

Christian Growth Week 4: The Holy Spirit

Introduction

For Christians, spirituality or spiritual growth is not our own development of our spirit. It is being transformed by God's Spirit, or the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we need to understand what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit so that we can intelligently cooperate with His transforming work in our lives.

We will also look at the passages in Romans that you studied for your homework.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a *Person*, not a force or a part of God. All of the elements of personality are attributed to Him:

- Intelligence

1 Cor. 2:10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. **11** For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

Note Paul's reference to the *mind* of the Spirit,

- Volition

1 Cor. 12:11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Notes that the Spirit gives spiritual gifts as He *wills*.

- Emotion

Eph. 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

This verse warns us not to *grieve* the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: The Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as "He" or "Him"— not because the Spirit is male, but to emphasize that He is a Person rather than an impersonal force.

The Holy Spirit is fully God. He is one of the three Persons of the Trinity.

- He is grouped with the Father and Jesus to emphasize His equality with them.

Matt. 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

This verse speaks of the "name" (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three Persons share the same "name" or authority.

2 Cor. 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

This verse speaks of the “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”

- He has divine attributes:

1 Cor. 2:10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

The Spirit is *omniscient*—He knows the thoughts of God

Ps. 139:7 Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?

The Spirit is *omnipresent*.

- The Spirit is equated with God.

2 Cor. 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

Acts 5:3,4 But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

Why does the Holy Spirit play a greater role with God’s people in the New Testament?

If you survey the Bible, you will find that the Holy Spirit was not as active among God’s people before Jesus came as He is now that Jesus has come. The three key contrasts are:

BEFORE JESUS	AFTER JESUS
WITH	IN
SELECTIVE	UNIVERSAL
TEMPORARY	PERMANENT

- Before Jesus, the Holy Spirit was *with* rather than *in* God’s people.

Jn. 14:17 . . . that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.

During Old Testament times, the Spirit “came upon” Israelites to empower them to carry out God’s strategic purposes (Jdg. 14:6; 1 Sam. 16:13; Mic. 3:8; Ex. 31:3).

- Before Jesus, His involvement was *selective*, not *universal*. Evidently, only a few Old Testament believers received the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Rather, this assistance was reserved for those in leadership positions. After Jesus’ death, all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor. 12:13* For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Rom. 8:9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

- Before Jesus, His involvement was *temporary*, not *permanent*. Old Testament figures could (and did) lose the presence of the Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11; Jdg. 15:14; 16:20; 1 Sam. 16:14). But Jesus promised that after His death, His followers would have His Spirit “forever.”

Jn. 14:16 “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 that is the Spirit of truth . . .

What is the reason for these differences? Obviously, Jesus is the difference!

The Old Testament tabernacle symbolized God’s desire to dwell in His people, but it also communicated that their sins made this impossible. Through the animal sacrifices, the tabernacle foreshadowed the death of a future Substitute that would remove this separation. Jesus is the “Lamb of God” (Jn. 1:29) whose death would pay for our sins.

This is why Jesus predicted that the Spirit would soon indwell those who believe in Him, but not until after His death.

Jn. 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. 38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Jn. 12:23 refers to Jesus’ death as a key aspect of His glorification). Once Jesus’ death paid the penalty for our sins, the Spirit could live in sinful people who believe in Jesus!

What does the Holy Spirit do in Christians’ lives?

The New Testament describes the following specific ministries of the Holy Spirit. Think about ways you have experienced many of these ministries of the Spirit.

Prior to conversion, the Spirit:

- **Convicts** us of our need for His forgiveness through Jesus. Otherwise, we would never come to Christ.

Jn. 16:8 “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment . . .

At conversion, the Spirit permanently:

- **Regenerates** us, or makes us alive to God and gives us a new nature.

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit . . .

- *Indwells* us

Rom. 8:9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him . . . **11** But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

- *Baptizes* us, or identifies us with Christ and His Body, other Christians

1 Cor. 12:13* For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

- *Seals* us in Christ until His return.

