

Who is the Holy Spirit?

By Dr. Jim Denison

The Holy Spirit is the most misunderstood member of the Trinity. Who is he? What does he do? Why does he matter so much in our lives today?

I spent years in Baptist churches with no real introduction to the Holy Spirit. I don't remember ever hearing a sermon on the subject. We knew to trust in Jesus and worship his Father, but I had no idea how to relate to the Spirit. Or even if I should. I suspect that many of us have a similar story.

We'll begin with some introductions. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal neuter, an "it." He is more than a "presence." He is not a "ghost," holy or otherwise (the King James Version notwithstanding).

Rather, the Spirit is a Person who works personally. He possesses the three distinctive characteristics of personality: knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:10-11), will (1 Cor. 12:11), and feeling or emotion (Romans 15:30). He performs acts which only a person can perform: he searches (1 Cor. 2:10), speaks (Revelation 2:7), cries (Galatians 4:6), prays (Romans 8:26), testifies (John 15:26), teaches (Jn. 14:26), leads Christians (Ro. 8:24), and commands people (Acts 16:6,7).

He is treated in Scripture as only a person can be treated: he is grieved and rebelled against (Isaiah 63:10; Ephesians 4:30); insulted (Hebrews 10:29); and blasphemed (Matthew 12:31, 32).

But is he God?

Why is the Spirit "Holy"?

Why do we believe the Spirit to be God? For five reasons. First, he possesses the four distinctly divine attributes: eternity (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10), omniscience (1 Corinthians 2:10,11), and omnipotence (Luke 1:35). Second, he performs each of the three distinctively divine works: creation (Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30; Genesis 1:1-3), impartation of life (John 6:63; Gen. 2:7), and authorship of prophecy (2 Peter 1:21).

Third, Old Testament statements about God are applied to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (see Exodus 16:7 and Hebrews 3:7-9). Fourth, the name of the Holy Spirit is often coupled with that of God (1 Cor. 12:4-6; Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14). And last, the Holy Spirit is called God. Peter asked Ananias, "how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:3). Then the apostle warns, "You have not lied to men but to God" (v. 5).

While the Spirit is God, he is also distinct from the Father and the Son. At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit descended while the Father spoke (Luke 3:21, 22). We are to baptize

in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (Mt. 28:19). The Son promised that the Spirit would come when the Son left earth for heaven (Jn. 16:7).

When we survey the names given to the Spirit by Scripture, we get a better sense of his divinity and significance. He is the Spirit (Ps. 104:30); the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 3:16); the Spirit of Jehovah (Isaiah 11:2); the Spirit of the Lord Jehovah (Is. 61:1-3), and the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor. 3:6). He is the Spirit of Christ (Ro. 8:9), the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:19), the Spirit of Jesus (Ac. 16:6,7), and the Spirit of his Son (Galatians 4:6).

He is the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13), the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13, RSV), of holiness (Ro. 1:4), judgment (Is. 4:4), and burning (Is. 4:4). He is the Spirit of truth (Jn. 14:17), of wisdom and understanding (Is. 11:2), of counsel and might (Is. 11:2), and the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Is. 11:2). He is the Spirit of life (Ro. 8:2), the oil of gladness (Heb. 1:9), the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29), of grace and supplication (Zechariah 12:18, RSV), of glory (1 Pt. 4:14), the eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14), the Comforter (Jn. 14:26), and God in us, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). How can we know him better?

What does the Spirit do?

We've learned that the Spirit is a Person and that he is Holy. What does this holy Person do? The Bible likens him to fire (Isaiah 4:4), wind (John 3), water (Jn. 7:37-39), a dove (Genesis 1:2; Luke 3:22), a "seal for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30; 2 Timothy 2:19), an "earnest" or down-payment on the future (Eph. 1:13,14), and anointing oil (2 Corinthians 1:21).

The Spirit was extremely active in the Old Testament. He created the material universe and humanity (Psalm 33:6; Job 33:4). He empowered individuals for specific tasks (Judges 14:6,19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:6,10; 2 Chronicles 15:1-2; Zechariah 4:6). He maintains living creatures (Ps. 104:29,30), and sides with the helpless, poor, wretched and oppressed (Ps. 103:6).

