
The Holy Spirit

Kevin L. DeYoung

The Gospel Coalition Booklets

Edited by **D. A. Carson & Timothy Keller**

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Let's be honest: one of the fun things about Christmas is getting presents. Some people get very few, some get too many. But most people get something. This past year I got some books (yay), clothes (meh), a Nintendo Wii (it was, er, for the kids), and a John Calvin bobblehead doll (priceless). All in all, a decent haul.

Think about your favorite gift, not just from Christmas, but the best ever. It's hard to beat an engagement ring for long-term impact. But what if I told you of a gift that provided a surer, longer-lasting promise than marriage? Money might be your favorite. After all, you can wield a lot of influence and do a lot of fun things with money. But what if I told you of a gift that provided more life-changing power, more world-transforming influence, than wealth? Maybe you are the sentimental type and your most treasured gifts are old photographs given by friends and family. Well, what if I told you of a gift that provided more than a picture of your beloved; it gave you his very presence with you for all time?

This would be some gift—a gift of promise, of power, of presence. And millions all around the world have received it. Or received *him*, I should say. For the gift, as you may have guessed, is the Holy Spirit. No other possession is as precious, helpful, dynamic, strong, and loving as the Spirit who dwells in those who belong to God through Christ (1 Cor. 3:16).

The Holy Spirit in All the Bible

The word for “spirit” is *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. The former is used roughly ninety times for the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. The latter is employed more than 250 times as a reference to the Spirit in the New Testament. Both words can refer to wind or breath. The general idea is the same: *ruach* and *pneuma* express energy, motion, life, activity. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit set apart, belonging to God. He is God's power and presence among his people.¹

The Holy Spirit, though more “visible” in the New Testament, was

also at work in the Old. He was present at creation, hovering over the face of the waters, poised to order and complete what the Father had purposed and planned (Gen. 1:2). The Holy Spirit was instrumental in the exodus (Isa. 64:7–14). He gifted God's people for service, equipping Bezalel and Oholiab not just with artistic excellence but with the Spirit's power to reshape a kind of heaven on earth (Ex. 35:30–35). We see frequently how the Spirit in the Old Testament rested on individuals like Balaam, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and Azariah for special acts of speaking or acting (Num. 24:2; Judges 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14; 2 Chron. 15:1). The Spirit could also come on people for a time and then depart, as Saul experienced (1 Sam. 16:14) and David feared (Ps. 51:11).

The Spirit's activity in the Old Testament is powerful but less than complete. It's no surprise, then, that the Old Testament looks forward to a coming age of the Spirit. Three prophecies in particular predict the glory of this new day. Joel 2:28–32 looks forward to the Spirit's coming upon all God's people. Ezekiel 36:22–37:14 awaits the day when the Spirit will dwell within God's people personally and permanently. And Isaiah 11:1–5 promises a Spirit-anointed Branch from the root of Jesse who will usher in the day of salvation for Israel. A universal Spirit, an indwelling Spirit, and a Spirit-empowered Savior: this is the age of the Spirit the Old Testament anticipates. Under the new covenant, this outpouring is realized (2 Cor. 3:1–11). The Spirit is poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:14–21), indwells all believers (Rom. 8:9), and empowers and glorifies the Spirit-anointed Messiah in his earthly ministry and saving work.

The New Testament emphasizes that last point more than we often realize. The Spirit empowered the Son through every stage of his ministry. The Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary in the virginal conception (Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35). The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon when he spoke about Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:25). The Spirit rested on Jesus at his baptism (Matt. 3:16). Then the Spirit led Jesus, who Luke says was full of the Holy Spirit, into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (Matt. 4:1; Luke 4:1). After the temptation, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (4:14) and announced in the synagogue that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him to proclaim the good news to the poor (4:18).

It was by the Spirit of God that Jesus cast out demons (Matt. 12:28).

Hebrews 9:14 says it was through the eternal Spirit that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice to God. According to Romans 1:4, Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead through the Spirit of holiness. From conception to birth through life, ministry, death, and resurrection, the Spirit was at work upon and through Christ.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

A Person

The Holy Spirit is a person. He grieves (Eph. 4:30); intercedes (Rom. 8:26–27); testifies (John 16:12–15); speaks (Mark 13:11); creates (Gen. 1:2; Luke 1:35); has a mind (Rom. 8:27); and can be blasphemed (Mark 3:28–29).² (Of course, the Scriptures are also said to “testify” and “speak,” and no one thinks the Scriptures are human. Yet context shows in such cases that this is a personification of Scripture, signaling, in fact, that God speaks and testifies through the Scriptures.) In the Farewell Discourse (John 14–16), Jesus promises to send “another *parakletos* [variously rendered “helper,” “counselor,” “advocate”],” namely, the Holy Spirit, who is Jesus’ successor in earthly ministry and in some respects Jesus’ replacement, and an impersonal force or the like simply will not fit the descriptions of what Jesus’ bequeathed Spirit will do.

