



Word and Spirit Foundations  
A Hope Rock Church Resource

# God, The Holy Spirit



**HOPE ROCK**  
CHURCH

**"TO KNOW CHRIST AND MAKE HIM KNOWN"**



## **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*Word & Spirit Foundations*

## **The Holy Spirit**

*(Part of the Hope Rock Word & Spirit Foundations series)*

Written by Ryan Peter, © 2026

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

God, The Holy Spirit	1
A baptism for all	3
Who is the Holy Spirit?	5
How the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit:	8
In union with God	10
The presence of God in our world	10
Bringing this love to the world	11
What does it mean, then, to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit?	12
How does the Holy Spirit work in our lives?	14
Experiencing the Holy Spirit	16
The promised renewing	18
Renewing even of our material life	19
The Holy Spirit is more than doctrine, programs, teaching	22
The Spirit and the Word	23
The Spirit given to you	28
Baptism in the Spirit for Empowerment	29
Signs and power	32
A continual immersion	34

A fruitful life	35
The Kingdom working through you	36
Surrendering to the Spirit	37
<b>Further questions and answers</b>	<b>39</b>
How do I receive all this?	39
Does someone have to pray for me to experience the Holy Spirit in my life?	40
What about "Charismania"?	41
What about 'cessationism'?	43
What about speaking in tongues?	45
What about mysticism?	52
Cultivating our relationship with the Holy Spirit	53





## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

### **John 3:8 (NET)**

*"The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."*

Jesus makes the statement above in light of what it means to be 'born again'. When you put your faith in Jesus, He makes you new (2 Corinthians 5:17). He declares your sins forgiven and then, even more, puts His own Holy Spirit into you so that you would begin to think and act anew in His power. This is one of the most amazing promises given by Jesus in the Bible.

In fact, the giving of the Holy Spirit is part of the gospel—of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is incredibly good news that God has given us of His Spirit, to be with us, to guide us, to empower us, and to unite us in Christ. However, many

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Christians don't think of it this way. They realize that the gospel is about God's forgiveness, grace and redemption. They know Jesus died for them. But they don't equate the giving of the Holy Spirit with the gospel message—usually thinking the message ends at the resurrection of Jesus. This is clear when you consider how most churches celebrate Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday every year, but how few celebrate Pentecost Sunday.

In Acts 19, Paul finds a group of people who believe in Jesus but do not even know that there is a Holy Spirit. (Acts 19:2.) Some today may be in a similar situation. Or perhaps they *have* heard of the Holy Spirit but don't know why this is relevant, or think it is more a fact than an experiential encounter. Even worse, some Christian teachers say you cannot experience the Holy Spirit at all.

*The giving of the Holy Spirit is part of the gospel*

Perhaps you have heard about how you have been born again but you can't say you've experienced this ongoingly in a tangible way. Perhaps you read your Bible, but you're not experiencing God. Perhaps you're not sure if God even ever speaks to you. You would not be alone in this. It is then that we have to understand who the Holy Spirit is, why the giving of the Spirit is good news, that we *can* experience Him, and why we should surrender to Him.

In this small book we will uncover who the Holy Spirit is and what He does, in as brief detail as possible. However, it will be up to you afterward to surrender to Him and His active working, otherwise what follows will only be information. As you will see, the Holy Spirit can be known personally. But this

GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

means you yourself need to choose to know Him personally.

## A BAPTISM FOR ALL

**Matthew 3:11**

*"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."*

To become a Christian, you believe in Jesus, repent of your sin (turn away from your previous value system, change your mind about everything, and commit to adopting the values of Jesus and stick to that journey) and you are saved (Acts 16:31). You don't need to prove yourself worthy or clean up your life before you believe in Jesus. Jesus died for you so that you don't need to do anything to receive God's love, acceptance, and purposes for your life. We all come to Christ with nothing to give, and that is the good news! It is God's grace that saves us, not anything we do!

**Titus 3:5:**

*"He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit."*

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

### **1 John 1:9:**

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

But what exactly is salvation? And how are you saved by faith?

The answer to these questions is the Holy Spirit. When you believe in Jesus, you receive the Holy Spirit who unites you to Jesus. This is salvation. You are united to the one who conquered death, who passed through judgement, who is God's Son. You are put into covenant with God, as in a marriage, which means all the benefits, victories, and the inheritance of the Son become yours. It is the Holy Spirit that seals this (Ephesians 1:13-14).

To believe in Jesus means to trust Him to save you, and to place your trust in His work and who He is. Therefore, salvation is by faith, sealed by the Holy Spirit. This is a gift of God's grace, given to us freely through only believing.

It is His grace that keeps us, too. You don't need to 'prove' that you believe in Jesus. If you believe, you believe. And when you believe, God will not let go of you, even when you fail and fall, as we all do. **Romans 8:38-39** says:

*"Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

When we came to faith in Jesus, we committed to turn away from our old life and adopt the new life God has for us. This is the significance of being baptized in water—it symbolizes our

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

'dying' to who we were (going into the water) and being 'raised' to live a new life in Jesus (when we come up out of the water). This is a public declaration that you are committed to following the ways of Jesus. You are a baptized believer!

But how do we stay faithful to our commitment? How does a believer live the baptized life? This is not a question of willpower or free choice, but a question of your relationship with the Holy Spirit.

## WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The question of 'who' the Holy Spirit is, rather than 'what', is the right question. Christians understand God to be "one" and also "God in three persons"—the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit; which we call the Trinity.

The concept of the Trinity is something that was revealed to the early church who experienced the Spirit for

*The question of 'who' the Holy Spirit is, rather than 'what', is the right question*

themselves and tried to work out how to explain His working in their lives by looking at what Jesus said and did; and also what the Old Testament said; and the experiences of those written about in the scriptures. In short, *it is through the history of God's salvation in the world through Jesus* that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, all three as co-equal and co-eternal and as one, is revealed. This history is written for us in the Bible. There we see that the Holy Spirit is God Himself—

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

God living in us and through us into the world.

Much has been written and debated on this topic, and much more will no doubt be written and said. There are some analogies that might help, but they very easily break down and have too many limitations.

- **One analogy is how the compound H<sub>2</sub>O can take three different forms—ice, water, or gas.** It is one compound, but depending on other factors, it presents itself differently. From this we can see that something can logically be "one" but yet also "three".

However, when we speak of the Trinity, we are not saying that God simply takes on different 'forms' or aspects (an idea known as 'modalism'), but we are saying each of the persons in the Trinity are distinct persons. So this analogy can only take us so far and is more a thought experiment.

- **Another example that may help is to think of marriage.** A married couple are two distinct people yet 'one' *in unity*. Their marriage makes them 'one'. Likewise, a family is "one" family, but made up of any number of persons.

This analogy is somewhat more helpful as it opens up to us the relational reality of the Trinity—our relationship to the Triune God is, in an experiential sense, not difficult to grasp. However, this example may make us think of each of the persons of the Trinity as separate beings (an idea known as "tri-theism"), which is not true. God is *one in three persons*.

- **Metaphysically, theologians have, for a long time, spoken of how the Holy Spirit is the eternal, delighting**

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

**bond of active love between the Father and the Son.** In other words, as the eternal God delights in being God, this love produces a 'spirit'. C.S. Lewis tries to explain it this way:

*"You know that among human beings, when they get together in a family, or a club or a trades union, people talk about the 'spirit' of that family, club, or trades union. They talk about its spirit because the individual members, when they're together, do really develop particular ways of talking and behaving which they wouldn't have if they were apart. It is a sort of communal personality come into existence. Of course it isn't a real person: it's only rather like a person. But that's just one of the differences between God and us. What grows out of the joint life of the Father and Son is a real Person, is in fact the Third of the three persons who are God." (Beyond Personality, 21)*

In this analogy, you could think of God as an eternal community of Father and Son, and the Holy Spirit as the fruit of the pure act of love in the eternal God. But this analogy has its own limits as it could indicate some sort of beginning to the Holy Spirit, which is also not true. The Holy Spirit is co-eternal with the Father and the Son.

