

The Work Of the Holy Spirit In the Christian Today

The Holy Spirit has a role in bringing about a new birth in the life of a sinner. While the new birth of water and the Spirit involves the supernatural activity of the Spirit in one's life, this does not mean that the Holy Spirit operates in a miraculous way in our lives today. The next lesson will focus upon the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit in the first-century church. As God was in the process of delivering and confirming His inspired message from heaven, the miraculous activity of the Spirit was necessary and common. Once the truths of the new covenant of Jesus had been delivered and confirmed, the miraculous activity of revelation did not need to continue. However, the fact that the Holy Spirit no longer distributes new revelations and miraculous gifts among Christians today does not mean that He has retired from active work in the church. The truth is that Christianity is a religion in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are constantly at work in those who have been born again and "walk . . . according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4).

CLOTHED WITH THE SPIRIT (HIS MIRACULOUS WORK)

Key terms which describe the miraculous activity of the Holy Spirit are found in the New Testament. In Jesus' final meeting with His apostles He promised that they would be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Jesus explained that this promise would be fulfilled

"when the Holy Spirit *has come upon you*" (Acts 1:8; emphasis mine). When the Holy Spirit is described in the New Testament as *coming upon someone*, or clothing someone, miraculous activity is involved (cf. Numbers 11:25; Judges 14:6; 1 Samuel 16:13; 19:20; Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 3:16; 12:18; Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-46; 19:6).

On the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, we see the beginning of the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that God would "pour forth of [His] Spirit *upon all mankind*" (Acts 2:17; emphasis mine). Joel also promised that the pouring forth of the Spirit would be accompanied by miraculous activity: "And they shall prophesy. And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs on the earth beneath" (Acts 2:18, 19). Beginning with the historic Day of Pentecost (the church's birthday into our world), we read of great signs and wonders as the Holy Spirit miraculously began to empower the apostles in their work.

In Acts 8 we read of the conversion of the people in Samaria. Verse 16 notes that the Holy Spirit "had not yet *fallen upon* any of them." (Emphasis mine.) These Christians had been "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus," so we trust that they had received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38); yet none of them could perform miraculous signs until the Holy Spirit *came upon them* through the laying on of the hands of the apostles (Acts 8:17, 18).

In Acts 10:44-46, when the Holy Spirit *fell upon* the Gentiles, they spoke in tongues. In Acts 19:6 as Paul laid his hands upon the Ephesian

disciples, “the Holy Spirit *came on them*, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.” (Emphasis mine.)

These instances of miraculous activity through the Holy Spirit’s clothing or coming upon *these Christians* are in contrast to the general promises made to all Christians. Penitent, baptized believers are promised the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). John referred to the Holy Spirit as being given to Christians (1 John 3:24; 4:13), as did Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:8. In Galatians 4:6 we read, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.” It is important to notice the contrast of the Spirit’s being given or sent “into our hearts” and the Spirit’s “falling upon” Christians. When the Spirit “fell upon” or “came upon” someone, miraculous activity was always involved. However, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the first century did not always involve miraculous activity. John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit” from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15), yet he “performed no sign” (John 10:41). Every Christian is commanded to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18), but this does not mean that all Christians are to perform signs and wonders. Today the Holy Spirit’s work is providential (behind the scenes) rather than in the same open, obvious, and miraculous way characteristic of His work in the first-century church. Later in this series we will examine the miraculous activity of the Spirit, but our present lesson will focus upon His providential work.

INDWELT BY THE SPIRIT (HIS PROVIDENTIAL WORK)

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Christian today is described by the Greek word *oikeo*. This word is translated in the New American Standard Bible as “dwell,” “indwell,” and “live.” It comes from the Greek word meaning “house” (*oikos*), and it is used four times to describe the Holy Spirit’s relationship with Christians (Romans 8:9, 11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:14). What a beautiful thought Paul conveyed in teaching how the Holy Spirit takes up His personal residency within the bodies of Christians and dwells in them, for they are God’s New Testament temple.

This leads us to the important question “If the Holy Spirit is present and is working in our

lives today, what does He do for us?” Some sincere Christians are asking this question today. Several years ago I was visiting with an elder who confessed that he had believed for a long time that he had been given the gift of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. “But,” he added, “I really do not know why I received this gift. If the Holy Spirit no longer imparts miraculous gifts, why is He present?” We need to give some serious thought to this question.

The Spirit as a Seal

The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit seals us as the children of God. Paul wrote, “You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). As we repent and are baptized by water baptism into Christ, we are clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27). Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus comes into our lives, and God places His seal upon us, marking us as His children. In the first century, seals were used to assure protection and security. For example, the tomb of Jesus was sealed by the Roman government (Matthew 27:66) to ensure that no one could steal the body of our Lord. The 144,000 in Revelation 7 were sealed as a means of identification and protection of God’s saved ones. The seal of the Holy Spirit is God’s invisible sign to the spirit world that we are His property and that He will personally protect and provide for us until “the day of [our] redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). The Holy Spirit is God’s mark, His living assurance of our sonship and of the Father’s love.