God

The Holy Spirit is not just a person; he is a divine person. Psalm 139:7 hints at his omnipresence. He is “the eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14). Lying to the Holy Spirit is the same as lying to God (Acts 5:3–4). Paul uses the phrase “God’s temple” interchangeably with “temple of the Holy Spirit,” thus equating the two (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).

Distinct from the Father and Son

The Holy Spirit shares the same essence with the Father and the Son, and yet he is distinct from them.³ Simply put, the Holy Spirit is God, but the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son. He is his own divine person.

Though he is distinct from the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9). To say, “the Spirit of God lives in you,” or, “the Spirit of Christ is in you,” or, “Christ dwells in

you,” are three ways of saying the same thing (Rom. 8:10).⁴ The Spirit is sent from the Father (John 14:26) *and* from the Son (16:7; 20:22).⁵ In fact, the identity of the Son and the Spirit so overlap that Paul can even say “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17–18).

This does not mean the Son and the Spirit are one in terms of their being, but rather that their mission is so united they are one in their shared redemptive activity. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6), and the Spirit will lead the disciples into all truth (16:13). Jesus came to bear witness to God the Father (1:14–18), and the Spirit comes to bear witness to Christ (15:26). The sinful world did not receive Christ (1:11; 5:43), and the sinful world will not receive the Spirit (14:17). The Holy Spirit is simply and gloriously *another* Helper (14:16), the very power and presence of the resurrected and ascended Christ on earth.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Having examined the “who” of the Holy Spirit, we now turn to examine the “what,” as in: “What does the Holy Spirit actually do?” Because the Spirit is not seen in the Bible, there is more to say about the *work* of the Holy Spirit than about the *person* of the Holy Spirit. The best way to know the Spirit is to understand and experience his effects. I have divided the work of the Spirit into seven categories: the Holy Spirit convicts, converts, applies, glorifies, sanctifies, equips, and promises.

The Holy Spirit Convicts

It is remarkable if you think about it. Jesus spends his last few hours before death teaching his disciples about the Trinity. Of all that he could have said, he felt it most necessary to speak of his oneness with the Father and his unity with the coming Holy Spirit. Five times in the Upper Room Discourse Jesus promises the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26–27; 16:4b–11, 12–15). In the fourth of these statements Jesus speaks of the Spirit’s convicting power:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper [*parakletos*] will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concern-

ing righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:7–11)

Understandably, the disciples are upset that Jesus is leaving (John 16:6). But Jesus assures them it is for their good, for if he doesn't go away, the *paraclete* will not come. The “will not” is not because the Spirit and the Son cannot occupy the same space, but because the Spirit can come only after the Son's death, resurrection, and ascension. The inauguration of God's reign begun by Christ will be completed by the Spirit, but only after Christ's work is accomplished.

The church, then, in a paradoxical way, is better because Jesus is no longer physically here. Back in the first century one had to go to Palestine in order to be with Jesus. But now, on the other side of Pentecost, Christ can be everywhere by his Spirit. We don't have to travel to Israel to be with him or live in the mountains or light a candle to find him. We can do better than walking with him or seeing him. He can dwell in us anywhere at any time.

For the disciples, the presence of the Spirit was good news. He would be their Helper-Comforter-Advocate. But for the world, for those mired in sin, the Spirit would wield a convicting or exposing power (see John 3:20, where the same word, *elegcho*, is used). The Holy Spirit acts like a giant searchlight, exposing the world's wickedness and calling people everywhere to repentance. It's as if the world is having a nice romantic candlelight dinner, thinking everything is all sirloin and roses, and then *voilà!* The Spirit flips on the lights to expose cockroaches scurrying up the walls and garbage strewn about the floor. We are not as good as we imagine, and the Spirit can prove it to us.