Unfortunately, language fails here to fully explain. The Trinity is also difficult to fully explain using the finer points of theology, philosophy, metaphysics, and even quantum mechanics, but that does not mean He is impossible to know. God is infinite and we will never fully understand—but we can grow in our understanding for

*The Holy Spirit is the eternal, delighting bond of love between the Father and the Son*

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

eternity!

At some point, we have to concede there are mysteries we simply do not know. The fact that the Trinity boggles the mind, however, is a good sign that human beings did not think this up for themselves!

What needs to be reiterated here, however, is that the Holy Spirit is a person. He is not an impersonal, mechanical, invisible force (like in the Star Wars universe) or merely the power of God operative in the world. He is not "one side" of God. He is not "the universe" (an idea known as "pantheism") or *karma*. He is not a manifestation of the God-power hidden and inherent in the universe (panentheism). He is not simply "our intuition" or our thoughts and impressions. He is not an "it" but a "Him". He is not subordinate to God or God's servant, but is God.

## HOW THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

There are many ways the Bible expounds on who the Holy Spirit is and His characteristics. Here are some of them:

A. Showing the characteristics of a person—intelligence and thought, speech and language, as well as feelings and emotions (1 Timothy 4:1; Romans 15:30; Romans 8:27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11; Ephesians 4:30).

B. Working in the world in ways we don't often see, and most especially working with, and in, believers—leading, guiding,

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

working, giving, fellowshiping, convicting, teaching, comforting, counseling, and even praying for us. (Romans 8:14;26,27; John 16:8; Isaiah 59:19; Zechariah 4:6).

C. Possessing the attributes of God—omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience and immortality (1 Corinthians 2:10-11; Hebrews 9:14; Psalm 139:7)

D. Performing or sharing in the (ongoing) works of God—creation, revelation, conviction, regeneration, sanctification and resurrection (Genesis 1:2; Romans 8:16; John 14:26). Now, renewing the world through the Church whom He indwells (Ephesians 3:10).

E. He also issues commands (Acts 8:29).

One of the beautiful revelations we see when we ponder the Trinity is that God's very nature is relational. He is a "community". This gives us tremendous insight into what

*One of the beautiful revelations we see when we ponder the Trinity is that God's very nature is relational*

He wants—a relationship with us. We know this is true because Jesus died for us.

When we encounter the Holy Spirit, we encounter God Himself. How we relate to God is through the Holy Spirit. To know Jesus is to know the Father (John 14:7-9); to know the Spirit is to know Jesus; to know Jesus is to know the Spirit; to know the Father is to know Jesus and the Spirit.

## IN UNION WITH GOD

Somehow, and here lies another joyous mystery, through our faith in Jesus we are wrapped up in the eternal, delighting love in the godhead. God's love within the godhead is an *active* love; a delight that results in *action*, and was proved true by Jesus dying on the cross for us. This is what it means to live by the Spirit—to live out the work of God in the world.

By coming to faith in Jesus, we are made "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4)—a nature that is pure, joyous, and active love. This is why scripture simply says: "God is love." (1 John 16.) We share in this eternal, active bond of love by being united into Jesus. We are made holy by the indwelling *Holy Spirit*, and are therefore brought into union with God. This activates our new life in Christ in this world; it is what energizes a life of faith and good works; it is the continuous baptized life. This will be made complete when Christ comes again and the Church and Christ will become one, as a bride and groom become one. (Revelation 19:7.) What this means in complete actuality we cannot fully know until that day.

## THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR WORLD

This Spirit of God, this active love, is at work in God's creation, and no part of God's creation can escape it. Thus, **Psalm 139** says:

*"Where shall I go from your Spirit?*

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

*Or where shall I flee from your presence?*

*If I ascend to heaven, you are there!*

*If I make my bed in Sheol (the grave), you are there!" (vs 7, 8)*

The presence of God, the eternal love in the godhead, spills into everything and anything God has created. He is like a master painter, and all He has made carries His Spirit; or rather, is carried by His Spirit. That includes His people, and in a very special way. His Spirit is alive and living within those who come to Christ in faith. Our journey in our life with the Lord is one of ever-increasing union with God Himself!

## **BRINGING THIS LOVE TO THE WORLD**

As part of being wrapped into this active bond of pure love in the eternal godhead, we are told by the scriptures to exhibit this love toward others, and invite them into this same eternal love we get to share, a love that has no limits or end.

This is why, as we will see later, knowing the Holy Spirit includes having a healthy emotional life (experiencing joy and peace) *and* living an active life of love to the world (being missional). Many Christians today merely relegate their relationship to the Holy Spirit to the emotional realm, which is a massive mistake. God wants to work through you into the world. This is why knowing the Holy Spirit is a very practical reality of the Christian life.

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN, THEN, TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT?

## **John 14:16-18**

*"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."*

When depicting the Holy Spirit, the scriptures sometimes use the pictures of fire (Acts 2:1-4), wind (Acts 2:1-2), oil (Acts 10:38), and a dove (Matthew 3:16-17). This is picture language to describe what the Spirit does and how we experience Him.

- As the 'fire', He purifies and sanctifies us, to mature us and cover us in our weakness.
- As the 'wind', He leads His Church to where God wants us to go.
- As the 'oil', He 'anoints' us, giving us authority in the work we do and the enabling we need to do what He calls us to do.
- As the 'dove', He is gentle with us and chooses us as His people, perfecting us in our weakness in His love.

Here are more ways in which the Spirit personally works today with us, and in history:

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

- He played a special role in creation, revelation, God's dealings with Israel and the incarnation of Christ. (1 Peter 1:10,11.)
- He is involved in the Church: He indwells it, unifies it, gives gifts to its members for the edifying of the body, ordains and equips its leaders, and stirs us to our mission. (Ephesians 4.)
- He always glorifies Jesus and points to Jesus (John 16:14).
- Even before we put our faith in Christ, it is the Spirit who convicts a person and draws them to Christ (John 6:44, John 16:8-11).
- The Holy Spirit works with, and is, the Word of God (a Trinity)—and this Word creates faith (Romans 10:17, John 6:63).
- At the moment of conversion it is the Spirit that regenerates a person's spirit and causes them to be born again (John 3:5-8, Titus 3:5).
- From that moment on, therefore, every believer is indwelt by the Spirit (Romans 8:9) and thereby also sealed by Him: the indwelling is like a deposit guaranteeing the full payment (of salvation) at Christ's return (Ephesians 1:13-14, Ephesians 4:30, 2 Corinthians 1:22).
- For the rest of our lives the Spirit walks with us—assuring, sanctifying, fellowshiping with, leading, guiding, teaching, inspiring and giving gifts to us.
- The Holy Spirit empowers us to fulfill Jesus' commands and imparts gifts to us to enable us to complete what we

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

are called to do (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4). He produces His fruit within and through us (Galatians 5:22).

- The Holy Spirit is the one who defeats the demonic operating in the world, exposing them (and their teachings) and expelling them. This is done through the people of the Spirit, the Church. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:28, "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you".
- The giving of the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of the coming Kingdom (Luke 11:20, Acts 1:4-8). It is by the Spirit that we establish the Kingdom.

## HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK IN OUR LIVES?

The Christian life is one of growth. God wants to do more in you and through you and with you and for you. Here is what the Holy Spirit will do in your life:

- Provide you the guarantee that you are saved and your salvation is sealed. (Ephesians 1:13.)
- Have a calling and purpose for you to fulfil, and give you (empower you) with what you need to get it done. (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4.)
- Let you enjoy your salvation to its fullest and mature in it. (Romans 15:13).
- Enrich your relationship with Jesus, giving you daily nourishment and joy, and making you fruitful in your call

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

and guiding you into all truth (John 16:13).

- Give you everything you need for "life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3), all that you need for combating the sin that still lingers in your mind and heart and actions, and combating the influence of the devil in your life.
- Energize your prayer life (1 Corinthians 12-14) and intercede to God on your behalf even when you don't have the words to say (Romans 8:26).
- Use you to accomplish his Kingdom purposes – to tear down the darkness of this world and bring in His light. (1 Corinthians 4:20).
- Be an abiding presence in your life, offering you comfort, joy and hope, even in the most trying times. As Romans 14:17 says, the Kingdom of God is "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."
- Increase your faith in Jesus, so you can live the life you were called to live. (Romans 10:17.)
- Guide and teach you "all truth" (John 14:26).
- Make you holy even though you are weak. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10.)

Jesus promises not to "leave us as orphans" (John 14:18) but to abide with us in our new life. All this, and more, is accomplished through God giving us the Holy Spirit.

# EXPERIENCING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Some people feel that they have never experienced the Holy Spirit. This could be for a number of reasons. It often boils down to faith, expectations, a lack of knowing what it all means, or fear about surrendering to the Spirit.

There are many who perhaps don't *want* to experience the Holy Spirit, usually because they believe that this 'experiencing' means giving into 'emotionalism' or they have seen some "crazy charismatic stuff" and don't want a part of it. This, however, betrays a bad theology. We cannot say that the Holy Spirit is not to be experienced because others are confused or charlatans. Many people claim to speak in Christ's name and do terrible things. Does this nullify the truth of Christ? No, why would it? It simply highlights that human beings are sinful.

*We cannot allow others' misuse of scripture to dictate our own practice*

It's true that many have taught, or demonstrated, that the Holy Spirit is the "emotional" side of Christianity. This is especially true of various (but not all!) charismatic / pentecostal teachings, or the way people speak of music or worship or Holy Spirit experiences today. Many do make the mistake of thinking every emotional experience is the Spirit's leading. Some even only ever seek out emotional experiences, and they spiritualize this in unhealthy ways. This, too, is incorrect, and it chases away people who want the Holy Spirit to be *real* in their lives and not just some emotional experience.

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Nevertheless, we cannot allow others' misuse of scripture to dictate our own practice. The Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit can be experienced, and that the Holy Spirit empowers believers, sometimes in unusual ways. This cannot be ignored.

The truth in Scripture is that the Holy Spirit is *not* the 'emotional side' of Christianity, He is far more than that. He is a tangible reality in our lives—a person, not an experience or a good worship song on a Sunday morning that gives you goosebumps. He is the power of God working in you and through you. He is the One who pours out God's grace and brings people to salvation (called "prevenient grace"). He is the source of all life that sustains creation, providing us with abundant life.

On the other hand, this does not mean that emotions are not a part of the Christian life. They are! A human being has emotions, and it is foolish and even dangerous to ignore this reality. We are called to be human. Jesus became a human being, complete with emotions (John 11:35). Emotions are not a bad thing—what is important is using them for God's glory.

The truth is that the Holy Spirit works to renew our mind, heart, and our soul—our thinking and our emotions. To have a real relationship with Jesus means we love Christ with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Matthew 22:37). This means every part of us—including our emotions.

It is also true that the Spirit pours out His gifts and empowerment on believers. The New Testament is not silent about this. The book of Acts is especially clear—we should expect the Holy Spirit to pour out on us, individually and corporately, regularly.

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Often the problem is not that certain charismatics have "turned us off" but that our pride gets in the way of what God might want to do in, with, and through us. We are not sufficiently surrendered to the Holy Spirit, and often use the practices of others as an excuse to be overly cautious toward God Himself. This is a challenge, but nevertheless one we must all face and be honest about.

## THE PROMISED RENEWING

It's not that we want to have "emotionalism" in our walk with God, it's that we want our emotions *renewed* for the glory of God. Our relationship with God incorporates all our corporal faculties—our rationalistic side (which includes study of the Bible) and also our emotional side, just like every relationship we have in the world. And just like every relationship, our relationship with this Holy Spirit results in *action* in the material world. There is no true relationship we have with anyone that is pure emotion, or lacking in emotion. Every relationship we have changes how we live—how much more our relationship with God!

### **Romans 12:2 says:**

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

In the Original Greek this was written in, the word for 'mind' is *nous*. This referred to the moral faculties and implied the seat

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

of our moral consciousness and decision-making. The Hebrew understanding of this was that it included the *heart*. What the Bible is saying is that our mind and heart ought to be renewed, and this is done by the Holy Spirit. A change of mind and heart is simultaneous—you can know all the facts of something and it means nothing unless you choose to believe those facts, i.e. set your heart on them.

Our emotions follow what is in our heart. **Ezekiel 36:26-27** gives us a magnificent promise:

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit inside you. I will remove your hard heart of stone and give you an obedient, responsive heart instead."*

The work of the Holy Spirit is to renew our mind and put a new heart within us. That is the promise. God is not against our emotions, but the Spirit's work is to renew our emotions. Although, when we are renewed, we may find we will respond emotionally because that is part of what it means to be human! We shouldn't fight that, we should just be normal rather than pious and religious. Renewal is often something we *experience*, because life is an experience!

## RENEWING EVEN OF OUR MATERIAL LIFE

The Holy Spirit renews our thinking, our actions; our emotions, and even our material life. This last part is often neglected. Some people have no problem acknowledging their emotional needs, but they neglect their material needs, believing that

GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

emotional needs are more important than material needs. This is a mistake. The Bible takes a more holistic view.

**Psalm 103:1-5**

*1 Bless the Lord, O my soul,*

*and all that is within me,*

*bless his holy name!*

*2 Bless the Lord, O my soul,*

*and forget not all his benefits,*

*3 who forgives all your iniquity,*

*who heals all your diseases,*

*4 who redeems your life from the pit,*

*who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,*

*5 who satisfies you with good*

*so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Or even **Deuteronomy 8:18**

*"You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day."*

God anoints us through the Spirit to work faithfully and excellently, and even "create wealth" with our work. **The point of highlighting this is to note that the Spirit's renewing is of**

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

**our entire being and life.** There is nothing that escapes his notice. There is no part of us and our lives He will not sanctify. Even your bank account is included in God's renewing, and His plan for your life and the advancement of the Kingdom! Therefore, you submit it all to Him!

This is not a prosperity "health and wealth" gospel. The Bible promises that we will have tribulation, but we can take heart because Jesus has overcome the world. (John 16:33.) At the same time, the Bible tells us that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28.) And also, at the same time, we've seen above some promises of the Lord to take care of us and bless us. "Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God." (1 Corinthians 3:21-23, NLT.) The prosperity gospel seeks to deny tribulation, and also insists manipulatively that the way to God's favor is through work and effort (usually, through giving your money to a ministry), rather than free grace in the Holy Spirit.

