

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

Dr. Glenn Robertson

John 14:15-21

Among Christians there is often much confusion about the Holy Spirit. The charismatic movement has brought a great deal of attention to the role of the Holy Spirit. Orthodox and traditional Christianity gave it little attention. Perhaps so, because, in terms of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit seeks little attention to itself. Jesus says it never speaks on its own. It only seeks to bring glory to Christ and the Father. Yet, with the Charismatic emphasis, the Holy Spirit seems to be on display. People are eager to know if they have the Holy Spirit. They want to know if they need to do something specific to demonstrate the presence of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit. Are those who claim manifestations of the Spirit biblical? Do we get saved, then get the Holy Spirit later?

We will seek a biblical viewpoint, more than an experiential viewpoint. The reason I make this distinction is because the Lord may give a variety of experiences to people. We do well not to judge what the Spirit does. However, personal, subjective experiences are not the basis for developing biblical truth. I had an experience of the presence of Christ once while reciting the Apostle's Creed. That does not mean everyone will have such an experience.

We begin our study of the Holy Spirit by looking at the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be given after his departure.

John 14:15-21 NIVO

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--
¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

²¹ Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

1. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to the church after his death and ascension.

Jesus wanted to give assurance to His disciples for when He died. He knew leaving them would make it difficult for them to continue in their faith. For three years He had been with them, teaching them God's truth and empowering them to do the kingdom ministry. They had the power to heal and cast out demons in His name. Yet, now He was leaving them.

Jesus taught them God's commands. He says that if they obey his commands then He will send the Counselor. He will ask the Father and the Father will send them the Holy Spirit, the Counselor.

a. The Holy Spirit was promised by Joel, John the Baptist and Jesus.

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on God's people had been promised by the prophet Joel. We will see its fulfillment in a moment. John the Baptist had foretold His coming. Now, Jesus proclaims His coming into the world.

Joel 2:28-29 NIVO

²⁸ "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

John the Baptist spoke of Jesus' giving the Holy Spirit:

Matthew 3:11-12 NIVO

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. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

What does baptism of the Holy Spirit mean? John was practicing water baptism. In Jewish teaching, dipping in water was ceremonial means of removing uncleanness. If your hand was defiled, you dip your hand in water. If your whole body is defiled, you dip your whole body in water. Water baptism is a full dipping, an immersion in water, a complete soaking.

Baptism of the Spirit means a full immersion or fullness of the Holy Spirit. John's idea is centered in repentance as the object of this immersion. He baptized with a baptism of repentance requiring the people change their lives. He said that Jesus would baptize with the Spirit of Fire, again indicating a renewal that brings repentance. We know this when we read the next verse about winnowing the wheat. Winnowing is a separation of the wheat from the straw. The fire of Jesus is a power which leads to a separation of righteousness from unrighteousness. Charismatics want to interpret the fire as an experience of ecstasy. Yet John was speaking not of ecstasy but of repentance from sin.

b. The Holy Spirit is eternal as part of the Godhead.

The Holy Spirit has always existed, just as Jesus existed in God before His incarnation. We understand the Holy Spirit to be part of the Trinity, God revealed in three persons. God has no beginning. The Holy Spirit was not birthed at Pentecost. He came to the church at Pentecost to begin His ministry in believer's lives. He entered into a new role in the life of the church and the believers.

c. The Holy Spirit has many names in the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit is given many names. He is the **Spirit of the Father** who gives us words to defend the gospel. Mat. 9:20; (Mark has Holy Spirit.) He is the **Spirit of Truth** (John 14:17); the **Counselor** (lit. paraclete, advocate) 14:26. Frequently he is called the **Holy Spirit** (*KJV Holy Ghost*; *pneuma* is spirit, wind, breath. Old English meaning of ghost conveyed this concept. Today a ghost is a spirit of the dead, a fright.) Often He is called the **Spirit of God** (of the Father) and sometimes the **Spirit of Christ** (Phil 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:11).

The Holy Spirit works to communicate the thoughts between God and us; and the Holy Spirit empowers the believer to overcome sin and to do ministry.

2. The Holy Spirit Came to the Church at Pentecost

Although the Holy Spirit is always in the world, He is sent from the Father at Jesus' request after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. (John says that Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, John 20:22. Yet, the event of the transformation seems to lie at the singular coming of the Holy Spirit attending the tongues of fire on Pentecost.) Only Luke (Acts) tells us about Pentecost.

a. Jesus affirms that Pentecost is the fulfilment of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Before Jesus ascended, He again foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit.

⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:5 NIVO)

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NIVO)

Jesus affirms the words of John the Baptist that He would send the Holy Spirit into the lives of the believers. He told them to remain in Jerusalem until the Spirit came. The Holy Spirit would give them power to do their ministry. That power was specifically directed toward their ability to be witnesses of Jesus to the world.

The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost. The Spirit was evidenced as tongues of fire that came down from heaven and rested on all of the disciples, both men and women. The presence of the Spirit enabled them to speak in tongues. What kind of tongues. When you read Acts it is very clear that the nature of these tongues was not a glossolalia type experience. The spoke in dialects. We know because people heard them speaking in their different dialects. People gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost (50th day after Passover). This is the Feast of First Fruits. Pilgrims who came from around the Roman world heard the disciples testifying about Jesus. Yet, they heard them in their own language.

b. The tongues of Pentecost is a miracle of language translation.

Pentecost was a miracle of language translation.

Acts 2:6 NIVO

When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Acts 2:8-11 NIVO

⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"

Long before Google Translator came about, God empowered the disciples to be able to quickly convey the gospel into the languages of many nationalities.

My older brother married a woman from China. They met online. Then they met in China on a business trip. After they married, they still communicated with their cell phones on Google Translator. It was quite amusing. It has taken 2,000 years for technology to catch up to what God did in a moment. In the Bible, God gave dialects at Babble to confuse the people. Now at Pentecost, he gave them the gospel in a mass communication.

c. The purpose of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was conviction and conversion.

In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, Peter confirms that this outpouring of God is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

Acts 2:33 NIVO

Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Peter shows the purpose of the Holy Spirit was to lead people to conviction and conversion. Those who repent and are saved receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:38-39 NIVO

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call."

The Holy Spirit is given to every believer at salvation. It is not a second blessing experience. The Holy Spirit has many roles including communicating God's thoughts to us, encouraging us as God's counselor, interceding for us in prayer, and empowering our ministry. The goal of all of this is to bring people to salvation so glory may come to God.

3. The Holy Spirit is given to every believer at salvation.

John 3:5-6 NIVO

⁵ Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit."

No one can be saved apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said the new birth is to be born again by the Spirit. Salvation is a new life created in us by the work of God. Before the new birth we are spiritually dead. The life of the Holy Spirit living in us is what makes us alive.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit that enables us to be saved. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin. The Holy Spirit empowers faith. The Holy Spirit creates in the spiritually dead soul a new spiritual life. To have life in Christ is to be born again by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost was a unique event in the life of the church just as Jesus' birth was a unique event in the coming of Christ. Both pre-existed. Both were at work in the world. Yet, in His birth, Jesus who has been Spirit of the Word became flesh and lived among men. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit of God who had been working in the world now came to dwell in the lives of believers in a new unique way.

In order to receive the Holy Spirit you repent of sin and have faith in Jesus. Baptism in the early church was a pledge of one's life to God in faith and demonstration of repentance from sin.