

The Misunderstood Holy Spirit – Part 2

We're examining the Bible truth on the Holy Spirit. Perhaps no subject has caused as much disagreement and controversy as the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We saw in Part 1 of this series that groups generally make one of two mistakes – they underemphasise Him, denying His power in the church, or they over-emphasise Him, leading to extremes and a church like the Corinthians had.

We started out by saying that we cannot make experience our authority in this, or in any debate over truth, because personal experience is subjective and unreliable. We saw Peter regarded his own mountaintop experience as unreliable in comparison with the written Word. So we've decided that no matter what is happening or not happening in different churches, we must judge our experience of the Holy Spirit by the truth of His Word, not the truth of His Word by our experience of the Holy Spirit.

Well, we began by laying the foundation. We saw that the Holy Spirit is a Person. Not a human person – but a person in the sense that He has Personality. He thinks, feels and wills. He has emotion, intellect and a will. We saw that He is not a force, or an expression of God's will. There is plenty of biblical evidence that He is a literal, separate Person. We then saw that He is also God. He is the third Person of the Trinity – not inferior to the Father and the Son, but equal. We looked at the Scriptural evidence for His being God.

In Part 2 of this series, let's start looking at His work on our lives. This is where most of the debates among orthodox Christians centres. I don't imagine for a moment that I will be able to solve it; I would just like to present what I think is a Scripturally sound view. No doubt many will disagree with me, and that's fine, as long as we disagree on our interpretation of Scripture, not on the basis of what you and I have individually experienced or see in our churches or lives.

To start off, we must understand that the Holy Spirit has not always worked in the same way. He changes His ways of dealing with man. If we could find that He has done exactly the same things in Abraham's time that He is doing now, we would have no debates. But it is His differing modes of operation that confuse many.

In an attempt to try and make the Holy Spirit behave today as He always did, they point to the unchanging nature of God. "Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, right? God hasn't lost any of His power, has He?" Well, not at all, but that is not the point. The point is that the Holy Spirit, being God, can sovereignly choose to work in different ways in different times with different individuals.

The fact that the Spirit does not change in His essence in no way means that He will never change His methods. As early as the pre-Flood time period, we hear God saying in **Genesis 6:3** *"And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh."* Here, God is plainly saying, 'I am not always going to do things the same way. I am going to change my methods.'

Scripture is very plain that God changes directions with people. That is the meaning of Scriptures like **Genesis 6:6-7** and **Exodus 32:14** when it refers to God repenting or relenting. It does not mean that God had done something wrong, nor does it mean God was frustrated or had a sudden better idea. It means that God sovereignly chose to change His methods in relation to man. He decided to change direction in the way He was revealing Himself. God is all-wise, and always chooses the best option.

So, with that understanding, we must see that the Holy Spirit has done things somewhat differently to what He does today. To see that life before Pentecost was different for the people of God is an important Biblical truth. Notice John's commentary on a time not too long before he wrote his Gospel:

If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 7:37-39

Here, John is saying there was clearly a different situation then – the Spirit was not yet given. Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit to His disciples made it clear that there was going to be a change in operation.

Listen closely to **John 14:17**: *"Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."* Notice it says, He dwells with you, and – in future tense – He *shall be* in you. So, Jesus is teaching that the Holy Spirit's work was once again going to change after His departure. He even said that His departure was going to be good for them, so that the Holy Spirit would come and work in this new way.

What this all means is that we should not try to superimpose the Spirit's work today upon Old Testament characters. People get very confused with Bible interpretation of the Old Testament. They either throw it all out, as if it's all been replaced, or they want to bring over even what has been changed into the New. Simple Bible interpretation understands the need to make distinctions between the Old and the New, and to understand when a new principle has replaced an old one.

So we must understand that the Spirit's work today has replaced His work of Old Testament times. How did He work in the Old Testament?

1. Firstly, the Spirit came upon people temporarily for service.

The Hebrew preposition used is *al*. He came upon them, and they were empowered. You especially find this ministry in the book of Judges. For example, on Othniel: *"And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war"* (**Judges 3:10**); on Gideon: *"But the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet; and Abiezer was gathered after him"* (**Judges 6:34**); and on Samson: *"And when he came unto Lehi, the Philistines shouted against*

him: and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands" (Judges 15:14).

We also see His Spirit coming upon Saul and others. So what we glean from this is that it was a temporary enablement for service. It seems rather foolish to talk about the Spirit coming upon them, if He was upon them permanently. So it is logical that when the required deed was done, He left them.

2. Secondly, his entering or leaving people was not related to salvation.

There are a number of reasons we say this. Firstly, we see God's Spirit coming upon someone who was clearly not saved – the prophet Balaam in **Numbers 24:2**. The book of Jude identifies Balaam as an unsaved, false prophet. So it will be hard to show that the Spirit entering meant salvation, or leaving meant a loss of it. Balaam was an ungodly man, and the Spirit coming upon him did not change his heart or convert him, because he very clearly went on to disobey God and reap judgement.

Consider David. He prayed in **Psalms 51:11-12**: *"Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me."* Did he mean, don't take away my status as your child? Don't take away my eternal life? No, it couldn't mean that, because the very next two verses teach that David wanted the Spirit for service. He says, *"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee."*

See that? *"Then will I teach..."* If you uphold me with your Spirit – then I will be empowered to serve you. The Spirit came upon people for service in the Old Testament. And notice how the Spirit had come upon David when he was anointed, but left Saul at that point. Why? Because the Spirit was coming upon the king for service:

Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him.

1 Samuel 16:13-14

So the Holy Spirit was evidently not indwelling people in a permanent way, and His coming upon them was unrelated to salvation. It was related to service, and was temporary.