The Spirit as a Pledge

The Holy Spirit is also “given as a pledge of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14). Some translations render the Greek word *arrabon* as “earnest” or “deposit.” The idea is that the Holy Spirit is God’s down payment toward our eternal inheritance in heaven. He is God’s personal pledge to us that He will faithfully keep His part of the new covenant we have entered into with Jesus. It is interesting that the modern Greek word *arrabona* is the word for engagement ring. When a young man gives a young woman his personal pledge to marry her, he gives her an *arrabona* (engagement ring) to show his commitment to the future marriage. This figure is full of meaning as we remember Paul’s words from 2 Corinthians 11:2:

“For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.” The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is God’s personal pledge that if we remain faithful to our marital vows to Jesus that one of these days we will be presented to Him as His perfect bride (see Ephesians 5:25–27; Revelation 21:2). In a sense, in this earthly life we are Jesus’ fiancée, while in the heavenly realm we will be His wife.

The Spirit as a Gift

The gift of the Holy Spirit also involves God’s gift of eternal life to His children. In contrast to being dead in sin and indwelt by the spirit of Satan (Ephesians 2:1, 2), God’s children are “alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5). Separation from God is spiritual death. To be joined “together with Christ” through the indwelling Spirit is life. “And the witness is this, that God

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has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11, 12). When our souls were washed by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Himself began to live in us, imparting eternal life to our spirits! To be “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5) is to have the very life of Jesus planted into our spirits through God’s Holy Spirit. Jesus illustrated the life of the Spirit in His parable of the vine and the branches in John 15. Just as the branch draws its life from the vine, so we draw our life from Jesus, the spiritual Vine. We abide in Christ through faith; and as we draw life from Him, He produces His spiritual fruit of righteousness in us (John 15:4; Galatians 5:22, 23). “And if Christ is in you, . . . the spirit is alive because of righteousness” (Romans 8:10). The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit becomes in each of us “a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:14) and flowing from our inner beings as “rivers of living water” (John 7:38, 39).

The Spirit as an Inner Strength

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit strengthens God’s children in spiritual warfare against Satan. Paul declared that “by the Spirit” we put “to death the deeds of the body” (Romans 8:13). Many Christians trust their own strength and determination to overcome Satan. They need to be reminded of Jesus’ warning: “For apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). In contrast to having an attitude of self-sufficiency, Paul expressed a confident faith: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). The Christian life is a life of faith in which we fix “our eyes on Jesus, . . . so that [we] may not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:2, 3). Our victory is in the Lord Jesus Christ and “in the strength of His might” (Ephesians 6:10).

Have you ever noticed how the Christian armor described in Ephesians 6 is related to the Lord Jesus Himself? We are to gird our loins with truth, and Jesus is “the truth” (John 14:6). We are to “put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14), and Jesus is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). We are to “shod [our] feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15), and Jesus is the gospel message (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:2; 15:3, 4). We are to take up “the shield” (Ephesians 6:16), and the Lord is our shield (cf. Psalm 33:20). We “take the helmet of salvation” (Ephesians 6:17) as we trust Jesus for our eternal salvation (cf. Acts 4:12). Jesus, as the Word of God, (John 1:1) is “the sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17), through whom we can fight the attacks of Satan. No wonder the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, and not Himself (John 16:14). It is through the Holy Spirit that we are “strengthened with power . . . in the inner man” so that “Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:16, 17). “Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27). The Spirit strengthens us as we focus the eyes of our faith upon Jesus and trust Him for His strength to fight the good fight of faith.

Alexander Campbell wrote,

... without this gift [of the Holy Spirit] no one could be saved or ultimately triumph over all opposition. . . . He knows but little of the deceitfulness of sin, or of the combating of temptation, who thinks himself competent to wrestle against the allied forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

... [But] by His Holy Spirit, in answer to our prayers, [God] works in us, and by us, and for us, all that is needful to our present, spiritual, and eternal salvation.¹

The Spirit as a Helper

The Holy Spirit also helps God's children in prayer. Paul commanded Christians to "pray at all times in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18). To "pray . . . in the Spirit" involves more than praying from the heart. Any worship offered "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24) is worship that recognizes the role of the Holy Spirit as He helps us in our prayers to God. What a wonderful assurance that the Spirit who abides in heaven is also the Spirit who abides in the church! We read, "The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the

hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:26, 27). When we pray, the Spirit Himself prays with us, giving us the great assurance that prayers offered in faith and from our innermost beings arise to the Lord as sweet incense (Revelation 8:3, 4).

CONCLUSION

As we learn of the Spirit's activity in helping us to live the Christian life to the glory of our God, we can see the need to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). A Spirit-filled life is a life focused upon Jesus rather than upon self. It is a life yielded to Jesus as Lord, and our Lord is not just some distant king we serve. Through His Holy Spirit He is an ever-present Shepherd who promises to restore our souls and to provide for our every need. Each Christian can say with the psalmist, "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). Amen! ▲

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