He anticipated the Anointed One, the Messiah (Isaiah 42:2), and would one day be poured out on the house of Israel (Ezekiel 39:29). He would be experienced universally (Joel 2:28-29), and would write God's laws on the hearts of all (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The Spirit was active in the life and earthly ministry of Jesus. Our Savior was born of the Spirit (Luke 1:35), and lived a sinless life in the power of the Spirit (Heb. 9:14). He was anointed and fitted for service by the Spirit (Ac. 10:38; Is. 61:1; Lk. 4:14,18,19; 3:22). The Spirit led Jesus in his earthly movements (Lk. 4:1). He taught Jesus, and was his source of wisdom (Is. 11:2,3; 42:1, fulfilled in Matthew 12:17,18).

Jesus worked his miracles through the Spirit (Mt. 12:28). By the power of the Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead (Romans 8:11). After his resurrection, Christ gave

commandments to his apostles through the Spirit (Ac. 1:2). Now the Spirit bears witness to Jesus (Jn. 15:26,27).

The Spirit then worked in the apostles and prophets, giving them special gifts for specific purposes (1 Cor. 12:4,8-11,28,29). Truth was hidden before the Spirit revealed it (Eph. 3:3-5). The apostles and prophets spoke not in their wisdom but the Spirit's (1 Pt. 1:10,12), as they were carried along by him (2 Pt. 1:21). The Spirit spoke prophetic utterances (Heb. 3:7; 10:15,16; Ac. 28:25; 2 Samuel 13:2), so that when we read their words we find not the speech of men but of God (Mark 7:13; 2 Sam. 23:2). In a very real sense, every time we open the pages of Scripture, we hear the voice of the Spirit as he speaks to us today.

How does all this relate to our personal lives?

Why does the Spirit matter to us?

The Holy Spirit shows us our guilt as sinners, convicting us of righteousness and judgment (Acts 2:36,37). He then imparts spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1; cf. Titus 3:5; John 3:3-5).

Now he indwells the believer (1 Corinthians 6:19,20), and sets us free from sin (Romans 8:2). He forms Christ within us (Ephesians 3:14-19), bringing forth Christ-like graces of character (Galatians 5:22,23). He guides the believer into the life of a son (Ro. 8:14), and bears witness to our sonship (Ro. 8:15,16).

The Spirit brings to remembrance the words of Christ, and will teach us all things (Jn. 14:26). He reveals the deep things of God which are hidden from and foolishness to the "natural man" (1 Cor. 2:9-13). He interprets his own revelation to us (1 Cor. 2:14), enabling Christians to communicate to others in power the truth which we have been taught by him (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

He guides the believer in prayer (Jude 20; Eph. 6:18); he inspires and guides us in thanksgiving (Eph. 5:18-20); and he inspires and leads our worship (Philippians 3:3). He infills the believer (Eph. 5:18; more on this tomorrow). He sends us into definite vocations (Ac. 13:2-4). And he guides us in daily life (Ac. 8:27-29; 16:6,7).

One of the most significant ways the Holy Spirit impacts the lives of Christians is through the "spiritual gifts" he bestows on us at our salvation. God's supreme gift to us is himself. These spiritual "gifts" are means by which we can know our Father better and serve him more effectively. They are to the church what organs and body parts are to the human body. The study of these gifts is the study of the anatomy of the Church, the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are God's way of equipping and enabling us for our world mission and ministry. They are equipment necessary for service. They are bestowed on believers as

the Spirit chooses (1 Cor. 12:11), not as we might wish. They are often given in accordance with natural talents, but always supercede them.

How do we know our gifts? How can we experience daily the power of the Spirit? We'll close our study by discussing the controversial questions people often ask about him: what are our spiritual gifts? What about "tongues"? What is the "baptism of the Spirit"? How can we be "filled with the Spirit"? Why should we be?

Who is gifted?

The New Testament provides three lists of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4). Theologians have classified them as ministry of the word vs. practical ministry; and as motivational, ministering, and manifestational. One wrong classification is to group them in permanent and temporary categories. A good division: Ephesians 4 provides the orders of ministry given the church, while 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 list the gifts themselves.

Here are gifted people, according to Ephesians 4:11. First come "apostles." Their qualifications (1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 1:22; 14:4,7) are that they saw Jesus, were witness to the resurrected Christ, and were called by him to this function. The word means "delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders." The title came to include more than the original Twelve, as Paul makes clear in greeting Andronicus and Junias, two who are "outstanding among the apostles" (Ro. 16:7). Most theologians see the gift or office of "apostle" as one of introducing Christ and his gospel where it has never been preached, and leading churches to do the same.