In particular, Jesus says the Spirit will convict the world of three things:⁶

- 1) Of sin, because it does not believe in Jesus. At the heart of sin is unbelief. And there is no better (worse?) sign of unbelief than refusing to recognize Jesus for who he is.
- 2) Of righteousness, because Jesus went to the Father. The world is impressed with its own supposed goodness (Isa. 64:6) when it should be impressed with Jesus. We want to determine who Jesus is and decide what he really accomplished. But his ascension into

heaven is enough to demonstrate his identity as the holy Son of God, one with the Father.

- 3) Of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. This is the most damning evidence the Spirit could bring against the Jews: they killed the wrong man and worship the wrong ruler. But the Spirit will come and bear witness to the resurrected Christ so they might see that the one they follow has been defeated and the one they murdered has proven victorious. The blow dealt to Satan on the cross was a precursor to the final defeat that awaits him and his spiritual children. Satan can still bark and bite, but he's on a short leash headed for the pound.

The primary fulfillment to this threefold promise came at Pentecost (Acts 2:22–24, 37), but the ongoing work of Spirit-prompted conviction continues wherever there is sin to be exposed and forgiven. The convicting work of the Spirit is the first element in regeneration. God the Holy Spirit must awaken us to our selfishness, our antipathy to godliness, and our indifference to Christ. Jonathan Edwards observed:

The Spirit that is at work takes off persons' minds from the vanities of the world, and engages them in a deep concern about eternal happiness, and puts them upon earnestly seeking their salvation, and convinces them of the dreadfulfulness of sin and of their own guilty and miserable state as they are by nature. It awakens men's consciences, and makes them sensible of the dreadfulfulness of God's anger, and causes in them a great desire and earnest care and endeavor to obtain his favour.⁷

When the Spirit is at work, we will not just be embarrassed by our failures or regret our mistakes; we see our sins in relationship to God and experience what David felt when he cried out, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Ps. 51:4). No sentient man or woman is a Christian who has not seen his or her sin in light of the Spirit's convicting work and seen it as an offense against Almighty God.

The Holy Spirit Converts

The classic passage on conversion is John 3, where Jesus talks with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews (v. 1). Unlike many of the other Pharisees in the Gospels, Nicodemus seems like an honest

seeker, if a little cowardly. He doesn't appear hostile to Jesus. In fact, he strikes me as a sincere religious man genuinely interested to learn from Jesus. There's only one massive problem with Nicodemus: he's not born from above. He recognizes that Jesus is a teacher come from God. He affirms that Jesus has done miracles with God's power (v. 2). But this is not enough. Jesus says to him in effect, "I don't care that you see the miraculous with your eyes. I want you to *experience* the miraculous in your heart."⁸

Nicodemus, like the rest of us, must be born again (John 3:3). Or to put it another way, we must be born of water and the Spirit (v. 5). Nicodemus should have been familiar with this curious imagery, for it comes from the Old Testament (cf. v. 10). Jesus is no doubt thinking of Ezekiel 36, in particular the references to water and Spirit (vv. 25, 27). In Ezekiel's prophecy waters points to cleansing, and the indwelling of the Spirit suggests a new heart (vv. 25–26). Thus, in John 3, Jesus is not talking about the sacrament of baptism but about the supernatural work that removes the stain of sin and makes us new.⁹

This is what the Bible means by new birth, conversion, regeneration, or being born again. Conversion is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:5 calls it the "washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit." Just like the wind (*pneuma*) blows where it wishes, so it is with everyone born of the Spirit (*pneuma*). God the Holy Spirit must invade our heart and awaken us to the vileness of sin, the truthfulness of God's Word, and the preciousness of Christ.

Jesus could not be any clearer: there is no Christian life without the converting work of the Spirit. He enables us to understand and spiritually discern the things of God (1 Cor. 2:12–14). He grants us repentance that leads to life (Acts 11:18). He pours out God's love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). He enables us to believe in the promises of God (John 1:12–13). "No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father," Jesus says in John 6:65.

And how do the elect come to God? "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" (John 6:63). So we come to faith in the Son by the Father's appointing and the Spirit's imparting. Faith itself, then, is a gift, a gift that comes at conversion when we are born again by the Spirit working through the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23–25).