*"Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."*

*- 1 Corinthians 3:21-23  
NLT*

Matthew 6:33 puts the blessings in context. It is for the purposes of the Lord and the extension of His Kingdom. Therefore, "seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you." It is the Spirit's work to make us into generous people of action.

God is not more interested in your emotions than your physical well being and how you live your life. He wants it all. A relationship with the Holy Spirit is about seeing the active, loving power of God working *through* your life—all of your life—

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

into the world. It is about advancing God's Kingdom of peace, love, prosperity, justice, right-thinking, right-action, and more. All this incorporates *everything* about your life. This is what it means to "walk by the Spirit" (Romans 6) and bring the Kingdom to this world.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IS MORE THAN DOCTRINE, PROGRAMS, TEACHING

So we see that it is through the Holy Spirit that we are actually *transformed* into being more like Christ, because it is through the Holy Spirit that we experience a full *union* with God. Having good doctrine and solid teaching is certainly a major part of growing up in Jesus, but it's not all there is to it.

When Jesus taught some of His disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24, they said their hearts "burned within them" (Luke 24:32). In many ways, the modern Church has forfeited the Holy Spirit's power and working in our lives for merely good teaching, programs and methods. All these can be helpful, but they don't truly transform us unless we also let the Holy Spirit let the truth of Christ—the Word—*burn* in our hearts. It becomes an issue of surrender.

# THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD

The Word of God and the Spirit of God are not mutually exclusive, but are one and the same.

## **1 John 1:**

*1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

The Bible claims that Jesus is the Word of God that created the world. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God was "hovering over the face of the waters" when God created the heavens and the earth. Here we see a glimpse into the Trinity.

In Christianity, the Bible is also often referred to as the Word of God. This is because Scripture reveals Christ through its message. Christ is the Word because He is, in the flesh, all that God has been, and is, saying to us.

According to the Bible, the Word and the Spirit work together.

## **Ephesians 6:17**

*"Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"*

**John 6:63**

*"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."*

From this we surely can see that the Word of God is not merely facts, intellectualism, or history. The "Word of God is living and active." (Hebrews 4:12.) The Bible is a book that brings this word to us today. God speaks His Message, His Word, and His speaking carries His Spirit. Jesus as the Son of God only spoke what the Father said (John 12:49).

The Spirit of God works through God's Word, giving us faith to believe. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17.).

The "word of Christ" is the gospel message of Jesus Christ—who He

is, what He has done (including giving us the Holy Spirit), and all He will do. It is the record we have of this gospel, the Bible, including the Old Testament.

*"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*

*- Romans 10:17*

The Holy Spirit does not work through 'intuition' or our 'feelings'; or through mystical practices. He speaks to us through the history and narrative in the Bible; the letters and the prophetic writings and its poetry and song. It is through the Bible that we learn who God is, what He says, and what He does; and so we hear His voice in His Word.

The Word *trains* us to hear the Spirit speak to us directly. We should never discount the fact that the Spirit speaks to His people, but it is never the Word at the expense of the Spirit, or the Spirit at the expense of the Word.

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

This is an important component as it determines your theology and action. It has often been said by Protestants that the Bible is our ultimate 'normative authority'—in other words, the authority that ultimately decides what we believe and what we do. On the other hand, some (not all) charismatics have (in various forms) said the Holy Spirit is the normative authority. For context, the ultimate normative authority for Catholics and Eastern Orthodox is the institutional Church (the magisterium).

Let's briefly examine the fruit of these approaches.

### **1. The Bible alone is our ultimate normative authority**

This position can actually place too much authority on *rationalism*—our ability to understand every teaching of the Bible cognitively and rationally. It may be true that there is a 'plain meaning' of scripture, but that meaning is not always plain to us because we are blinded by many aspects of sin! We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes.

The truth is that the majority of Christians through the ages had no access to a Bible, and therefore they could not live by God's Word if this is true. Being "Bible-only" (*Solo Scriptura*, or sometimes called *Nuda Scriptura*) does have the unfortunate fruit of making the faith merely rational, which leads to a dry, purely cognitive faith. It is usually how fundamentalists use the Bible, and ironically the emphasis often gets placed on the Bible teacher as the one who has the ability to tell us what Scripture actually says.

### **2. The Spirit is the normative authority**

The difficulty with this approach is it's impossible to discern if it really is the Spirit or not, without some objective authority to match against what someone believes is the Holy Spirit's

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

teaching. Acts 2:42 encourages us to be devoted to the apostles' teaching (i.e. the Word of Christ, the gospel), which we cannot know in full apart from the Bible. Many who make the claim that the Spirit is our normative authority begin to claim new revelation apart from the scripture, because it is very easy to label our own preferences as the Holy Spirit (a very dangerous thing to do, however!). This opens up opportunities for New Age practices, demonic teachings, etc. and is also usually how cults can develop.

### **3. The Church is the normative authority**

The difficulty with this is that interpretation of scripture is left up to human beings, who can be corrupt and increasingly authoritarian. History shows us that this route has resulted in major injustices against human beings made in the image of God. The Church is not infallible, if it was it would be perfect, but Jesus told us there would always be wheat and tares growing together. (Matthew 13:24-30.)

What, then, is the the best approach? Our normative authority should be **Word and Spirit, in community**. We are to take all three of these approaches and put them together.

- We are to let the Bible guide us on life and doctrine and on what we would expect the Spirit to say to us. This means the Bible becomes our objective guide which we can assure our consciences on. This honors Bible study, the God-given ability to reason, and the saints who have come before as we look to their lives as examples, and gives us assurance because the Bible tells us Jesus died for us!
- We are to consult the church's views on interpretations of scripture to come to a fuller understanding and attain

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

wisdom. The Spirit has always worked through the Church! This means tradition can be honored without becoming immovable or above questioning.

- We are to work our theology out in community, and not in a vacuum. This means the local church and the authority of elders can be honored, as well as our relationships with Christians even more broadly. The local church is not infallible, but we are to work our theology out with Christians and those called to help us in our study and our walk with the Lord (elders).
- We are to let the Spirit guide and speak to us, providing us interpretation to share in community. This means we can honor the mission of God given to us, and we can honor preaching and proclamation, while ensuring our authority is God, not Man.

**This is the method called "Sola Scriptura"**, which states that our consciences are bound to the Word of God as revealed in the Bible, and not to anything else. Sola Scriptura has always affirmed (when taught correctly) that the Holy Spirit and the Church are part of the process, but states that ultimately we bind our consciences to the revealed, objective Word. We do not rely on 'feelings' but on what the Word says, submitting to the Spirit to reveal to us what the Word says, and doing this in community and with history in mind so we don't come up with new ideas that are, in fact, harmful.

*If we are not open to the Spirit working through the Word, the Word will become mere facts or theologizing*

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

We have to be open to the Holy Spirit if we want to see our own lives transformed and we are to be people who shine the light of Jesus in this world! If we are *not* open to the Spirit working through the Word, the Word will become mere facts or theologizing. We need to let it *transform* us! We also need to do what the Bible tells us to do, which is to walk with the Spirit and listen to Him. This is the difference between just 'reading' the Bible and being expectant to let the Bible read you!

And we are to do this in the Spirit-made community called the Church. We are not to develop our theology in a vacuum or be lone rangers. God has given godly authority (elders) in local churches to aid us (but not rule over us) in our quest for right belief and right practice. All this together is the New Testament pattern.

## THE SPIRIT GIVEN TO YOU

Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the Church, which means the corporate body (all of us, together) and each of us as individuals.