The second office in Ephesians 4:11 is that of "prophet" (cf. 1 Cor. 12:10). These were both male and female (cf. Deborah and Miriam in the Old Testament, and Philip's four daughters who prophesied, Ac 21:9). The emphasis of their ministry was on forth-telling more than fore-telling, though God occasionally gave them messages regarding the future as well as the present. "Evangelists" were the third office, individuals who founded churches as roving ministers. We are all to do the work of evangelism (2 Timothy 2:5), but some are especially gifted for bringing souls to salvation.

The fourth office in Ephesians 4:11 is the "pastor-teacher" ("pastor" and "teacher" in the Greek syntax are one function). They are responsible for protecting, shepherding, and teaching the people of God. They are to "feed and lead" the church of Jesus Christ.

Now we come to individual gifts. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:7, 11; Eph 4:7), given at his or her salvation. No believer has every spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:12, 27, 29-30). Our gifts differ from each other (Ro 12:3-6a).

We receive our gifts according to God's will, not our own desire or experience (1 Cor 12:11; Eph 4:7-8).

What are the "spiritual gifts"?

Combining the various lists, we discover these gifts:

- *administration*: organizing people and ministries effectively
- *apostleship*: adapting to a different culture to share the gospel or do ministry
- *discernment*: distinguishing spiritual truth from error or heresy
- *evangelism*: sharing the gospel effectively and passionately
- *exhortation*: encouraging others as they follow Jesus
- *faith*: seeing God's plan and following it with passion
- *giving*: investing with unusual sacrifice and joy in God's Kingdom
- *healing*: being used by God to bring physical health in supernatural ways
- *intercession*: praying with unusual passion and effectiveness
- *interpretation of "tongues"*: being used by God to explain to others the message given by the Spirit through "tongues" (see below)
- *knowledge*: discerning and sharing the deep truths of God's word and will
- *leadership*: motivating and inspiring others to serve Jesus fully
- *mercy*: showing God's grace to hurting people with unusual passion
- *miracles*: being used by God in ministry which transcends natural explanation
- *prophecy*: preaching the word of God with personal passion and effectiveness
- *servicing*: meeting practical needs with unusual sacrifice and joy
- *shepherding*: helping others grow spiritually
- *speaking in "tongues"*: using a God-given spiritual language in prayer and worship
- *teaching*: explaining God's word and truth with unusual effectiveness
- *wisdom*: relating biblical truth to practical life with great effectiveness

How can you know your gifts?

Some believe that God reveals our spiritual gifts to us directly, as his Spirit speaks to us. Others depend on the insight and opinions of godly believers. Most theologians would add a third approach: give attention to your God-given opportunities for service, and to your interests, passions, and abilities. The Lord typically uses us in ways consistent with our gifting. For instance, if you are often asked into a leadership position, you may well be gifted for that role. The Lord usually gives us a desire to become involved in those ministries for which we are gifted. And he blesses the uses of our gifts, so that we can identify their existence by their effectiveness.

Several "spiritual gifts analysis" tools are available today. The Center for Informed Faith has developed one which is available to you on our website (www.informedfaith.com). As you utilize it or other approaches, know that the Father wants you to discover and use your gifts even more than you do.

And remember: the Lord gives his greatest joy to those who help fulfill his Great Commission. When you find and use your spiritual gifts, you will find the passion, purpose, and peace of God.

The gift of "tongues"

Now we come to a divisive subject. Let's begin with the Pentecost event we will remember this Sunday:

When the day of Pentecost came, [the first believers] were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4).

"Pentecostals" are typically named for their understanding of this event: that when the Spirit came at Pentecost, each Christian began speaking in a "heavenly" or "prayer language," an "unknown tongue." If each of them should, each of us should. In this view, if you are a Christian who has not "spoken in tongues," you have not yet experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

In the late 1970's, no issue was more divisive for evangelicals than the "Charismatic" movement which advanced this thesis. While divisions regarding this phenomenon seem less intense today, confusion still surrounds the issue.

Should all Christians "speak in tongues"?

The question first arises at Pentecost, when early believers "were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Ac 2:4). It seems clear that the activity of speaking in "other tongues" was a direct result of the Spirit's work, and that it was experienced by every believer.