The Holy Spirit Applies

Think of all Christ accomplished. He kept the prescriptive and penal requirements of the law. He took on human flesh and satisfied divine justice. He conquered death, sin, and the Devil. As the covenant-keeping Messiah, he won for his people every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). Jesus Christ is wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

Union with Christ

But how does all that Christ accomplished become ours? That's a question most of have never considered. John Calvin asks:

How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son—not for Christ's own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand, that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.¹⁰

So how do we share in Christ's benefits? Calvin's answer: "The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."¹¹

In Romans 8:9–11, Paul argues along similar lines. When the Spirit dwells in us, we have the Spirit of Christ (v. 10), and if the Spirit is in us, we will have life in Jesus Christ (v. 11). In short, when you have the Spirit, you have Christ; and when you have Christ, you have the Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, because the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. He is the Spirit of adoption, making us children of God the Father by joining us to Christ our brother (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6; Heb. 2:17). God, by the Spirit, has torn the "first Adam" jersey from our backs and put us on the "second Adam" team.

We don't often think about this aspect of redemption, but John Murray says that union with Christ is the "central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."¹² So crucial is our union with Christ that Paul uses this "in Christ" language about 160 times.¹³ Justification, reconciliation, redemption, adoption, sanctification, glorification—all these belong to us because of our union with Christ. In a mysterious, supernatural way that transcends spatial categories, Christ is in us by the Spirit that we might have communion with Christ and share in all his benefits.

Baptism in the Spirit as Our Union with Christ

One other passage bears special mention: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13). Christians continue to debate the meaning of this verse. Is this baptism something all Christians experience or a special blessing that only some Christians receive? The answer is fairly straightforward.

The phrase “baptism in/with/by the Spirit” (*en pneumatī*) occurs seven times in the New Testament. Four instances are in the Gospels, where John the Baptist prophesies that the Lord Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). The fifth occurrence is in Acts 1:5, where Jesus alludes to John’s prediction. The sixth instance is in Acts 11:16, when Peter recalls Jesus’ words from before his ascension in Acts 1:5. So all six of these references to baptism in/with/by the Spirit look forward or back to the same thing: the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The seventh passage, 1 Corinthians 12:13, is unique because it does not refer directly to Pentecost (the Corinthians and Paul weren’t there in Jerusalem to be baptized with the Spirit). Some Christians, therefore, have taught that 1 Corinthians 12:13 speaks of a second-blessing experience, one that comes subsequent to conversion and that only some Christians enjoy. But the second-blessing explanation will not work. For starters, the verse emphasizes that *all* were baptized in the Spirit and *all* were made to drink of the Spirit.

Whatever Paul is talking about, it’s clear he assumes everyone at Corinth has experienced it. Furthermore, given the larger context, Paul could not possibly be talking about a unique second blessing experienced by only some Christians. After emphasizing the diversity of gifts in the body, Paul turns his focus on the unity the Corinthians share. They all may have different gifts, but they all have been baptized in one Spirit.

Baptism in the Spirit is something every Christian has experienced because every Christian has been born again and joined to Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Baptism with the Spirit is nothing less than our union with Christ. The same Spirit first poured out at Pentecost now dwells in every believer, joining us to Christ and immersing us in all his benefits.

If you’ll permit a homely illustration, baptism in the Spirit is

like that wonderful waterfall of glaze that pours over a Krispy Kreme doughnut moving down the conveyor belt. Every doughnut gets it, and every doughnut is much better for it. In a similar way, Jesus baptizes us in the Spirit that we might know his power and be awash in his blessings. Or as John Stott summarizes it: Spirit baptism is a distinctive blessing (realized only in the new covenant), an initial blessing (given at conversion), and a universal blessing (poured out on every genuine believer).¹⁴

The Holy Spirit Glorifies

With this subheading you may think I'm going to continue through the "order of salvation" and explain how the Spirit leads the Christian to final glorification. But that's not the point, because that's not what Jesus talks about in the upper room. In Jesus' fifth promise regarding the Holy Spirit, he speaks of a different kind of glorification:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13–15)

Here we have Jesus' final words about the Holy Spirit. And what does he emphasize as he comes to the cross but the central and often overlooked work of the Spirit to glorify Christ? Most immediately, Jesus is speaking to the Twelve about the work the Spirit will do in the days ahead to reveal Christ's full glory to them (John 7:39). But derivatively, Jesus' promise is also about the work of the Spirit to glorify Christ in our hearts through the truth the disciples would soon see. This is an important passage because it helps us avoid two common mistakes.

