

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Background

The Holy Spirit (the third person of the Trinity) is as truly God as God the Father and God the Son. Though the Hebrew and Greek words for 'Spirit' also mean 'wind' and 'breath', he is *personal*, not just an influence or energy or mode of action, and he can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). As God the Holy One, he will never prompt us to say or do anything that is ungodly and contrary to the Bible, which he himself caused to be written (cf. 2 Peter 1:20–21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Not only must he be revered as God, Jesus himself said that it is unpardonable for us to blaspheme him (Matthew 12:31). Rejection of the Spirit would be rejection of the very person who applies God's grace to our lives.

Psalm 139:7–10; Matthew 28:19; Luke 1:35; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 1:8; 5:3; Romans 8:26–27; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 9:14; 1 John 4:1–3.

Old Testament

The Holy Spirit was active in creation. The Spirit was present to believers (cf. Psalm 51:11) and would act upon God's human agents (temporarily) to equip them for divine tasks. There was also the promise that the Spirit would one day be in believers to enliven and empower them 'from the inside'.

Genesis 1:2 [cf. Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30], Genesis 6:3; Exodus 31:3; Numbers 11:26–29; 24:2; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 13:24–25; 14:19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:6; 11:6; 16:14; 2 Samuel 23:2; 1 Chronicles 12:18; 28:12; 2 Chronicles 24:20; Nehemiah 9:30; Isaiah 32:15; 42:1; 44:3; 61:1; 63:10; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–29; Zechariah 4:6.

The Gospels

In the Gospels the work of the Holy Spirit was manifested powerfully in and through Christ. So Jesus could tell the disciples that the Holy Spirit dwelt *with* them and would one day be *in* them (John 14:15–18). The indwelling of the Spirit would be a glorious result of Christ's atoning work and resurrection. Then it would be possible for believers to be born again and share in the life of the risen and glorified Christ. On the day of his resurrection, Jesus made this a reality for his disciples: 'He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."' (John 20:22; the Greek verb means, 'Receive now'). They were changed! (cf. their story up to the end of Acts 1). Jesus also taught his disciples that, when he departed from them, the Holy Spirit would come to be with them as another helper/advocate/counsellor/comforter (Greek *parakletos*). The Holy Spirit would come upon disciples, empowering them to be his witnesses throughout the world. Believers would be baptised in Holy Spirit (see Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:15–17). This was not without a visible effect! A gift of tongues was normative in the early church and has been known and experienced by countless believers since then. Equipping for service and mission is vital for members of Christ's body, the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:13).

Matthew 1:18; 10:20; Luke 1:15; 2:25–27; 3:16, 22; 4:1; 11:13; John 3:5–8; 7:37–39; 15:26; 16:7–15.

N.B. Though the word for 'Spirit' (*pneuma*) is a neuter noun in Greek and a feminine noun in Hebrew, Jesus strikingly disregards all that and refers to the Spirit as 'he' (*ekeinos* – emphatic masculine pronoun): John 15:26; 16:13–15.

From the Day of Pentecost onwards

The Holy Spirit is now 'with', 'in' and 'upon' the true believers. See John 3:3–8; Acts 2:1–38; 4:8, 31; 7:55; 8:14–17; 10:44–48; 13:2–4; 19:2–7; Romans 8:9–11; 1 John 2:20, 27.

The work of the Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and of the church is expounded in the epistles. 'Religion' without the Holy Spirit would be dead. It is the Spirit who gives life (see 2 Corinthians 3:6). The Spirit produces in the believer the character of Christ – the 'fruit' (singular!) described in Galatians 5:22–23.

Romans 5:5; 8:1–27; 14:17; 1 Corinthians 2:4, 10–14; 3:16; 2 Corinthians 3:3–6, 17; Galatians 3:1–5, 14; 4:29; 5:16–26; Ephesians 4:3–4, 30; 6:17–18; Philippians 1:18–19; 2:1; 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:13–14; Titus 3:4–6; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 4:14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 3:24; Jude 20; Revelation 3:22.

[Some believers are persuaded that the 'gifts of the Spirit' (Greek *charismata*, as in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11) were only given to the early church, to establish the first Christians until the New Testament was complete. In fact the New Testament nowhere says that the charismatic gifts are temporary. They are needed just as much today.]

Discernment is needed

Christians need to be aware that not everything that happens which is *claimed* as a manifestation of the Spirit is always actually his doing. We need to exercise discernment and humility at all times, weighing what we see in the light of Scripture, and not jump to conclusions when we are unsure or uneasy. Christians need to remember that our enemy uses the counterfeit to lead people astray. That cautionary note having been sounded, we are to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit. We are to be baptised in Holy Spirit; we are to go on being filled with him; we are not to grieve him; we are to be sensitive to his prompting. He is our counsellor. We have been given in the New Testament examples of how he operates. We know that he convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement (see John 16:7–11) and he always glorifies Jesus. The fruit of the Holy Spirit (listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22–26) and the gifts of the Spirit (listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:4–11) are both still needed by believers today.

Unusual manifestations may sometimes be visible in some who are experiencing the impact of the Holy Spirit in Christian gatherings, and what we see happening may be how a person is *reacting to* the presence and activity of the Spirit.

It is very important that no believer should think it is somehow spiritually superior to be manifesting a particular outward physical reaction! Pastors will be aware of this, and are in special need of wisdom and discernment as they lead and minister, and train others to do so.

A concluding thought

Many Christians, either because of ignorance or through degrees of carelessness in their discipleship, do not enter into all the blessings available to them in their walk on the Way. Believers need teaching, training and pastoring. Furthermore, we all tend to 'leak' – some lose what was once enjoyed, growing weary, falling into sinful behaviour and grieving the Holy Spirit. So we need to heed again Paul's exhortation: *Go on being filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18).