Later, the Corinthian Christians experienced an ecstatic kind of spiritual language as one of the Spirit's gifts (1 Cor 12:30; 14:1-25). This gift is usually called speaking in "unknown tongues." Let's note the contrast between the two experiences at Pentecost and Corinth:

- At Pentecost all spoke in tongues (Ac 2:4); this was not true at Corinth (1 Cor 12:30, where the Greek syntax is literally translated, "All do not speak in tongues, do they?").
- At Pentecost these tongues were understood as languages by the crowd (Ac 2:6); at Corinth they were understood by none (1 Cor 14:2).
- At Pentecost the Christians spoke to men (Ac 2:6); at Corinth, they spoke to God (1 Cor 14:2).
- At Pentecost no interpreter was needed (Ac 2:6); at Corinth public tongue-speaking was prohibited unless an interpreter was present (1 Cor 14:23-28).
- At Pentecost there was perfect harmony (Ac 2:1); at Corinth there was confusion (1 Cor 14:33).

And so the Corinthian experience was completely different from the Pentecost event. In Jerusalem on Pentecost day, Christians were given the divine ability to share the gospel

with the assembled crowds by using known languages which they had not yet learned. At Corinth, believers were given the divine ability to speak to God in a language known only to his Spirit. Nowhere does the Bible teach that all Christians will speak in tongues as did some in Corinth. In fact, it is clear that they will not (1 Cor 12:30).

What do we know about "unknown tongues"?

The Pentecost gift is found in Acts 2 and never mentioned or practiced again. However, the "unknown tongues" practiced in Corinth have been a significant part of the Charismatic movement and Pentecostal worship in recent generations.

What can we learn from Scripture about this experience?

- Jesus never mentioned this gift.
- Numerous conversions occur in Acts without this accompanying sign.
- The spiritual gifts are given to the edification of the church (Eph 4:12). Any gift which is used to the division of the church rather than for its edification is being abused.
- Any person who desires to speak in an "unknown tongue" in public must first determine whether one with the gift of interpretation is present (1 Cor 14:27-28). If an interpreter is present, only two or three are to speak, and each in turn (1 Cor 14:27).
- Tongues are given last in every list where they are found (1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30), and are not included in lists found in Romans 12:6-8 and Ephesians 4:11.
- But Paul rejoiced that he spoke in tongues "more than all of you" (1 Cor 14:18).

Are "unknown tongues" still a valid gift today?

Some say no. Paul predicted that tongues would "one day cease" (1 Cor 13:8), and they are omitted in Ephesians 4 and Romans 12, gift lists written later in the New Testament.

However, 1 Corinthians 13:8 also states, "where there are prophecies, they will cease." "Prophecies" means preaching; no one claims that preaching has ceased as a spiritual gift and activity. Paul's reference in 1 Corinthians 13 relates to that time in glory "when perfection comes" (v. 10). And nowhere does the New Testament clearly teach that this gift is temporary.

Some suggest that the reason for the gift ceased at Pentecost, since we are able to translate the gospel into hundreds of languages today. However, such interpretation confuses the Pentecost experience with the Corinthian gift.

Paul wrote: "Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers" (1 Cor 14:22). And so some believe that the purpose of "unknown tongues," like other "sign gifts" of miracles and healing, is no longer valid today.

In this reasoning, these spiritual gifts existed to show the unbelieving world the truth and veracity of the Christian faith. Now that the New Testament and its church are established, these gifts of persuasion are no longer necessary.

However, no text teaches that this is so. Believers who consider "tongues" to be invalid still pray for God to heal bodies and work other miracles. I can find no biblical warrant for dismissing "tongues" as a valid gift for believers today. When this gift is used within Scriptural guidelines, it apparently draws those who practice it closer to the Father.

So we can conclude that "tongues" are still a valid spiritual gift. But we should also note: no biblical text suggests that "tongues" is a superior spiritual gift, or that it demonstrates that the believer is more "filled" with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). We are all to be submitted to the leading of God's Spirit each day. Then our spiritual gifts will fulfill his purpose, to his glory and our good.

The "baptism" and "filling" of the Spirit

Finally, we come to the most practical dimension of our entire study. A power drill is not much good unless it's plugged into a power source. You can make a hole in a piece of wood if you try hard enough, but the tool isn't fulfilling its purpose without its intended power. So it is for all Christians--we cannot accomplish our purpose without the power of the Spirit.

