

THE
Holy
SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit & Christians

“For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so” (Romans 8:5–7).

*W*e have already studied the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Next, we will consider other aspects of the Holy Spirit in regard to Christians. Is the Holy Spirit active in the lives of Christians today? If so, what does He do?

PROVIDES A SPIRITUAL RESERVOIR

First, the Holy Spirit is the source of inner spiritual renewal. John 7:38, 39 says, “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, “From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke of the Spirit, . . .” In contrast to a cistern which has no inner source but must be filled from without, a spring continues to flow because of an inner source. Jesus did not say how the Spirit would do this, only that He would do it. We do not need to speculate as to how, but should accept as a fact that Christians have an inner source of spiritual reserve because of the help of the Spirit. Obviously, those who neglect God’s Word or live contrary to His will cannot expect the Spirit to provide a spiritual flow of “living water” in their lives.

SETS US FREE FROM THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH

In Romans 8:2, 3, we read, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.” The law of Moses, as a set of rules written on stone and not on the heart, brought death (2 Corinthians 3:6). Too often, God’s laws existed only as letters on stone and were not translated by His people into an inner desire to follow His will (Romans 2:27–29). We as Christians are set free from that law in order to “serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter” (Romans 7:6b). If we cooperate with the Spirit, He will help us to circumcise our hearts. Our sinful passions will be removed so that we can be free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

The Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17) is the basis on which we learn how to cooperate with the

Spirit. He can give us strength (Ephesians 3:16; 1 John 4:4) in our effort to overcome the world and to conform to the Word—but only when we are willing to put forth the effort ourselves (2 Corinthians 7:1).

LEADS US

Third, the Spirit leads Christians. “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:14). The question is not “*Can* we be led by the Spirit?” but “*How* are we led by the Spirit?” Our spiritual birth as Christians comes through the Word (1 Peter 1:23). We would not know how to obey Jesus unless we were taught His commandments (Matthew 28:20).

The Spirit delivered Jesus’ Word (John 14:26) to the apostles and the prophets (Ephesians 3:3–5). Those who follow that Word are being led by the Spirit, but those who follow human teachings are being led by men. If we are to live by the Spirit, we must “walk by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 25). That is, we must walk in the truth (2 John 4; 3 John 3, 4) that has been revealed by the Spirit (John 16:13). If we are led by the Spirit, we are not under law (Galatians 5:18), but under grace (Romans 6:14). To remain under grace, we must produce the fruit that has been revealed by the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23) and not follow our fleshly passions (Galatians 5:19, 21). The Spirit does not place these qualities in our lives for us; we must be the ones who sow to the Spirit and not to the things of the flesh (Galatians 6:8).

BEARS WITNESS THAT WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD

Next, we read that “the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16). What is the Spirit’s witness, and what is our spirits’ witness?

Paul did not say that the Spirit bears witness to our spirits as though the Spirit talks to our spirits. Rather, our spirits unite in agreement with the Spirit, giving the same testimony: that we are sons of God.

Our witness is our confidence within us (1 John 5:10), but what is the witness of the Holy Spirit? The witness of the Spirit is found in the message He has revealed (Hebrews 10:15). John gave witness concerning Jesus by speaking

about Him (John 1:15). In the same way, the Spirit has given His witness concerning Jesus through the revelation of the Word of truth (John 15:26, 27; 1 John 5:7). The words of Jesus are the source of life (John 6:63; 12:49, 50). When our spirits can confirm that we have come to newness of life by becoming children of God through Jesus’ teaching that has been revealed by the Spirit, our witness corresponds with the Holy Spirit’s witness.

The Spirit has testified that those who are born again by the truth of God’s Word (1 Peter 1:22, 23)—who through faith in Jesus have been baptized—are children of God (Galatians 3:26, 27) and have entered newness of life (Romans 6:4). If we have done these things and have the new life because we have been born of Him (1 John 2:29), then when we testify that we are God’s children, our witness agrees with the witness of the Spirit. Thus we can have assurance that we are God’s children (1 John 5:10). If one has not responded to the Scriptures, but testifies that he became a child of God some other way, then his spirit does not bear the same witness as that of the Spirit. In other words, he is bearing false witness about his salvation. Our witness is true only when our spirits bear the same witness that is given by the Spirit. Only when these two witnesses agree are we sons of God.

HELPS IN OUR PRAYERS

The Spirit also helps us in our prayers. Romans 8:26, 27 says:

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but 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.