The Christian life is one of ever-increasing union with Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This union is not just for pastors or missionaries, monks, or others who have adopted a more 'extreme' calling in Christ. Neither is it just for Charismatics or Pentecostals who tend to speak about it a lot! It is for every Christian who has put their faith in Christ.

## BAPTISM IN THE SPIRIT FOR EMPOWERMENT

We have already seen that every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of coming to faith in Jesus (regeneration/rebirth) and that living with the Spirit is what it means to live the baptized life. To be "baptized in the Spirit" is to remain in Christ and live out the resurrection life (Romans 6 - 8).

But the testimony of both Scripture and millions of believers is that there is sometimes an experience of empowering in the Holy Spirit that in some cases may be subsequent to first coming to faith.

- Jesus was surely indwelt by the Holy Spirit from birth, yet He needed to be anointed by the Spirit (to receive Him in a fuller and different way) before He began His public ministry. In Matthew 3:16 we see this happen—*"And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him."*
- The disciples seemed to receive the Holy Spirit before Jesus ascended (John 20:22) and yet had to wait in Jerusalem for a subsequent powerful baptism of the Holy Spirit before embarking on their public ministry (See Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4-5, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:1-4).
- The Samaritans believed when Philip preached to them and were therefore, from that moment, indwelt by the Spirit (Acts 8:12). Yet Peter and John still found it necessary to pray for them to *"receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of*

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

them" with a subsequent infilling and empowering (Acts 8:14-17).

- Paul (Acts 9:17) and possibly Apollos (Acts 18:24-26) and the Ephesian disciples (Acts 19:1-6) also experienced a filling subsequent to conversion.
- John prophesied that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, John 1:33) and Jesus clearly identified this subsequent powerful anointing (a 'pouring over') as the baptism in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). He stated in Luke 24:49 that we would be "clothed" with "power from on high." In most occasions this is mentioned in Scripture there is experiential language used, such as 'fire', linked to this event.

If a Christian has not experienced a dramatic event, does that mean something is wrong? No, it is not a formula. The point is to be open to God.

### **Baptism as a pickle makes sense of this**

The key to understanding this lies in the meaning of the word "baptism". "Baptism" means "immersion". It is picture language. In water baptism we are literally immersed in water. The picture is relevant for Spirit baptism as well—we are 'immersed' into Christ.

The original Greek word for "Baptism", *baptizo*, can be traced to a pickle recipe by a Greek poet and physician named Nicander. In his recipe, he says you must first *bapto* (*baptize* - by *dipping*) the vegetable into boiling water, and then *baptizo* (*baptize* - but by a *sealing*) the vegetable in a vinegar solution.

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Common sense tells us that dipping the cucumber in the boiling water is preparation, but if you end there, you get a clean hot cucumber but you don't get a pickle! Rather, you must put it in the jar, seal the jar, and let the vinegar solution slowly change the cucumber so that, day after day, it eventually turns into a pickle.

Is there a day when it is a cucumber and a day when it is a pickle? Not really. It undergoes a state of *transformation*.

When we are saved, God takes us out of the world, dips us (cleans us) and then immerses us into His Spirit, and seals us for salvation with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). You are *baptized*. However, transformation is a life-long affair, and sometimes may incorporate dramatic moments of change and revelation, and at other times it will all seem quite ordinary. The point is not to compare yourself with others and their walk but to run your own race (1 Corinthians 9:24). If you have a heart of trust and expectation, God will transform you in whatever way He chooses. We all grow differently. For some, puberty was a dramatic experience! For others, it was a slow development. Likewise, our Christian walk is a personal one with Jesus.

*Water baptism therefore represents the "going" into the new life. Spirit baptism, however, is the staying in*

Water baptism therefore represents the "going" into the new life. Spirit baptism, however, is the *staying in*. To be baptized by the Spirit therefore is a present-continuous experience, with moments of flurry and dramatic experience, and moments of ordinary life. You can call it all 'baptism' and the moments of empowering 'baptism' as the word means both dipping and

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

being sealed. It is all part of having a relationship with the Lord and living the life He gives us!

## SIGNS AND POWER

### **Acts 2:1-13**

*"<sup>1</sup> When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

*"<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." <sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" <sup>13</sup> But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." "*

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Here we see that the baptism of the Holy Spirit enabled the believers with *tongues* (verse 4), which acted as a sign to the unbelievers that God was doing something. It got their attention. It was also a sign that God was reversing what happened at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) where the nations were scattered. God was now bringing the nations together into His Kingdom. (See our FAQ at the back of this resource for more on tongues.)

While not quoted above, the narrative continues from verse 14 with Peter preaching to a crowd of thousands, and many believing in Jesus. Peter seems to be a very different person than before with a new boldness and ability. The Holy Spirit empowered them all in a new way.

This serves as one example to show that, beyond the indwelling of the Spirit in every believer after coming to faith in Jesus, there can be tangible occasions in which the Holy Spirit comes upon us and fills

*This baptism of the Holy Spirit brings a totally new dimension of God's presence, person and power into our lives*

us—anointing, empowering and equipping us both for life (to be able to live the life God wants us to live) and ministry (to be able to do the things he wants us to do). This is not a one-off event. The scriptures continually speak of how people were "filled with the Spirit" on multiple occasions, even after they were "filled with the Spirit" on a previous occasion. For example, in Acts 2 quoted above, we see Peter is filled with the Spirit and he gets up to preach (from verse 14). However, later in Acts 4:8, Peter is "filled with the Spirit" again when he needs to speak to the Council of elders and scribes.

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

There could be multiple times when the Holy Spirit equips you in some new way, often for the task at hand. The point is that this baptism of the Holy Spirit brings a totally new dimension of God's presence, person and power into our lives. We will find that we truly experience God in new and tangible ways, and we find that we grow in our anointing and empowering and experience. God is with us, and He often makes it clear that He is, indeed, with us!

For some of us, all of this might not be as dramatic as it is for others, but that does not make it any less real. The truth is we cannot fulfil the Christian life or the specific call God has for us without the Holy Spirit. He will provide us with power over sin, as well as gifts, guiding us as we go along, and anointing us more for the call and the tasks he has for us. We need only be open to Him!

### A CONTINUAL IMMERSION

"Immersion" means to "go in and stay in". In water baptism we go under the water and come out, in Spirit baptism we go in and stay in. Yet the Spirit is effectively the one who empowers us to live the "resurrected life" - depicted in water baptism when we come out (see Romans 6-8). The "resurrected life" is us living the new life in power and perfect love, in God's presence and leading. Ephesians 5:18 says:

*"And be not drunk with wine, which is excess: but be fulfilled with the Spirit." (Geneva Bible, edited for modern English.)*

To be 'fulfilled' is not a once-off event as the context of this scripture is about a lifestyle. Hence, it continues saying (vs 18 -

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

21 ESV):

*"[Address] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."*

So as we have noted, to be baptized in the Spirit, therefore, is not a once-off event but is also a *continuous* event which we grow in and enjoy and live in as we mature in Christ. Nothing in the Christian life is static. There is always more in God! It is God, after all, who is eternal and infinite! Therefore, if you have experienced a baptism in the Spirit, trust God for more "infillings" of the Spirit through you to others—more of what he has given you, more of Him. Our Christian life is one where we look back and thank God for His amazing gifts, and look forward, trusting Him for even more.

### **A FRUITFUL LIFE**

Life with the Holy Spirit is a life of fruitfulness. Specifically, the Holy Spirit produces the kind of fruit in our lives that transform us into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Galatians 5:22 lists the fruit of the Spirit: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."* As we grow in faith in Christ, God forms us into people possessing these aspects. What an amazing promise!