The first mistake is to pit the Spirit against the Scriptures. Jesus' promise has nothing to do with the Spirit's telling me whom I should marry or what job I should take. That's not what he has in mind when he says the Spirit "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Jesus is talking to the apostles (v. 12). They are the ones who will be led into "all truth."

The "all truth" they would receive was not the truth about every bit of knowledge in the universe, from supernovas to DNA. The "truth" refers to the whole truth about everything bound up in Jesus Christ,

the way, the truth, and the life. The Spirit will illuminate the things that are to come (John 16:13), not in a predictive sense, but in so far as he will unpack the significance of the events yet to come, namely Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation. The Spirit, speaking for the Father and the Son, will help the apostles remember what Jesus said and understand the true meaning of who Jesus is and what he accomplished (John 14:26).

This means that the Spirit is responsible for the truths the apostles preached and that in turn were written down in what we now call the New Testament. We trust the Bible because the apostles, and those under the umbrella of their authority, wrote it by means of the Spirit's revelation. The Bible is the Spirit's book. He inspired the Old Testament, as the apostles assume (Acts 4:25; 28:25; Heb. 3:7; 2 Pet. 1:21), and also the New Testament, as Jesus indirectly promised in John 16.

Therefore, we can yield no ground to those who, like Mormons, argue for ongoing revelation that adds to the doctrinal content of the New Testament. Nor can we tolerate the suggestion theological liberals often make that sticking meticulously to the Scriptures is somehow an insult to the Holy Spirit. Word and Spirit belong inseparably together. We hear from the Spirit when we search the Scriptures. And in searching the Scriptures, we must pray for the Spirit's illumination.

The second error this passage can help us avoid is the mistake of pitting the Spirit against Christ. The Holy Spirit is a serving Spirit. He speaks only what he hears (John 16:13). He declares what he is given; his mission is to glorify another (v. 14). All three persons of the Trinity are fully God, yet in the divine economy the Son makes known the Father and the Spirit glorifies the Son. Yes, it is grievous to ignore the Holy Spirit and overlook the indispensable role he plays in our lives. But we must not think we can focus on Christ too much. The Spirit is not hurt when we fix our attention on Christ.

Exulting in Christ is evidence of the Spirit's work! The focus of the church is not on the dove but on the cross, and that's the way the Spirit would have it. As J. I. Packer puts it, "The Spirit's message to us is never, 'Look at me; listen to me; come to me; get to know me,' but always, 'Look at *him*, and see *his* glory; listen to *him*, and hear *his* word; go to *him*, and have life; get to know *him*, and taste his gift of joy and peace.'"¹⁵

All this business about the work of the Spirit to reveal and glorify

the Son is why the notion of anonymous Christians is so horribly mistaken. I remember a professor in college who argued that because God is sovereign and the Spirit blows where he wishes, the Spirit could very well be savingly at work in all religions, causing people to be born again and joining people to Christ apart from their knowing it. He believed people could be saved in Christ without hearing of Christ or professing faith in him. This “inclusivist” way of thinking is popular. Even the beloved C. S. Lewis espoused it:

There are people who do not accept the full Christian doctrine about Christ but who are so strongly attracted by Him that they are His in a much deeper sense than they themselves understand. There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it. For example, a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain other points.¹⁶

I’ve benefited from Lewis often, but to think this way is to misunderstand the Spirit’s mission at Pentecost and in the age of Pentecost. The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to Christ by taking what is his—his teaching, the truth about his death and resurrection—and making it known. The Spirit does not work indiscriminately without the revelation of Christ in view. Arguably, the Holy Spirit’s most important work is to glorify Christ, and he does not do this apart from shining the spotlight on Christ for the elect to see and savor.

The Holy Spirit Sanctifies

The opening greeting of Peter’s first epistle gives a clear example of the Trinitarian nature of our salvation. The “elect exiles” are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, that they might be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled by his blood (1 Pet. 1:2). The Holy Spirit sanctifies in two ways. First, he sets us apart *in Christ* that we might be cleansed by his blood. Second, he works *in us* so we can be obedient to Jesus Christ. Through the sanctification of the Spirit we are given a new position and infused with a new power.

It's the second element, the new power, that we usually think of when discussing sanctification. Though sanctification is positional too, as a theological term it usually refers to our progressive sanctification, the way in which God works in us for his good pleasure as we work out the life of salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12–13). Or, as Romans 8:9–13 puts it, we are no longer in the flesh but in the Spirit (position); therefore, by the Spirit we ought to put to death the deeds of the flesh (power).