Eph. 1:13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise . . .

The grammar in Eph. 1:13 indicates that the Spirit is given to us the moment we believe the gospel, not at some later time (as taught by some Pentecostals).

Eph. 4:30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Subsequent to conversion, the Spirit is our “Helper” (Jn. 14:16) in the following ways:

- He *assures* us of our salvation by enabling us to relate to God personally. He enables us to experience our adoption as God’s children by helping us to cry out “Abba!” (“Papa!”), and that He personally testifies to our spirit that we are God’s children.

Rom. 8:15,16* For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” **16** The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God . . .

Gal. 4:6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

The following ministries explain *how* the Holy Spirit provides this subjective assurance. This is often subtle enough that it requires sensitivity to recognize this in your own life, and to point out in other Christians’ lives.

- He *illuminates* us, or enables us to understand the meaning and significance of God’s Word (especially His grace), and how it personally applies to our lives. We should

regularly pray for this personal apprehension of what God has given us through Christ—both for ourselves and for other Christians.

1 Cor. 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.

Eph. 1:16 . . . I do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

- He *leads* us by personally guiding us into God's will for our lives. This leadership consists primarily of personal guidance in the areas of our character transformation and ministry purpose. Contrast this to an impersonal list of rules that dictate a desired behavior, or mindless imitation of other Christians.

Gal. 5:18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law . . . 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Acts records a number of instances of the Spirit's guidance of Christians into fruitful ministry situations (see Acts 8:25-40; 10:9-33; 16:6-10).

EXAMPLES: Most of us have experienced God sensitizing our consciences about sinful behaviors, urging us to apologize, forgive, etc. Most of us have experienced God prompting us to share our faith, encourage another Christian, pray aloud at a meeting, etc.

- He *empowers* us to please God by anointing us for character transformation and ministry.

The Spirit empowers us to break free from sin's mastery and become more Christ-like in our characters.

Rom. 8:12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The Spirit empowers us to witness (Acts 1:8) and overcome the fears involved in evangelism (1 Cor. 2:3-5), to work hard in ministry (Col. 1:28,29), and to endure difficult situations and be patient with difficult people (Col. 1:11).

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

1 Cor. 2:3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, 4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

Col. 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Col. 1:11 . . . strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.

The Spirit also sometimes empowers Christians to perform miracles that help God's people and/or validate the gospel to non-Christians (see for example Acts 2:43; 3:1-26; 5:12-16; 6:8-10; 8:5-8; 9:17,18; 14:3; 19:8-12; Rom. 15:18,19; 2 Cor. 12:12).

EXAMPLES: Most of us have experienced the Spirit's help in sharing our faith. Many of us have experienced endurance and patience that we knew didn't come from us. All of us (hopefully) have experienced the Spirit's help in breaking a sinful habit and forming Christ-like attitudes. (Sometimes this help is very dramatic; more often it is subtle and gradual—but no less supernatural.) Some of us have experienced miraculous activity by the Spirit.

- He *comforts* us with God's love. Sometimes God imparts this comfort to fortify us in the midst of our sufferings (Rom. 5:3-5; 2 Cor. 1:3,4). Sometimes He just grants us varying degrees of His peace, hope and joy as we trust in Him (Rom. 14:17; 15:13; Gal. 5:22; 1 Pet. 1:8).

2 Cor. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Rom. 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

EXAMPLES: Many have experienced God lifting them up during a trial so that they had peace and even joy in the midst of pain. Many have experienced special times of sweet communion with God—especially during prayer.

- He *helps* us to pray—both by giving us a desire to pray and by guiding us on how to pray according to God's will (Rom. 8:26,27; Matt. 18:19,20). This is evidently what it means to pray “in the Spirit” (Eph. 6:18; Jude 1:20). This help comes to us during corporate prayer as well as when praying alone.