With the Holy Spirit we participate in the life of God, who is love (1 John 4:8). Perfect, joyous, never-ending, love. It is all ours through faith in Jesus and keeping in step with the Spirit, living by Him, listening to Him, fellowshiping with Him, living

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

out His mission of perfect love to the world, and enjoying Him.

### THE KINGDOM WORKING THROUGH YOU

The giving of the Spirit to the Church is the inauguration, sign and guarantee of the coming Kingdom. The Kingdom of God can be defined as wherever the rule and reign of God is. Revelation 21:4 tells us that when Jesus comes back and establishes the fullness of His Kingdom, he will wipe away all tears and *“death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”* The rule and reign of God brings peace, joy, life in its fullness, contentment, abundance, and the end of sickness, death and emotional pain.

Jesus links the Kingdom and the Holy Spirit together throughout His ministry in the gospel accounts. (For example, Matthew 3:2-12; Luke 11:20; and also Acts 1:2-8). The giving of the Spirit is a promise for all who are called (Acts 2:39).

Believers, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, have a “foretaste” of the Kingdom of God in their own lives. Christians are also, therefore, able to expect the Kingdom of God to manifest in powerful ways in and through their lives and all they do, just like it did through Jesus, which we see in the many healings, miracles and casting out of demons he performed. In Luke 11:20, Jesus notes that the casting out of demons is because the Kingdom of God has come. Healings and miracles take place when God decides to demonstrate the

*Believers, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, have a “foretaste” of the Kingdom of God in their own lives*

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Kingdom, where death and sickness is no more, right now in our time.

Like the Spirit, the Kingdom is therefore dynamic and powerful. Wherever the Spirit may be found, there is the Kingdom. Wherever the Kingdom is, the Spirit is working. And the Holy Spirit is in you—in anyone who has faith in Jesus!

Jesus therefore empowers us to bring his Kingdom rule and substantial change wherever we are. Sometimes He will demonstrate the Kingdom through us by our character, our love, our compassion, our creativity, and our ability to suffer with others. Sometimes He will demonstrate the Kingdom through us by healings, miracles, and signs and wonders. We are to expect all of this because the Spirit empowers us to lead lives of Kingdom love and power into a broken and lost world. However, do not fall into the trap of comparing yourself with others. Rather, let the Lord use you as He wants, be open to His nudging, and enjoy your relationship with Him.

## SURRENDERING TO THE SPIRIT

There is now only one thing left, and that is for you to surrender to the Holy Spirit.

Many people do not do this because they know the Holy Spirit is going to challenge them. They want Him to be their comforter, to be a guide through life, or give them revelation. But they do not want the Spirit to *lead* them. Romans 8:14 says, "*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*"

## GOD, THE HOLY SPIRIT

Galatians 5:25 says, "*If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.*" We must let the Spirit lead us, which requires complete surrender to Him.

- He is going to ask you to do things you might not initially feel comfortable with—for example, give someone a scripture or a prophetic picture; or challenge you to lead something when you don't want to, or to step back when you want to lead.
- He will tell you to be quiet when you really want to say something; or tell you to say something when you'd rather be quiet!
- He will highlight things in your life or lifestyle you need to stop, and will inspire and encourage you to start something new that might seem daunting.
- He will even challenge your doctrine and established ways of thinking. Just when you think you know what there is to know, you will discover there is more to know—or that, shockingly, you were wrong!
- He may challenge you to lay down your ambitions and sacrifice something for His Kingdom

Submitting and surrendering to the Spirit means that He is now your commanding officer. God certainly wants to partner with us and gives us free agency to make our own decisions. His leadership is not one-sided. You work together for His Kingdom as He empowers you. But He is ultimately sovereign, and we should surrender to His will, not ours, as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. (Matthew 26: 36-46.)

# FURTHER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## HOW DO I RECEIVE ALL THIS?

Simply ask God. If you have faith in Jesus, you don't need to wait or graduate in some way to be baptized by the Spirit, as you have already received Him! But if you want to know God more tangibly, you can ask, and can even receive an answer today. (See Acts 10:44.)

Remember, you don't 'get' the Holy Spirit by doing anything or living a certain type of life. The Holy Spirit has already been given to you when you came to faith in Christ. Ephesians 1:13 says, *"When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."* (NIV). However, you might not be fully

*"When you believed,  
you were marked in  
Him with a seal, the  
promised Holy Spirit."  
- Ephesians 1:13 NIV*

aware of this, and that unawareness could make you turn back to trying to live the Christian life by your own righteousness, rather than trusting on the righteousness of Christ. When you do that, however, you will find yourself incredibly frustrated and in danger of even falling back into those things you now despise doing, because we cannot live the Christian life by willpower and our own strength. That would be like trying to save yourself with the very flesh that needed saving. It has to be done with the Lord.

Trust and believe that God will do it. Surrender to Him and thirst for him. (See John 7:37-39.) Relax and receive from Him. He is faithful and will do what He says.

F.A.Q.

## DOES SOMEONE HAVE TO PRAY FOR ME TO EXPERIENCE THE HOLY SPIRIT IN MY LIFE?

It can be helpful to have people encouraging, guiding and praying for us to have an encounter with the Spirit, but this is by no means obligatory. Those ministering may exercise the laying on of hands (this is a scriptural pattern for imparting the Spirit) but again this is not a prerequisite. Any Christian can administer the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:10, Acts 9:17) as long as they are sincere (Acts 8:21). They need not be leaders. But those ministering are always merely a channel: Jesus is the One who baptizes; He asks the Father for the Holy Spirit and pours Him out on us (John 14:15-27).

There are many ways the Spirit pours out on people and the way people respond (John 3:8). He comes as a mighty wind but also as a gentle breeze, as a powerful wave but also as gentle dew. That there is often a marked spiritual, emotional, mental or even physical impact when the Spirit comes upon us should not surprise us: our finite being is being encountered and filled by the infinite God! But the response differs from person to person: some laugh, others cry; some are quiet, others are boisterous; some testify particularly to joy, others to peace, love or freedom. The experience can sometimes be so obvious to outsiders in certain instances that they might even think you are drunk, as they did in Acts 2:13! Peter then had to say, "These people are not drunk, as you suppose." (Acts 2:15.)

*Our finite being is  
being encountered  
and filled by the  
infinite God!*

But it is not as dramatic for everyone and nor does it need to be. The focus is not on experience but on living with the Lord

F.A.Q.

every day.

## WHAT ABOUT "CHARISMANIA"?

It's a fact of life that everything God makes and does can be abused by others for their own selfish or even evil purposes. It is true that a movement exists, and continues to exist today, where "experiences of the Spirit" are grossly emphasized and people

*Most Charismatic churches across the world do not practice or believe what they are often accused of practicing and believing*

have claimed the Holy Spirit has made them do some crazy things that just don't look like the God we know from Scripture.

It would be grossly unfair to think or say that every Charismatic / Pentecostal is involved in or approves of some of the crazy things we've all seen or heard about on Youtube or through the grapevine. This is simply not true. Are there some charismatic churches that are delving into occult practices but claiming these are the Holy Spirit? Yes, unfortunately there are. But these are usually the exceptions, which is why we hear about them. Most Charismatic churches across the world do not practice or believe what they are often accused of practicing and believing.