Though we must make effort in our growth in godliness (2 Pet. 1:5), the Spirit empowers through and through. The Bible is not a cheap infomercial telling us to change and then serving as an enthusiastic cheerleader: “You can do it!” We have already been changed. We are already new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and have a new strength at work in our inner being (Eph. 3:16), producing gospel fruit in us by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). The Bible expects that because God dwells in us by the Spirit, we can, by that same Spirit, begin to share in the qualities that are characteristic of God himself (2 Pet. 1:4). Of course there is still a fight within us. But with the Spirit there can be genuine progress and victory. The New Testament simply asks us to be who we are.

How exactly, then, does the Spirit empower us for growth in godliness? Think again of the metaphor of light. The Holy Spirit, as we've seen, is like a light shining into our dark places, exposing our sin and leading us to repentance. The Spirit is also a lamp to illumine God's Word, teaching what is true and revealing it as precious (1 Cor. 2:6–16). And, as we saw in John 16, the Spirit throws a spotlight on Christ so we can see his glory and beauty and be changed accordingly.

This is the stunning argument Paul makes in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Just as Moses had his face transformed when he saw the Lord's glory on Mount Sinai, so will we be transformed when we behold God's glory in the face of Christ. Except we won't get just a shiny, tan face; we will grow more and more into the image of the one we see. We become what we behold.

My wife loves to watch figure skating. She loves the artistry and beauty of it. She also enjoys the puff pieces on the young women. I find them nauseating, but I have to admit that it is pretty remarkable what they can do. I imagine most of them grew up watching figure skating.

They probably marveled at all the lay-back spins and double-axles and triple salchows (uh?). I'm sure many of them were mesmerized as little girls by Kristi Yamaguchi or Michelle Kwan. They probably thought, "I want to do that. That's amazing! That's incredible! How can I be like her?" Of course, it takes practice to be a world-class figure skater, just like sanctification takes effort on our part. But the effort in both cases is inspired and motivated and modeled after glory. The sight of brilliance and majesty is transformative in and of itself.

That's why when the Spirit is at work to sanctify us—by revealing sin, revealing truth, and revealing the glory of Christ—and we look the other way, it is a profound offense. The Bible refers to this as resisting (Acts 7:51), quenching (1 Thess. 5:19), or grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). There may be slight nuances among the three terms, but they all speak of situations where we do not accept the Spirit's work in our lives. When we reject what the Word of God has to say to us, when we turn our eyes from the Spirit's exposure to sin, when we say one thing as Christians and do another, we sin against the Spirit.¹⁷

The Holy Spirit Equips

The Holy Spirit not only empowers us for Christlike living; he equips us for Christlike service. "Fullness" is one way to describe this equipping. The Spirit fills with boldness, courage, wisdom, faith, and joy (Acts 6:3; 11:24; 13:52). Even though the Spirit dwells within us, he can still fill us to a greater or lesser degree, just like a balloon can be full of air—if you blow into it, it expands and has a fuller fullness. Being filled by the Spirit may or may not make you an emotional person. It may or may not make you a spontaneous person. But whenever you engage in worship, thankfulness, and proper submission, you can be assured it is the Spirit who is filling you (Eph. 5:18–21).

Spiritual Gifts

"Gift" is another way to talk about the Spirit's equipping work. The word "gift" (*charisma*) is a flexible term.¹⁸ Most broadly, a gift is simply the manifestation of God's grace in and through his people.¹⁹ In 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, a gift is equivalent to service or activity. The major gift lists in the New Testament are not meant to be exhaustive descriptions of the Spirit's equipping.²⁰ The lists are overlapping, imprecise, and occasional in nature. Paul is simply saying, "The

church is made up of all sorts of people doing all kinds of things by the hand of God. For example . . . ” In other words, wherever God’s grace is evident in his people for the common good, there we see spiritual gifts at work.

The purpose of spiritual gifts is not to impress or even to provide a powerful personal experience. The manifestation of the Spirit is for the common good and the edification of the church (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12, 26). The gifts are for service and ministry for the benefit of the body of Christ.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit apportions gifts to individual Christians as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11). It’s not as if the Holy Spirit backed up a big dump truck of gifts and unloaded them indiscriminately on God’s people. He didn’t distribute the gifts by putting us in a money booth with spiritual gifts flying around (and some poor chap gets stuck with administration). No, the Holy Spirit has apportioned the gifts carefully and personally. Everyone is gifted by the Spirit for service. This means we *can* serve. It also means we *must* serve. Whether it’s within or without the walls of the church building, each of us must be working for the common good. Church is not like going to the movies. It’s more like being a soldier in an army. Every soldier needs to do his part, and munching popcorn while his fellow soldiers do battle in the foxhole doesn’t count.

