

Do you feel desperate for the power of the Holy Spirit today? If not, you may have a misunderstanding of who you are or who the Holy Spirit is. Every aspect of our salvation is dependent on Him. Without the Spirit, we can't know God, understand Scripture, overcome sin, or transform the people around us. We are spiritually impotent without the Spirit (Jn. 6:63; Rom. 8:7; Titus 3:5), so it is vital that we have a right understanding of who He is and what He does.

Our need for God's Spirit goes all the way back to the beginning. Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the garden, and humanity has been rebelling ever since. The history of Israel is a powerful reminder that human beings cannot faithfully follow God without the Spirit. God pinpointed Israel's problem in Ezekiel 36: they had a heart of stone. They were spiritually dead. They needed a new heart and a new spirit. And God's solution to this problem involved nothing less than the complete transformation of His people:

Ezek.36:25–27 // I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

What God's people needed was the Spirit of God. They needed to be changed from the inside out and empowered by the very presence of God. This may have sounded far-fetched to the Israelites. After all, they stood terrified at the base of Mount Sinai when God spoke with Moses on the mountaintop. They fell on their faces as God's glory filled the temple. They had to be so cautious with God's presence dwelling in the tabernacle and temple. How could this all-powerful God possibly dwell within stained and fragile human beings? Yet this miracle is the exact reality that we find in the New Testament. It is the solution to humanity's rebellion, the culmination of God's plan of redemption.

When Jesus told the disciples of the Spirit's coming, He was not implying that the Spirit had not yet come into existence, or that the Spirit was previously inactive in the world. The Spirit was active in creation and in God's redemptive work in the Old Testament. However, the Old Testament pointed ahead to a time when God's Spirit would work in humanity in a new and powerful way.

1. Take a minute to consider the significance of the promise of the Holy Spirit in Ezekiel 36:25–27. Explain why this promise is so important in the history of redemption.

Who is the Holy Spirit

We must be careful when we discuss a topic as sacred as the Holy Spirit. The most important thing is to recognize Holy Spirit is God. (Acts 5:3-4)

Just as Jesus Christ is a distinct person but is also fully divine, so too the Holy Spirit is both a unique person and fully God. This is the mystery that we refer to as the Trinity, and it is based in the reality that the Bible talks about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as distinct persons, but also clearly identifies each of these persons as God.

John 14:15-17 // “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 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.

This carries important implications for how we think about the Holy Spirit. He is more than just a mystical force or power—He is God and worthy of the love, relationship and obedience that God deserves. This also tells us that the Holy Spirit is a person. He is not an impersonal force, so we should not refer to the Spirit as an “it.” The Holy Spirit is a “He,” a person with the ability to act, have a will, and even be grieved (Eph. 4:30). These brief thoughts should frame the way we think about the Spirit of God.

2. How should seeing the Holy Spirit as a person and as God Himself change the way you relate to Him?

The Promise of the Father.

Throughout the Old Testament we have seen two very important types of prophecies: (1) that God was going to send the Messiah to atone for sin and (2) that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh. Jesus Christ was the prophesied Messiah but where was the out pouring of His Spirit? The Spirit of God had descended and ascended many times on His prophets, judges and kings but this out pouring was for everyone.

- Joel 2:28 // “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Many people think Jesus’ final words of instruction to His disciples are found in the final two verses of the book of Matthew, when He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). However, these words were not the last Jesus spoke to His disciples. His final word of instruction to His followers was not “go.” It was “wait.” Jesus’ final instruction was to wait. Wait for what? The promise. What promise? The baptism in/with the Holy Spirit.

- Acts 1:4-5 // And while staying with them He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, He said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

- Luke 24:49 // And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

- Acts 2:39 // For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The Three Baptisms

Many Christians are unfamiliar with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In fact, most

believers only know about water baptism. We can easily deal with this baptism because the Bible depicts it physically—take John the Baptist’s activity in the Jordan River, for example. If you attend a church that practices water baptism, you see it with your own eyes all the time.

