

DEITY

HOLY SPIRIT IN THE EARLY CHURCH



SUMMARY: The Holy Spirit worked three ways in the early church, indwelling, miracles, and baptism of the Holy Spirit and provides five specific blessings for us today by giving us hope, encouragement, direction, help in our prayers, and optimism.

1. First, to understand the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church, we must know a little of who the Holy Spirit is. In Genesis 1:1-2, 26, the scriptures say "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . .'" From these verses we learn (1) that the One we call God is a being composed of more than one personality, (2) that one of these "persons" is called the Spirit of God, and that (3) this Spirit of God existed before created beings and has divine power.
2. Sometimes we speak of God as one. Deuteronomy 6:4: "Our God is one God." This was in contrast to the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans who had many gods, often fighting with each other and sometimes even killing each other. The God of the Bible, unlike these, is one.
3. But this God is composed of more than one personality or being. These are called Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all equally divine, all working together for the same purposes, all having lived forever, and all spirit beings. But as three personalities, they can act separately to carry out different functions. The Father is generally pictured as the "planner," the Son as the "doer," and the Spirit as the "revealer," although their roles are not always totally distinct.
4. In the instance of the baptism of Jesus recorded in Matthew 3:16-17, for example, we have the Son in human form on earth, the Father speaking from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son," and the Holy Spirit descending as a dove. In Revelation 1:4-6, to cite another passage, John writes about Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, His God and Father, and the seven Spirits who are before His throne.
5. The Holy Spirit, then, is one of the three personalities in the Godhead. He has always been, has divine power, and often serves as the one who reveals the will of God to men. He is not a ghost or angel but one with the full power of God. The special purpose of this lesson is to study the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church.
6. In Acts 2:38, Peter answers the question from believers who ask, "What shall we do?" His answer contains not only commands to be obeyed, but a promise about the Holy

Spirit. According to this verse, who will receive the Holy Spirit? Look also at Acts 5:32 and answer the question of who will receive the Holy Spirit? Read Romans 8:9 and I Corinthians 6:19 to see what these verses add. [WBK 6]

7. The function of the Holy Spirit as He lives in all Christians is called "the indwelling of the Spirit" because He is said to "dwell" in us. In Ephesians 3:16-20, Paul gives more information about this indwelling.
8. Acts 8:12-19 records the work of Philip in Samaria.
9. Now let's look at Acts 10. Peter is speaking to the household of Cornelius to whom God sent him. Cornelius is a Roman centurion, a Gentile. Although some nine years have passed since the day of Pentecost, the gospel has not yet been preached among Gentiles. Now Peter and six other Jews are at the house of a Gentile, declaring the gospel to them. While Peter is preaching, Cornelius and his household begin to speak in tongues. This was evidence that the Holy Spirit had fallen on them.
10. A very interesting event is described in Acts 19:1-6. Look at that passage.
11. It is very important for us to understand the work of the Holy Spirit for three important reasons. (1) We want to know how the Holy Spirit helped the church as it was beginning in the first century. (2) We want to know how the Holy Spirit helps the Christians today. (3) We want to be able to help others avoid some of the errors about the work of the Holy Spirit that are to prevalent today. Below are some comments about these three topics which summarize the lesson.

When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, Christ sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles so they could be His witnesses. He had promised them He would provide this helper for them and so they were "baptized in the Holy Spirit." This baptism allowed them to carry out their apostolic function by placing God's approval on them in a way evident to all. It was also God's plan that these apostles could lay their hands on Christians to bestow the Holy Spirit on those who needed miraculous powers to demonstrate that they also had been given a revelation from God and were speaking (and writing) for Him.

God also gave the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the household of Cornelius. He did this both to demonstrate (1) that He had approved of them as candidates for the gospel and baptism into Christ and (2) that the Gentiles were on an equal footing with Jews for some among both had now been baptized with the Holy Spirit. So far as it is revealed, these are the only two cases of baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Since the baptism of the Holy Spirit is said to have occurred only twice during the years of the church covered in the New Testament, and since those not baptized in the Holy Spirit could only work miracles when apostles laid hands on them, these two functions of the Holy Spirit were clearly not intended to be long term.