Those Controversial Gifts

I would be remiss in talking about spiritual gifts if I didn’t say something about the debate over the “miraculous gifts.” On the one side are cessationists, who claim that some of the gifts, such as tongues and prophecy, ceased after the apostolic age. They contend:

- 1) The miraculous gifts were needed only as authenticating signs for the initial establishing of the gospel and the church.
- 2) First Corinthians 13:8–10 says that prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease “when the perfect comes.” A minority of cessationists contends that the “perfect” came with the completion of the Bible.
- 3) Revelatory gifts such as tongues and prophecy undermine the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.
- 4) The miraculous gifts we see today are not analogous to the gifts exercised in the New Testament.

On the other side are continuationists, who claim that all the gifts are available today. They argue:

- 1) Without a clear word to the contrary, we should assume all the gifts are still in effect and earnestly desire them (1 Cor. 14:1).
- 2) The “perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13 refers to the return of Christ, not to the close of the canon (and, it must be pointed out, many cessationists accept this exegesis, too, but draw different conclusions).
- 3) Revelatory gifts do not have the same authority as Scripture. They must always be tested.
- 4) Whether or not the gifts are identical with the first century, we should welcome the Spirit’s work in our midst.

I believe both sides have come to see that they agree on more than they once thought. They agree that:

- 1) Every proclamation must be tested against Scripture.
- 2) Nothing can be added to Scripture.
- 3) It is unwise to claim personal words from the Lord for someone else.
- 4) We should be open to the Spirit working in nondiscursive ways, whether that’s called “prophecy,” “illumination,” or something else.

One of the encouraging signs in the evangelical world is how cessationists and continuationists have been able to partner and worship together in recent years, realizing that their commonalities in the gospel are far greater than the issues that separate them with regard to spiritual gifts.

The Holy Spirit Promises

In Ephesians 1:3, Paul begins his glorious explosion of praise, extolling the blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. The concert of blessings comes to a final crescendo with the sealing of the Spirit: “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (Eph. 1:13–14).

Sealing

What does it mean to be sealed with the promised Holy Spirit? The language may sound obscure to us, but it probably didn't to the Ephesians. A seal in the ancient world did three things. (1) A seal authenticated—think of a letter with the king's official stamp pressed in wax. (2) A seal secured—think of a branding iron marking the cattle to keep them safe from thieves. (3) A seal marked ownership—think of that overpriced embosser that makes a literal impression on the opening page of your books. Paul uses the imagery of a seal to capture these same thoughts.

The seal of the Spirit authenticates us as true believers, secures our eternal safety, and marks us out as God's possession. It's as if God took his spiritual embosser and stamped us as his very own.

Although some Christians would disagree, I believe the sealing of the Spirit takes place at conversion. As Peter O'Brien says, "The sealing is a reference to the actual reception of the Spirit by the readers. The Pauline connection between hearing the gospel, believing, and receiving the Spirit is made, and these are important elements of conversion-initiation."²¹

Along these lines, the ESV translates the ambiguous participle with the word "when." *When* we heard the word and believed, we were sealed. These things—belief and sealing—happened at the same time, which is why Paul can write the Ephesians from a distance and be assured that they all have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. The sealing is an objective work done in us concurrently with regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

But just because the work is objective doesn't mean we can't have a subjective experience of it. We *ought* to pray for an experience of God's love poured in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). We should hope not just to know that the Spirit is our guarantee, but to feel deeply the good news that he is the down-payment of our inheritance (2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 4:30). The seal of the Spirit is there even when full assurance is not, just like two feet of ice holds us up even if we are afraid it is only two inches. But how much better to skate freely on the pond, resting assured that we are free from danger.

The seal of the promised Holy Spirit, securing us for the final day of redemption, is a gift possessed by every Christian, and every Christian is meant to enjoy it (Eph. 1:18). The Spirit is like God's engagement ring

saying to us, “This promise is only the beginning. You have no idea how much I will bless you. There is a wedding feast coming to you that you wouldn’t believe. But I’ve given you my Spirit so you will believe that it is coming.”