The work of the Spirit is related to the work of Jesus, through whom we have “access in one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). Perhaps in this way we pray “in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18; see Jude 20).

The Spirit does not cause us to groan in prayer. Rather, He helps us by unscrambling our improperly expressed efforts to communicate with God. He translates our deep needs that cannot be put into words, making them known

to the Father. Barklay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida wrote, “. . . the Spirit stands in immediate communion with the Father and so needs no spoken words to express his thoughts.”¹

By taking the intent of our feeble prayers and revealing them to the Father, He is interceding for us, in a sense. He is making our communication known to the Father. However, Jesus is the one who truly mediates in our behalf (1 Timothy 2:5) as our intercessor (Romans 8:34). He not only relays the message, but also pleads our cause (Hebrews 7:25).

This passage is not referring to speaking in tongues. “As [Franz J.] Leenhardt notes, the passage is intended to include all Christians, whereas speaking in tongues is a special charismatic gift not possessed by all.”²

SEALS US IN CHRIST

Ephesians 1:13 says that the Spirit seals us in Christ for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30) and is sent into our hearts as a “pledge” (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5).

When we are baptized, we receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) because we have obeyed Jesus (Acts 5:32). Nothing in these two passages or anywhere else in the Bible states that we are given a “feeling” so that we can know the presence of the Spirit. John’s statement is typical:

¹Barklay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (London: United Bible Society, 1973), 164.

²Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Romans—Galatians*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 96.

“And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 John 3:24). This verse does not tell how we know He abides in us, whether by what is written in the Word or another way. For this reason, the verse cannot be used to prove *how* the Spirit causes us to know of His presence.

Our assurance is that if we have responded to the will of Jesus so as to become sons of God (Galatians 3:26, 27), the Spirit will be given to us (Galatians 4:6). Through faith we can accept Bible truths concerning the indwelling of Deity (Ephesians 3:17). Based on God’s Word, we accept the truth that we each have a human spirit dwelling in us (Zechariah 12:1), even though we cannot see or feel a spirit. In the same way, we must accept that the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

If the presence of the Spirit dwelling in us were something we could feel or were based on empirical knowledge, Paul would not have had to write the Corinthians to tell them that the Spirit dwelt in them (1 Corinthians 6:19). Instead, he could have stated that they knew the Spirit dwelt in them because of some evident sensation or manifestation.

As Christians we can have assurance from God’s Word that the Spirit is in us, that we are sealed by Him, and that we have received Him as a pledge for the day of redemption.

BEARS FRUIT IN OUR LIVES

By following the teaching of the Spirit, Christians are led to develop several qualities known

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIANS

1. He sets us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2–8).
2. He will bring about our resurrection (Romans 8:11).
3. He helps in our prayers (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 6:18).
4. He intercedes in our behalf (Romans 8:26, 27).
5. He leads us (Romans 8:14).
6. He seals us as a pledge for the day of redemption (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30).
7. He has fellowship with us (2 Corinthians 13:14).
8. He gives us access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18).
9. He strengthens the inner person (Ephesians 3:16).
10. He brings unity (Ephesians 4:3).
11. He sanctifies us (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

as the fruit of the Spirit: “. . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; . . .” (Galatians 5:22, 23; see also Romans 8:23). Not only are we to put to death fleshly desires (Galatians 5:24; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:8), but we are also to develop those qualities listed as the fruit of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:23, 24; Colossians 3:10–14). Since we are commanded to acquire spiritual traits, we have the responsibility to develop them:

love	John 13:34; Colossians 3:14
joy	Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16
peace	Philippians 4:6, 7; Hebrews 12:14
patience	2 Corinthians 6:6; Ephesians 4:2
kindness	Colossians 3:12; 2 Peter 1:7
goodness	Ephesians 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11
faithfulness	Revelation 2:10c
gentleness	1 Timothy 6:11; Titus 3:2
self-control	2 Peter 1:6

Paul did not write that the fruit of the Spirit is miraculously given to us. Rather, he said that we are to “put on” spiritual qualities (Colossians 3:12).

PROVIDES OUR BASIS FOR UNITY

As followers of Jesus, we are to be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). The Spirit, being one (Ephesians 4:4), has revealed the truth (John 16:13) as a unified body of teaching, which produces one faith (Ephesians 4:5). If we “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), then we are seeking to maintain the unity that the Spirit has made possible for us. That unity is based on both the right attitude (Ephesians 4:1–3) and the right structure (Ephesians 4:4–6).