There is, however, a third way in which the Holy Spirit was given in the early church. All those who believed in Christ, repented of their sins, and were baptized into Christ were promised the Holy Spirit as a gift. In fact, in Acts 2:39, right after Peter makes this promise, he adds, "For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are far off, as many as our Lord shall call." This promise of the indwelling, then, is for all those who obey Christ in scriptural baptism.

But what are the benefits of this indwelling. It does not carry any power to work miracles for the need for them has ceased. Believing that the Spirit indwells us does, however, give us an important blessing--a sense of God's presence within us. God wants us to walk daily knowing that He is close to us because He is within us. This "sense of His presence" can be very beneficial.

There are five specific blessings we can identify from scriptures that come to the Christian from this indwelling. We must, of course, make clear that we do not and cannot understand completely the work of the Spirit--either as He dwells in us or in any other way. Yet, the scriptures do reveal to us some of what He does for us and to fail to recognize this is to fail to be able to make the most of its value for us.

First, the Holy Spirit gives us hope. Galatians 5:5 says, "Through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness." So, through the Spirit our hope for the future is strengthened.

Second, in I Corinthians 6:19, Paul uses the fact of the Spirit's presence in our bodies (which are His temple) to encourage us not to sin. Thus, the presence of the Spirit can be motivation to right living. In Ephesians 4:30, Paul urges us not to "grieve the Spirit" by living in a way He would be displeased. Recognizing that the Spirit lives in me, then, motivates me to do what will please Him.

Third, the Spirit gives us direction. Romans 8:12-14 says the Holy Spirit leads us. This does not mean that He whispers in our ears to "turn right at the next corner." In the context of this passage it is clear that the leading of the Spirit is connected with our living like sons of God. We want to be like our Father and having the Spirit within us leads us in that direction. He also helps to produce good fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:21-22). Of course the Word, revealed by the Spirit, helps us to know

what kind of lives He would have us lead and His presence within helps us to move in this direction.

Fourth, the Spirit gives us confidence. He helps us be bolder with our prayers (Romans 8:26) and this makes us bolder in approaching God and boldness here helps us to be bolder in carrying out the will of God.

Fifth, the Spirit gives us greater optimism. Ephesians 3:16-20 speaks of the Spirit's work within us as giving us greater power than we can ask or think. A child in the forest is far more optimistic about his outcome than is the child who has no sense that His father is near. So it is with us. Sensing that God is present with us through His Spirit, gives us strength to overcome many obstacles for we know that we are not alone.

An illustration here might be of help. One guiding a sailboat can turn the boat so the sail catches the wind and propels the boat rapidly or can turn the boat so that the sail misses the wind and the boat goes "dead in the water." In the same way, as a Christian, I can turn my life in the direction the Spirit, through His Word, tells me He blows, and He will fill my sails and propel me forward. Or I can choose to point my life away from the direction the Spirit "blows" and He no longer helps me. This illustration helps with several important points. (1) It is the Word revealed by the Spirit that tells us how to live. (2) I control the direction of my life--the Spirit in no way takes me over. (3) If I live as the Spirit tells me in His word, I can be "filled with the Spirit" and thus make good spiritual progress. (4) I can turn away from the Spirit's direction and thus "quench" the Spirit in my life so that He no longer helps me move forward.

The Holy Spirit's Functions in the Early Church

Function	How Received	Purpose	Scriptures
1. Indwelling	Faith, Repentance, Baptism	To give us a sense of God's presence in our lives	Acts 2:38; Acts 5:36; Rom. 1:11
2. Work Miracles	Laying on of apostles' hands	To perform miracles	Acts 8:17; 2 Tim. 1:6; Acts 19:6
3. Baptism of the Holy Spirit	Directly from God	To show God's approval for a specific need	Acts 2:1-11; Acts 10:44-48; Acts 11:15-16

Reference:

Jimmy Jividen, "The Ministry of the Spirit Among Us," Directions for the Road Ahead (eds. Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams. Chickasha, OK: Yeoman Press, 1998, pp. 152-161.

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