Still, the Bible mentions two baptisms you can’t see with your physical eyes; you can only see the after-effects of them in a person’s life. Let’s explore all three to understand the differences.

1) Baptism of the Holy Spirit. You probably already know about this baptism, but you might know it by a different name: salvation.

WHO: The Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ.

- 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body (Christ)—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free.
- “**The Spirit of truth, will guide you into all truth**” (Jn. 15:26, 16:12-14)

WHAT: When we received Christ as your Savior through faith we become a new person.

2) Water baptism. If we are obedient to the commands of Scripture, we choose to experience a second baptism, this one is in water. This type of baptism is what Jesus had in mind when He said, “**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**” (Matt. 28:19).

WHO: The disciple baptizes us in water.

WHAT: When we are baptised in water the old person is cut off. Just as Jesus was buried in the earth and then raised up into new life, so the new Christian is “buried” under the water in baptism and brought up again as a symbol of the new life he or she has received.

3) Baptism in the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 3:11, John the Baptist refers to Jesus, saying, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:4-5)

WHO: Jesus baptizes us in the Holy Spirit.

WHAT: When we are baptised in/with the Holy Spirit we receive the power to live like Christ.

What is the Purpose of the Three Baptisms.

1 John 5:7-8 // For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

- The three baptisms bear witness to and gives evidence for God’s supernatural transformation in our lives.

The Three Baptisms of Israel

- Everything in the Old Testament is to be an example for us. (1 Cor. 10:6 & 11)

- The Israelites had three baptisms

1 Cor. 10:1-4 // Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

The Three Baptisms in the New Testament.

This promise of the baptism in the Holy Spirit came powerfully to the disciples in Acts 2. Peter delivers a sermon immediately after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In response to Peter's preaching, a number of his Jewish listeners fall under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:37 tells us, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'" "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call'" (vv. 38-39).

Notice that Peter outlines the three baptisms.

- 1) Repent. This is the vital primary step in the baptism of salvation.
- 2) Be baptized. Peter urges his listeners to follow Jesus' example by submitting themselves to water baptism.
- 3) Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the third baptism. As Peter indicates here, the Holy Spirit will not force Himself upon anyone. He must be "received."

From here on out, the third baptism continually follows the first two as an essential, critical part of the Christian life. We see this pattern again and again throughout the book of Acts. Each one of these baptisms represents a distinct work of grace God wants to do in our hearts and lives. Salvation is a miraculous work of grace upon the heart. Water baptism is a work of grace in and upon the heart of man. And a believer's baptism in the Holy Spirit releases within us the supernatural empowerment to do all that God calls us to do.

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

The Holy Spirit's actions fill the pages of the New Testament. From the very start we see that John the Baptist and Jesus were filled with the Holy Spirit as they grew and fulfilled their ministries (Luke 1:15, 1:39-45 and 4:1). The Gospels are full of reminders that Jesus' ministry was empowered by the Spirit of God. The incredible events that unfold in the New Testament are the direct result of the Holy Spirit's working.

In Acts 2, the Spirit came in dramatic fashion to the disciples and empowered them in an unprecedented way. This came at a crucial moment. Jesus rose from the dead, gave them an impossible task in the Great Commission, and then ascended back to heaven. The disciples had been commissioned, but Jesus told them to wait until they received power from above. Suddenly, the Spirit came upon about a 120 disciples, and they began "telling the mighty works of God" "in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Peter pointed out that this outpouring of the Spirit had been promised in the Old Testament. God's people had been waiting for the Spirit to empower them, and that long-awaited day had arrived. The Spirit of God was now working in humanity—not only on the leaders of Israel but on all of God's people.

3. Read Acts 2 carefully. As you read, pay attention to two things: (1) references to Old Testament truths and promises and (2) references to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the Word of God

Not only is the Holy Spirit responsible for the miraculous events recorded in the New Testament, He is also responsible for the writing of the Bible itself! Jesus told His disciples that the Spirit would remind them of what He had been teaching them (John 14:26). These are the things that the disciples and their close associates recorded in the New Testament. Similarly, 2 Peter 1:21 tells us that Scripture is not a human invention, but rather the result of the Spirit's working through the authors of the Bible. Every detail of the text of Scripture, even down to the seemingly mundane grammatical features, is inspired by God and is therefore authoritative. While it is true that God used the personalities and other characteristics of the human authors in recording Scripture, even these human words are referred to as the Spirit's speaking (Heb. 3:7).