Our unity depends on our growing up to be like Jesus (Ephesians 4:13). To the degree that we all become like Jesus, we can have the unity of the Spirit. By being drawn to Jesus (John 12:32) and following Him as the one Shepherd (John 10:11, 14) we can become one. We become dispersed and divided when we follow shepherds who would draw us away from Jesus (Acts 20:29, 30). The Spirit’s work is the only basis upon which we can have the unity Jesus desires (John 17:20–23).

ARMS US FOR SPIRITUAL BATTLE

Ephesians 6:11 tells Christians to “put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.” As a part of our armor we have the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). This spiritual sword can be used both defensively and offensively. David wrote concerning the defensive use of the Word, “Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee” (Psalm 119:11). The offensive use of the Word is seen in its power to spread the gospel (Acts 8:4).

A Letter Written by the Spirit

Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, “You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; . . . you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:2, 3). The character of these Christians was an indication that they were following the instructions of the Spirit. One scholar said,

The letter was no human document recorded in ink on papyrus. Nor was it a divine composition, such as the Decalogue, engraved on inanimate tablets of stone (Exod 31:18; 32:15, 16). Rather the letter was of divine authorship, “written by the Spirit of the living God,” and was indelibly inscribed on living tablets, sensitive human hearts (Jer 31:33; 32:38; Ezek 11:19; 36:26). Proof of Paul’s genuineness was to be found not in written characters but in human characters.¹

When we “cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1b) in conformity with the Word revealed by the Spirit, our lives can be read by those about us as letters from God. The truth can be made known without the Word (1 Peter 3:1, 2) to people who read our lives as letters written by the Spirit of God.

¹Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, *Romans—Galatians*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 334.

The sword of the Spirit is to be used to defeat our enemy, the devil. In this way the Spirit helps externally in our fight against sin by providing our weapons. He helps us internally by giving inner strength while we are using our armor (Ephesians 3:16; 1 John 4:4).

GUIDES US IN OUR WORSHIP AND SERVICE

We are to “worship in the Spirit” (Philippians 3:3). “Worship” in this passage is the translation of *latreuo*, which elsewhere is translated “serve” sixteen times and “worship” three times. Our service is to be within the parameters set by the Spirit. Just as our toil in the Lord is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58), so also the service which we do in the Spirit is of value to God.

A different word, *proskuneo* (translated “worship”), is used in reference to our reaching up to God (John 4:23, 24). Our worship must emanate from the human spirit in accordance with the truth that originated with Jesus (John 1:14, 17; 14:6) and has been revealed by the Spirit (John 16:13). Our service is to be within the sphere of the holiness found in the Spirit.

SANCTIFIES US

As Christians, we are sanctified by the Spirit:

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: . . . (1 Peter 1:2).

The blessing of sanctification comes through His bringing us the Word of truth, which is also said to sanctify us (John 17:17), or set us apart for God’s special purpose.³

As Christians we are not to be dedicated to the sinful goals of this world, but are to be transformed (Romans 12:1, 2) into the image of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:17, 18). Developing this holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1) is our responsibility. When led by the Spirit’s revealed Word, we will become sanctified, set apart from the wicked world about us, because we have developed the fruit of the Spirit.

A cloth can be used to dry dishes, scrub floors, or wash windows. However, a cloth that is imprinted with a country’s flag is not used for such mundane purposes; it is dedicated to the high position of representing that nation. As a flag is set apart from other pieces of cloth, Christians are set apart from other people. They are sanctified, or dedicated, to serve the high purposes of God through the work of the Spirit. No longer are we to use ourselves for worldly things. We are to devote ourselves to serving Jesus according to the parameters set by the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit plays an important role in our lives as Christians. Through the Spirit we have been blessed with revelation, direction, strength, and many other benefits. The Spirit blesses our lives through His work when we follow the truths He has delivered. We are indebted to the Spirit for everything He has done to make possible the beginning and continuance of new life in Christ. Our getting to live in heaven with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will depend to a great extent on the great work of the Spirit.

³The verb root form *hagiazō*, “sanctify” (whose cognate forms are the adjective *hagios*, “holy” or “saint,” and the noun form *hagiasmos*, “sanctification”), means “to set apart” or “dedicate” for a special purpose.