3. Thirdly, we find no mention of His New Testament ministry of indwelling permanently, sealing and baptizing. So the Spirit is clearly at work in the Old Testament, but in a different way.

It's with that foundation that we must look at the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, and in our lives today. We must understand that He has changed His modes of operation for different circumstances. In our dispensation – the time of the church – He operates differently to how He operated even when Christ walked the earth, as we saw earlier.

One of the greatest errors in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is to try and force all His methods from all time periods into ours today. We must understand He sovereignly chooses to work the way He does. So, what is the biggest difference between now and then? It is the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This means that the Holy Spirit comes to take up permanent residence in the life of a believer. Before He used to only *come upon* some for service, later Jesus said to His disciples He was dwelling *with* them, now He was to come *in* them. He would indwell a believer, and remain there. So believers today have an amazing privilege which believers in ages before Pentecost did not have – the Spirit dwelling inside us, and God Himself making our body His home.

But this teaching must be clarified with Scripture. There is far too much confusion about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit today. We must examine Scripture to understand this issue. For starters, the Holy Spirit indwells *all* believers. Not some. Not only spiritual ones. All of them. How do we know this? **Romans 8:9** says, *“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”*

Paul says that if anyone does not have the Holy Spirit, they are not saved. In other words, you cannot be in some condition where you are a New Testament believer and do not have the Holy Spirit. The Bible knows no such state. It follows then, that if you are a believer, the Spirit does indwell you. When Paul writes to believers, he addresses them as those who have the Spirit, not as those who must seek after it, who are saved but not completed. For Paul, it is an either-or situation.

If you are saved, and you are saved by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ – then you do have the Spirit. If you have not received Christ, then you do not have the Spirit. **1 Corinthians 2:12** says *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”* We have received it – past tense. He does not say some of you, but includes every believer in a blanket statement.

When Jude talks about apostates he says of them, *“These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit”* (**Jude 1:19**). Clearly then, receiving the Spirit is synonymous with receiving Christ. When you believe on Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to take up residence in your life. If you get saved by repenting of sin and turning to Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells you.

Unlike His coming upon people for service in the Old Testament, He indwells and does not leave the New Testament believer. The reason we have proof of this is that Paul addressed a very carnal, sinful church, and told them that one of the great motivators for holy living was the fact that the Holy Spirit dwelt within them: *“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”* (**1 Corinthians 6:19**).

Consider that verse. Paul says to sinning believers, believers who were committing fornication, that the Spirit is inside them! He does not say they have lost the Spirit, or that they will lose the Spirit. He instead points to the Spirit’s permanent status as resident inside their bodies. These are immature Christians, not super-spiritual ones!

Earlier in **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** he warns, *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."* He does not say, God will leave, he says, God will destroy. The Spirit is here to stay. If you are a believer, your body is the modern-day Holy Place of the Old Testament tabernacle. It is the Spirit's dwelling place from the moment you believed till the day you die.

All the illustrations of the Holy Spirit leaving have to do with the Old Testament mode of operation of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, He added that it would be a permanent indwelling: *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever,"* (**John 14:16**).

So, if you are a believer, the Spirit dwells within you. In fact, when we talk about receiving Christ, we are really receiving Him as expressed by the Holy Spirit living within us. The Spirit comes to dwell in us and express the life of Christ through us. The Bible's logic is – if you don't have Him, then you never had Him. You are unsaved.

The New Testament does not have a single verse even hinting at the idea of the Holy Spirit departing from a believer. There are commands not to quench the Spirit, and not to grieve Him, but none of them ever suggest that He will depart from one He has truly saved. To do so would be to leave a job unfinished, and **Philippians 1:6** promises that God will perform the work He has begun in us until the day of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit's indwelling also leads us to consider the Spirit's sealing. They are integrally related. We read in **Ephesians 4:30**, *"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."* Once again, Paul treats the sealing of the Holy Spirit as a universal, past-tense fact for all believers. Paul also makes no distinctions as to who has been sealed in **2 Corinthians 1:22**: *"Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."*

What must we do to be sealed by the Holy Spirit? The same thing we must do to be indwelt – believe. Believe on Christ for salvation from sin. **Ephesians 1:13** says: *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise."* Notice that the sealing was consequent to believing. It happened to everyone who believed.

What does sealing mean? Well, sealing was in Roman times the method used as a kind of guarantee, as a way of guaranteeing the contents to their destination untampered. Registered mail is an example. It is sealed carefully and stamped across the seal to detect if it has been opened. Only two people can open the parcel – the recipient and the sender. In our case, God is the sender, and the recipient.

The Spirit seals every true believer. By this act, He guarantees that each one will arrive at his or her intended destination – the presence of God in glory. God is the sender, and God is the recipient. Only God can break the seal, but according to **Ephesians 4:30**, He will only do so on

the day of redemption. No one can tamper with our salvation until we reach glory, because the Spirit Himself seals us.

This furthermore underlines why the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a permanent thing in the life of believers today. If it were not, then it means He seals us, and then breaks the seal before the day of redemption, which makes **Ephesians 4:30** untrue. No, the believer's security is based largely upon the fact that the Holy Spirit is here to stay.

Sealing also is a wonderful guarantee. Sealing was often like an earnest pledge, a down payment of things to come. So the Spirit's presence is a guarantee of all that awaits us in Christ will be fulfilled.

So we have now seen that the Spirit is a Person and that He is God. We have seen that He has changed His methods of operations, and in the church today, He permanently indwells all believers. We have seen that He seals all believers until the day of redemption. In Part 3 of this series, we tackle the difficult subject of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Must I seek after it? Has it already happened? What does it look like? Once again, we will seek to make the Bible judge our experiences, not our experiences judge the Bible.