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Before the ascension at the Mount of Olives, Jesus must have stunned the disciples when He said that it would be better for Him to leave than to stay! How could that be? How could God's mission on earth possibly proceed more effectively without Jesus? The answer is found in the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7).

Jesus sent us His Spirit ("the Helper ") so that we can fulfill God's purposes on earth. The Spirit dwells inside His people—just as God dwelt in the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament—so that He can work through us. This indwelling of the Spirit is not a special gift for some Christians, but rather it is God's gift to all of His people. Paul said very simply, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9).

The Spirit is absolutely essential for fulfilling the mission we have been given. Unless the Spirit gives us the power to faithfully follow Jesus, we will follow in the footsteps of disobedient Israel. So great is our need for the Spirit that we are commanded to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16), be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), pray in the Spirit (Jude v. 20), and put sin to death by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13), among other things. The Spirit secures our faithfulness till the end. Even the assurance that we are God's children comes from the testimony of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16). In Romans 7 and 8, Paul contrasted the life that is lived in the flesh (that is, apart from the Spirit of God) with the life that is lived in the Spirit. The difference is staggering.

4. Take time to read Romans 7 and 8. What does Paul's comparison of these two ways of living say about the role of the Holy Spirit and our need for Him?

The Spirit in God's Mission

God's plan of redemption marches on, and He is using His Spirit in the lives of His people to do this work. The church's mission is too difficult to accomplish without relying on the Spirit. Our mission is too important to attempt without His power. We simply cannot fulfill the Great Commission without seeking and depending on the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit wants to do unbelievable things in and through us. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4–11) and still moves in a miraculous way today. But keep in mind that it is the Holy Spirit we are pursuing, not a specific supernatural experience. As you seek to live by the power of the Spirit, look to the promises of God’s Word. Trust the Spirit to show His power however He wants. More often than not, the Holy Spirit guides us by shaping who we are. He gives us new desires so that we gradually begin to live with the goal of glorifying God in all of our decisions.

6. How have you seen the Spirit of God working in the life of your church? If you are having trouble identifying the work of the Spirit, why do you think the Spirit’s work isn’t being clearly seen in your church?

The Spirit of God in the Church

In order to experience everything the Spirit offers, you need to be in close fellowship with other Christians. God designed us to function in a community of believers, each with our own spiritual gifts. To neglect your local church is to cut yourself off from one of the Spirit’s most powerful ministries.

All believers need the spiritual gifts of other believers. We need their teaching, leadership, encouragement, mercy, and even their loving confrontation, to name only a few gifts. On the other hand, consider how the Spirit has gifted you. How are you supposed to minister to your Christian brothers and sisters?

The Spirit works not simply through individuals, but through the church as a whole. Everyday church life—manifest in things like encouragement, prayer, and communion—may sound very “ordinary,” but there’s nothing ordinary about God’s people. They are a Spirit-filled community; they are God’s holy temple. We have already seen that the Spirit dwells within each Christian, just as He dwelled within the Old Testament temple. As important as that truth is, Paul also told us that the church is built together into a temple for the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:19–22). That is, the Spirit does not simply dwell within each one of us, He also dwells in our collective midst. The church is so central to God’s mission on earth that He dwells among us to empower us for the work He has called us to.

7. How are you partnering with other members of the body of Christ to be used by the Spirit in fulfilling God’s mission on earth?

8. Spend some time in prayer. Thank God for the incredible gift of the Holy Spirit. Pray that you would be baptized in the Holy Spirit and empowered to pursue and rely on the Spirit’s power in your life. Pray that God would work through the life of your church to bring healing, hope, and change to the world around you.