Go Ahead and Knock

What should we do with all this truth about the person and work of the Holy Spirit? Jesus has some good advice for us. But first, a story.

It’s early Saturday morning, barely 7:00 AM, which means, if it’s winter and you live where I do, the sun is still sleeping. Undeterred by the darkness and motivated by your stomach, you set out to make pancakes. You grab some flour and a little oil. Then you head to the refrigerator for an egg. Just one egg is all you need to feed your hunger and your family. But alas, no eggs.

You bounce over to your neighbor’s house and cautiously tap on the door. After a minute of silence the door opens a crack.

“What do you want? It’s Saturday morning. The kids are all in bed. I should be in bed too.”

“I’m sorry to be a bother,” you reply, “I just need one egg.”

“Come back at 9:30.”

But sticking your foot in the closing door, you make one more appeal. “Please, I can see your refrigerator from here. It won’t take you more than ten seconds. Just one egg. Then you can go back to bed.” And sure enough, with a little persistence, you get your egg, and your family gets your pancakes.

Jesus told a story like this one time. Here’s what he said at the end:

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:9–13)

Your heavenly Father loves you more than you love your own family. None of our little ones opened up a box of vipers on Christmas morning, because, though we are evil, we love to give nice presents to our

kids and grandkids. How much more, then, does God delight in giving us good gifts?

So, go ahead and knock. Ask him for the best gift of all. Ask him for more of the Holy Spirit's presence in your life. Ask God to fill your church with the Spirit's power. Wouldn't you like more of Christ, more repentance, more godliness in your life? Wouldn't you like your church to be more loving, more faithful, more courageous, more honoring to God? Wouldn't you like a fuller fullness?

All we have to do is ask. Jesus himself promises a favorable response. Ask for the Holy Spirit and he will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened.

Notes

1. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 21.
2. This list is culled from Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 60–61.
3. See Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 1:21–22; 13:14; 1 Pet. 1:2.
4. Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 37.
5. While the Bible clearly teaches that the Spirit was sent by both the Father and the Son, it is less clear whether the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. According to the earliest version of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 389), the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father.” The phrase “and the Son” (*filioque*) was famously added at the Council of Toledo in AD 589, leading to a schism between the Eastern and Western churches. The controversy that ensued was part political, part theological, and part misunderstanding. The Western tradition fits well with the biblical emphasis on the Spirit’s work to remake us in the image of Christ and safeguards against notions of salvation that put the Spirit’s work at the center apart from Christ. But those defending *filioque* (as I would) must still listen carefully to Eastern concerns. See Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 201–20.
6. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 534–39.
7. Jonathan Edwards, “The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God,” in *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1741; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), 121.
8. See John Piper, *Finally Alive* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009), 30–31.
9. *Ibid.*, 39–42.
10. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil; trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.1.1.
11. *Ibid.*
12. John Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 161.
13. According to Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 100.
14. John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 43.
15. J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 57.
16. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1943; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1996), 178.
17. See Graham Cole, *Engaging with the Holy Spirit: Real Questions, Practical Answers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 49, 81, 97.
18. See Rom. 1:11; 5:15–16; 6:23; 11:29; 2 Cor. 1:11; Heb. 2:4.
19. On this point, charismatics and noncharismatics are in agreement. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 1016; Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979), 47.
20. See Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28; Eph. 4:11.
21. Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 120.

The Gospel Coalition

The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences; we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King's highway, always aiming to provide gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that current- and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom he shed his life's blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply his disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission

is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all of our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so that we truly speak and live for him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. We intend to do this through the ordinary means of his grace: prayer, the ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who, in addition to embracing the confession and vision set out here, seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.

“Though we must make effort in our growth in godliness, the Spirit empowers through and through. The Bible is not a cheap infomercial telling us to change and then serving as an enthusiastic cheerleader: ‘You can do it!’ We have already been changed. We are already new creations in Christ and have a new strength at work in our inner being, producing gospel fruit in us by the Spirit. The Bible expects that because God dwells in us by the Spirit, we can, by that same Spirit, begin to share in the qualities that are characteristic of God himself.”

—From the booklet

These Gospel Coalition booklets are edited by D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller and are designed to offer thoughtful explanations of the ministry’s confessional statement. The Gospel Coalition is an evangelical movement dedicated to the gospel of Christ and a Scripture-based reformation of ministry practices.

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