The daily "filling" of the Holy Spirit is the most crucial experience of the Christian life. Next to our salvation, it is the most important decision we make. And we must make it every day.

Some traditions believe that we can become Christians without experiencing the "baptism" of the Spirit. But Romans 8:9 makes clear that if we do not have the Spirit, we do not belong to Jesus. I believe that the moment we ask Christ to be our Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us. In fact, when we "ask Jesus into our hearts," it is actually the Spirit who answers our prayer.

Unfortunately, while every Christian is "baptized" in the Spirit, not every Christian is "filled" with the Spirit. The command in question is Ephesians 5:18, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." "Filled" means "controlled." The Greek literally says, "be continually being controlled by the Spirit." This is an ongoing, daily decision we must make.

Why be filled with the Spirit?

When we are living under the control of the Holy Spirit, we are empowered for our purpose and work (Ac. 1:8). We find the comfort of Christ (Jn. 14:1,18,27-28). We experience his teaching, counsel, guidance and wisdom (Jn. 14:26). The Spirit anchors, stabilizes, grows, and matures us (Eph. 4:14-16).

The Spirit then equips us against Satan (Eph. 6:10-17; 1 Jn. 4:4). And he makes us witnesses to the world (Mt. 28:18-20). Without his power, we cannot fulfill his purpose. With his power, no purpose is beyond our fulfillment.

How are we filled with the Spirit?

Begin at the beginning of the day. A runner does not finish the race and then warm up. We don't fill the car's tank after the trip is done. The earlier you give your day to the Spirit, the more of your day he can bless.

First, we must confess our sins, for the "Holy" Spirit cannot control a person in rebellion against the Lord. We can lie against the Spirit (Ac. 5:3), grieve him (Eph. 4:30), and quench his power in our lives (1 Thessalonians 5:19). So get a piece of paper and a pencil, and get alone with God. Ask the Spirit to reveal to your mind anything which is separating you from God. Write down whatever comes to mind, as specifically and honestly as possible. Then confess each sin specifically to God, claim his forgiving grace (1 John 1:9), and throw the paper away. Conduct this "spiritual inventory" regularly.

Next, surrender every dimension of your life to the Spirit. Put him in charge of your plans for the day, your decisions, problems, and opportunities. Ask him to guide your steps and protect your character. Yield all that you will do this day to him.

Now, step out by faith, believing that he has answered your prayer. The Bible nowhere describes how it feels to be filled with the Spirit. It takes just as much faith to believe that the Spirit is controlling your day as it did to ask Jesus to be your Savior.

Here is what will *not* result from this decision: continuous emotional heights (Eph. 5:19), permanent filling (Eph. 5:18), sinless perfection (1 Jn. 1:8), or any particular gift (1 Cor. 12:29-30). Here are results of this decision as seen in the book of Acts: preaching and witnessing in the power of the Spirit (Ac. 2:4ff); gathering in fellowship (2:42,46); performing signs, wonders, and miracles (2:43; 19:11); giving sacrificially to needy brethren (2:44-45); healing the sick and the lame (4:31); adding new believers (2:45; 5:14); expanding the faith and establishing churches in new areas (9:31); maintaining the unity of the believers (4:32); raising the dead (9:36); and defeating Satan and his demons (13:6-12; 16:16).

When we are surrendered to the Spirit, we are empowered for God's purpose and plan for our lives. And eternity is always affected by our obedience.

Conclusion

We have learned that the Holy Spirit is God indwelling us. He affects and empowers every dimension of our lives. He directs every step and decision of our days. He is the Lord who gives us significance and purpose, life and a future.

We can measure the degree to which we are surrendered to the Spirit by the "fruit" or results which manifest themselves in our lives: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22). Would those who know you best say that they see the Spirit at work in your life today?

One of my favorite stories concerns a father arriving home from work one day. His two little girls ran to meet him. The five-year-old got to him first, throwing her arms around his legs. Hedges on either side of the sidewalk kept the three-year-old from going around her big sister to her father. Standing on the sidewalk, she began to cry. So her father reached down and picked her up.

The big sister then taunted her little sister, "Ha, ha, ha--I've got all of Daddy there is." The little sister replied, "Ha, ha, ha--Daddy's got all of me there is." If Jesus is your Lord, you have all of God there is. Does he have all of you?