The term "Charismatic" was originally given to a theological movement that rose out of the more traditional churches in the 60s that believed the miraculous and sign gifts of today were still relevant. "Pentecostal" was an earlier movement that can trace its history to the "Azusa Street Revival" (1906). What is interesting about the Azusa Street Revival is it was the first time

F.A.Q.

in a long time the gift of tongues was seen in a public setting, and one might note that one of the original intentions of the meeting was that it was to be multi-ethnic, in a time when segregation of churches was the norm and even enforced. This would actually make sense given that tongues is a sign of God's bringing together of the nations under one King, Jesus. More on that below.

The context here is important. Due to the nature of their experience, many early Pentecostals soon adopted the idea that tongues is the *definitive* sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Charismatics, arising from the traditional churches later (initially calling themselves the "renewal movement") did not emphasize tongues like the Pentecostals did. This is why the Charismatic movement as a whole has a wide variety of thought and practice.

However, the Charismatic movement has been guilty in cases of erring on the side of the crazy in an attempt to demonstrate that the Lord is real, or that their teachings are legit. Some of the more well-known figures, who get famous due to their extremism, have justified fakery and been exposed as frauds, not to mention scandals over money and other issues. (It would be fair to note, however, that such scandals have shown up in the evangelical, Catholic, and other church movements too.) Others in the movement have often found themselves caught up in the emotions of an event (a "revival" meeting) so much so that what they experience they think is the Lord they later realize was not. Unfortunately, years down the line, many have left the faith when the experiences stop or they begin to realize it all wasn't as real as they thought.

F.A.Q.

The exceptions do not prove a rule that we should paint Charismatics all with the same brush, as many have attempted to do. These issues also do not prove that God does not give His miraculous gifts today. Scripture is our guide. There, we see that God intends to grow us—and a misuse of the gifts is a sign of immaturity, not a sign that the gifts are not valid. Paul deals with the "Charismaniacs" in his day in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 & 14, outlining how the gifts of God *should* operate. What should be noted is he never once says the gifts are not valid, he says the gifts are not being used appropriately.

Do not let the abuse of God's gifts, or fakery, or scandals, or extreme teachings make you believe that God's gifts such as prophecy are no longer valid today. It is not a matter of whether they are valid, it is a matter of how they are used. We would do well to grow in our understanding of how to use them properly because God gave them to us to further His Kingdom purposes on the earth.

## **WHAT ABOUT 'CESSATIONISM'?**

"Cessationism" is the theological term for the idea that the apostolic gifts have ceased. These include gifts such as healing, being able to work miracles, speak in tongues, or prophesy (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; part of Ephesians 4:11). Cessationism believes these gifts were only for the early church and now that we have the Bible, these gifts are no longer necessary as the Bible now gives us all the revelation God wanted to give us through these gifts.

It's important to note that cessationists usually do not teach or believe that God no longer guides believers, only that these

F.A.Q.

particular gifts (called the "apostolic gifts" or in some cases "charismatic gifts") are no longer in operation today. Most cessationists even believe that God can and does heal today, but that He does not give anyone the gift of healing today, and that miraculous healing is not a common occurrence.

However, cessationism tends to read into scripture what is not there. There is no scripture that claims miraculous gifts would cease, or that only certain types of gifts (the "apostolic gifts") would cease. (No scripture lists such gifts separately to others.) Ironically, cessationists are frequently guilty of allowing experience (not seeing the gifts in operation) to interpret scripture—something they accuse charismatics of doing.

*Cessationism tends to read into scripture what is not there*

Cessationism is a relatively new belief in the Church. It was formalized as a belief by Benjamin Warfield (1821 - 1921) who traces the idea to the Reformers, who were suspicious about miraculous gifts due their context, where the Catholic Church was rife with mysticism and many fake "miracles" were promoted. For this reason, the seed of the idea can be found in John Calvin and Martin Luther. However, Calvin and Luther and other Reformers were not cessationists—a fact easily seen by the fact that the Reformation was widely believed at the time to have been prophesied 100 years before by Jan Hus.

For most of church history, including today, "continuationism" has been the consensus—that the gifts continue, although in some times and seasons God brings "revival" where the miraculous gifts seem to be more prominent for a time.

F.A.Q.

Lastly, it would be good to note that continuationism has never taught that God brings new revelation about salvation and His plans outside of Scripture. Scripture is the basis on which to test prophecy. In fact, prophecy is usually an application of Scripture into a new context—it's the ability to know how and when to apply what scripture is saying into a specific personal or corporate context. This requires the Holy Spirit to highlight something from Scripture that can encourage someone in their specific challenge or context.

## WHAT ABOUT SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

This gift often gets a lot of airtime and there is so much controversy and so many misunderstandings of it. It's also often been abused and incorrectly used. For this reason we need to touch on it here.

Various spiritual gifts may be given to the believer when they are baptized in the Holy Spirit, and many of these may only be discovered later. However, people in scripture often began to speak in tongues at a time of being baptized in the Spirit (Acts 2:4, Acts 10:44-46, Acts 19:6) and there are many believers who have had a similar experience today.

It is not fair to write such an experience off because you do not feel comfortable with it or understand it, especially since tongues are indeed in Scripture and that cannot be denied. There is much debate amongst theologians and Bible teachers about the exact nature of tongues. The question to ask is how

F.A.Q.

Scripture interprets the meaning of tongues as this sheds light on the practice of the gift.

### **Tongues is a sign and symbol**

It's helpful to realize that tongues is a sign and a symbol in the same way that baptism or communion is a sign and symbol. Baptism symbolizes our death and resurrection in Christ; communion symbolizes the death and sacrifice of Christ. As with these two signs and symbols, the fact that they happened in the past does not mean we do not practice them today. In fact, we encourage these signs to be re-enacted in our churches constantly, and with every believer.

There is no scripture that indicates that the sign of tongues passed away with the apostles or the early church. God has not changed, and the gospel has not changed. Therefore, if tongues remains as a sign and symbol, it stands to reason that it should be practiced. The question is, how should it be practiced? This is answered by first understanding what tongues is a sign and symbol of.

### **Tongues is a prophetic sign and symbol of the gospel of Jesus Christ**

Acts 2 is the reversing of what occurred at the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). The answer to the question "what does this mean?" in Acts 2:12 is partly answered by this. At Babel, the outcome was the division of mankind; now, the outcome of the New Covenant is the unity of mankind under Christ. This is what the gospel is about: all people coming under Christ. This is why Peter's sermon in reaction to their question is about the Spirit being poured on all people (Acts 2:14-41)—young and old, male and female, Jew and Gentile. It is a sign showing that

F.A.Q.

the Church is made up of “every tribe and tongue” (Revelation 7:9) and that the gospel destroys the barriers between us (Ephesians 2:14) bringing peace and unity between cultures, ethnicities, socio-economic groups, and so on. What is interesting to note is that whenever tongues appears in the book of Acts, it is when these barriers are being crossed. (See Acts 10 and Acts 19.) This also seems to be the case in history—the Asuza Street Revival was a mixed-race meeting, which was very controversial at the time.

Tongues is therefore a **missiological, apostolic, eschatological sign and symbol**. It is a sign of the Spirit's mission on earth today (missiological); the way in which it is done (apostolic); and the promised outcome for the future of human kind (eschatological). Whenever it is practiced it is pointing to these gospel realities. Just as communion points to gospel realities and baptism points to gospel realities, and so we practice these as outward expressions of inward realities, so tongues points to gospel realities that are taking place in our hearts and in the world today.

### **The practice of tongues**

What is important to remember is that all spiritual gifts, while exercised by the individual, are given for the strengthening of the body—the Church. (1 Corinthians 12 expounds on this.) This is one way to know if it is being used correctly—does it encourage and strengthen a local church? Or is it being used to draw attention to oneself and promote you in some way? When gifts are being used for self-promotion or attention-seeking, then they are being abused.

