk and faith cannot be based on experience, there comes a time when our experience should agree with the Bible. We need to read the Bible and to hear it preached and taught, but these things do not replace applying the Bible to our lives. At some point, individual believers must receive the Holy Spirit, or else all they have heard and read about Him does them little or no good. This is true of the teaching of

salvation. It is also true concerning the Holy Spirit.

More could be said. The gifts of the Holy Spirit have not been mentioned here. (Read I Cor. 12:1-11) His part in cultivating the fruit of the spirit, which arises from the spirit of Christ in us, is little understood by most and has not been dealt with here. (Compare I Cor. 13; Gal. 4:6; and Gal. 5:19-24) The believer's reliance on the Holy Spirit to teach and confirm the word of God has not been discussed here in any detail. (See I Jn. 2:27) But, you see, the Holy Spirit cannot fully undertake any of those tasks in you until He dwells in you in His fullness.

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