Rom. 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.²⁷ And he who searches our hearts

knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

Eph. 6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

EXAMPLES: Many have experienced God helping them to sense their need to spend time with Him after a period of relative prayerlessness. Many have experienced God changing the way they prayed for someone or something—either during one prayer or over a period of time.

God gave us His Spirit because He wants His children to be personally assured that He loves them and is with them! This does not mean that we will not feel sad or confused at times, or that we will never have times when the sense of God's presence is hidden from us. But it does mean that the above ministries of the Spirit should be recurrently present in the life of a healthy Christian. When these ministries are chronically absent, we should assume that we are either grieving the Spirit through willful sin, or that we are neglecting to walk by to the Spirit. We will study how to walk by the Spirit next week (Week 5).

What dangers should I avoid concerning the Holy Spirit?

According to our temperament, background, current church culture, or other factors, we may be vulnerable to two opposite dangers concerning the Holy Spirit. Paul instructs the Thessalonian Christians concerning both of these dangers in 1 Thess. 5:19-22.

1 Thess. 5:19-22 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.**

Do not quench the Spirit

We may neglect the importance of the Holy Spirit and live without anticipation of His activity in our lives. Paul calls this “quenching” the Holy Spirit, and he warns the Thessalonian Christians not to do this (1 Thess. 5:19). Without a healthy relationship with the Spirit in which we regularly experience His activity as described above, we can become “functional atheists” in various ways:

- Some become moralistic—trying to be externally moral through sheer will-power rather than depending on the Spirit to transform us.
- Some become overly pragmatic and functional—operating only by what works and is humanly possible rather than by seeking the Spirit's leading and power.
- Some become dead in their orthodoxy—affirming and defending the right doctrines, but lacking love and enthusiasm for God Himself.
- Some become institutional—preferring the same way of doing things rather than allowing the Spirit to lead them into change.

The best way to avoid this danger is to be alert and responsive to the Spirit's activity in your life! One key help in this is regular fellowship with other Christians who want this kind of life.

Examine Everything Carefully

We may emphasize the importance of the Holy Spirit, but have unbiblical expectations about how He works in our lives. We call this “super-spirituality.”

- Some expect that He must work in certain dramatic ways (e.g., visions or prophetic words for guidance; being “slain in the Spirit”).
- Some expect that all Christians must have the same spiritual experience (e.g., speaking in tongues). Speaking in tongues is a spiritual gift that God gives to some, but not all Christians (1 Cor. 12:30).
- Some expect that walking by the Spirit will prevent us from having times of sadness or dryness.
- Some equate having certain spiritual experiences with being spiritually mature (e.g., the Corinthian church).
- Some encourage self-centered spiritual gluttony instead of Spirit-filled, other-centered, sacrificial love.

The key to avoiding this danger is to test all of our expectations and experiences by God’s Word. The Spirit of God will never contradict the Word of God! This is why Paul urges the Thessalonians to “examine everything carefully; hold to what is good and abstain from every form of evil.” Unless we test all spiritual experiences by God’s Word, we become vulnerable to spiritual imbalance at best, and to spiritual deception at worst. So be expectant and receptive to the Spirit’s activity—but keep asking: “Does this agree with what God teaches and emphasizes in His Word?”

To which of these dangers are you most vulnerable? Lean against your tendency! What about your Christian friends? Help each other relate to the Spirit in a healthy, balanced way!

Memory verses

1 Cor. 12:13* - All Christians have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit and baptized by Him into Christ and His Body.

Rom. 8:15,16* – The Holy Spirit assures Christians of their adoption by helping them to call out to their heavenly Father, and by personally testifying to them of their Father’s love.

1 Thess. 5:19-22** - We should not quench the Spirit, and we should test all spiritual experiences by God’s Word.

Homework assignment

Chuck Smith, *Calvary Chapel Distinctives*, “Having Begun By the Spirit”