F.A.Q.

**Tongues is a sign for unbelievers** (see 1 Corinthians 14:22) and it also **edifies and builds up the believer** (1 Corinthians 14:2,4). It builds up the church spiritually and, when practiced together, reflects the gospel reality it is pointing towards. In this way, it also **builds up the church by being a missiological sign to us** (reminding us of the mission) and a sign to the unbeliever of God's heart of bringing every nation, tribe and tongue into the Kingdom.

Whether tongues is an earthly language that the believer praying does not understand or a 'heavenly' language (not a known language) is a large part of the debate around tongues. Acts 2:1-13, however, does seem to indicate that the crowd was baffled because each was hearing a *different* language from the *same* speakers (see vs 8—the emphasis is on the hearing, not the speaking) which would be confusing indeed! The Greek word used for tongues in the Bible is *glossalalia*, which means "language-like" sounds and not a human language spoken by someone who does not understand it. (The Greek word for that is *xenolalia*, which is not used in Scripture.) This explains why yet others heard no language at all and accused the apostles of being drunk (verse 13).

*[Tongues] is a sign to the unbeliever of God's heart of bringing every nation, tribe and tongue into the Kingdom*

Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 14 that tongues is a sign for unbelievers but not to be used for preaching or teaching or prophecy, unless interpreted, backs up the interpretation that tongues is more likely not a known human language, otherwise Paul would not have said that no one coming into their meetings would understand it unless it is interpreted. There

F.A.Q.

would always be the possibility that someone could. This interpretation better explains the phenomenon of tongues, what was going on in Acts 2 as to leave the crowd baffled, and why Paul encourages prayer in tongues but not preaching in tongues.

The problem with the Corinthians seems to be that they were sometimes getting together and having people speak in tongues, and then going home. They were not preaching, teaching, or even prophesying in any known language. Paul scolds them for their immaturity and makes it clear that this sort of practice benefits no one. This does not mean that tongues is not a true practice or irrelevant, only that it ought to be practiced appropriately.

**Tongues is an expression of prayer.** In Acts 2, tongues was an expression of praise (Peter's explanation speaks of David's rejoicing tongue; and verse 11 shows what people were hearing). Paul speaks of tongues in the context of prayer in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14.

Romans 8:26 says that when we do not know what to pray, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with "groanings too deep for words." There are times we do not know how or what to pray, but we may feel strong emotion or a burden. The encouragement is our prayer can be heard as the Spirit prays through us. 1 Corinthians 14:2 echoes this by saying, "For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit." In these moments, tongues can serve as an expression of prayer. This can be encouraging and edifying.

F.A.Q.

**Tongues can also function as an expression of deep seated, joyous praise!** This is what we see in Acts 2!

**Do tongues in a public setting always have to be interpreted?**

Paul's statements on interpretation in 1 Corinthians 14 has to do with tongues being used in prophecy, preaching or teaching. It seems Paul emphasizes that this is not the usual practice of the gift but he makes some allowances for it, saying that if it happens, someone should interpret, in order to make the word given intelligible to all.

When tongues is used in prayer (for example, praying over someone in tongues), this seems to line up with Paul's statements for tongues as prayer in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14, and Romans 8:26. There is nothing wrong with this and it can aid the believers in prayer. But it must be done in an edifying manner. (Perhaps even, if the two people cannot speak the same language, God might have them hear the tongues in their own language.)

However, if the intention of praying in tongues over someone is to draw attention to oneself, then this is an abuse of the practice. It does not benefit them and short-circuits the whole point of ministry.

Finally, if prayers over someone are not coupled, at least by someone in a group, with a language the person being ministered to understands, it would be fair to say that you have not sufficiently encouraged and edified them. Let them be encouraged in a way that will edify their mind and spirit!

### **Does everyone have to speak in tongues?**

Scripture does not record (as some have alleged) that people spoke in tongues on every occasion that they were baptized in the Spirit. So we cannot insist (as some have) that people *must* speak in tongues as proof of being baptized in the Spirit with the implication that they are not Spirit-filled unless they speak in tongues. Scripture clearly states that not every Christian has to speak in tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:30.)

Paul said he spoke in tongues and wished that all would speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:18; 14:5). He would not have said this if (a) everyone spoke in tongues and (b) it were not possible. Therefore, it seems right to say every Christian *can* speak in tongues, but it's not right to say every Christian *must* speak in tongues. This would be making up a commandment that the Bible does not give.

However, it is good to ask: why *not* speak in tongues? If the answer is you're afraid to look foolish, that is

*If this is a desire, ask  
God for the gift and let  
God answer it*

not a very good answer! If the answer is, because someone else puts you off, that is also not a very good answer! Each should follow their own conscience, but if Paul said he wished every Christian spoke in tongues, why not speak in tongues?

If this is a desire, ask God for the gift and let God answer it. Be patient, it may not be immediate. But do not close your heart because others have practiced it badly. If you remain skeptical, bring your skepticism to God and let Him teach you. Do not reject tongues simply because you cannot understand or it seems embarrassing. Let the Lord work in you and through you in His way—surrender to the Lord, be patient, and see what He

F.A.Q.

does!

## WHAT ABOUT MYSTICISM?

Many times when the Holy Spirit is discussed, particularly in reference to tongues and prophecy, some people make the mistake of thinking of all this as "mysticism".

It's important to note that mysticism is a broad term that has multiple meanings depending on its context. It is the same with the word "meditation". One can "meditate" on the Word (which means to read it, study it, think about it, come to know it) and one can "meditate" to empty the mind (transcendental meditation). It's clear that there are two very different meanings here. Christian meditation does not aim to empty the mind or contact spiritual entities, but aims to fill the mind with the Word of God and His truth.

How can mysticism be defined? Broadly speaking, mysticism usually has to do with a particular 'path' or 'way' that brings a practitioner into closer union with the divine, preparing them for heaven and seeing God face to face.

Is our union in Christ 'mystical'? Yes, in the sense that there is a mystery to what it all means and how God unites us by faith. It is a relationship that cannot be explained through pure science. It is in this relationship that we are brought closer to God. We do not work for it through techniques, rituals, or spiritual paths. We received it by faith—and that is the core difference between Christianity and mystical religions. What all mystical religions try and work for—a union with the divine—we receive by simple faith in Christ who gives us of His Holy Spirit, empowers us, walks with us, and speaks to us.

F.A.Q.

With this in mind, one can have better discernment about techniques or theology often labelled "Christian mysticism" and incorporate only what points to Christ and His already completed work.

Our relationship with the Spirit is just that—a relationship. It's far more dynamic and organic than many mystical or religious practices allow. When that relationship becomes governed by practices, rituals, religion, then it moves from relationship toward those things.

## **CULTIVATING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Often the reason why we turn to mystical or religious practices is due to a lack of faith in the Spirit's working in our lives. It is the same when we close ourselves to the Spirit and want to scrutinize everyone else's experience of the Holy Spirit.

The real issue often lies in whether we *surrender* to the Holy Spirit. A tender openness to the Holy Spirit

*It is an issue of  
surrender to the Spirit*

is often all that's needed to help us cultivate a relationship with Him. If we continue to let Scripture be our guide, engage in prayer, do not forsake the fellowship, and place the gospel of Jesus at the center (Acts 2:42), we are moving along.

*May you be blessed in your ever-growing, ever-deepening relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!*





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