

# **The Holy Spirit and the Believer Today**

**Alfred Norris**

## **PREFACE**

This essay originated in discussions in Newfoundland, with brethren and sisters who, while anxious to resist the excesses of modern Pentecostalism, nevertheless desired to do full justice to the teaching of the Scriptures on the Holy Spirit today. Notes were prepared on the spot which were adjudged very helpful, and what is now offered is a development from these.

It is impossible to approach the subject without realizing how close its very consideration brings us to the presence of Him that is holy. The pressing duty to expound the subject is not made easier by the knowledge of one's unworthiness to do so. Mistakes and inadvertences which any one author might make have, however, been as far as possible eliminated by long and searching, but always kindly, examination by others over many months. The document has been weighed sentence by sentence and though the responsibility for it is still my own, in many places the hands of others have left their mark.

Here and there differing views were expressed in our discussions on the meaning of isolated verses, as was perhaps inevitable. What is gratifying in spite of this is that we were very much at one in our understanding of the subject as a whole, and of nearly all the Scripture evidence adduced.

It is now my hope and prayer that the essay may help towards an enlarged understanding of this exalted theme, and that what the mind has grasped the heart may take hold of, that we all, "being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled unto all the fulness of God."

North Cave, October 1974 Alfred Norris

## THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Attitudes to the activity of God's Holy Spirit vary enormously. At the one extreme are those broadly labeled "Pentecostal", who believe that the gifts which descended on the apostles a few days after the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and were shortly afterwards bestowed on other believers, continued to be available throughout the centuries, and are to be expected and desired today. The whole range of such gifts is in principle to be expected, including tongues, prophecy, interpretations, healings, and even the raising of the dead. The first of these is the most obvious characteristic of Pentecostal movements, and while the language employed may sometimes, it is claimed, be a real foreign tongue otherwise unknown to the speaker, it is more usually an ecstatic utterance, a 'tongue of angels', corresponding to no known language, but nevertheless capable of interpretation by one having that gift to provide an edifying message for the congregation. In addition to tongues, healings are very commonly claimed, though raising from the dead very rarely indeed.

*Acts 2:1-12, 43*

*Acts 6:8*

*Acts 8:5-24*

*Acts 10:44-48*

*Acts 11:17*

*Acts 14:3*

*Acts 19:1-7*

*1 Corinthians 12:1-11*

*1 Corinthians 14:1-40*

*1 Corinthians 13:1*

Next to these are others who, either denying or indifferent to these miraculous manifestations, are still confident that the Holy Spirit speaks to the heart and mind of the believer today, giving a genuine revelation of the will and purpose of God. Some would regard all believers as so guided by the Holy Spirit as to be assured of the rightness of their views, safeguarded from false teaching, protected against loss of faith, and independent of any need to appeal to the written witness of the Bible, the Word of God: though this latter is more often implied than categorically stated. Others, while claiming less for the individual, would claim more for the church to which he belongs, or for its priests and ministers, whose ordination of call is supposed to convey the grace of divine guidance by the Spirit for the teaching and care of their flocks. Here, too, the guidance by the Holy Spirit could make it superfluous to reason from what is written in the Word of God. [\[1\]](#)

Further along the scale would be those who, while recognizing that the Bible is the only court of appeal at which doctrine, instruction, and moral precepts are to be established, hold that the Bible itself promises help from God's Holy Spirit to the believer in living his life, meeting his temptations, and working out his salvation. These would regard the evidently miraculous gifts as past, at least for the time being, and would add that they are in any case irrelevant to salvation. But they would say that to deny God's power and will to work in the life of every believer in every age by His Spirit could lead to the assertion that man can save himself if only he knows enough. It would lie within the believer's power, having understood what God has revealed, to live his life in the light of that knowledge alone, and bring it to a successful issue. Such a view, they would claim, is entirely out of accord with the Bible's own revelation of the mediation of the risen Christ and the facts of Christian worship.

*Philippians 2:12*

*Romans 8:31-34*

*Ephesians 3:14-21*

Finally, there may be some who mistrust all claims to possess the Spirit's gifts, or be subject to the Spirit's guidance or help, and have come to the conclusion that the only safe course is to claim the sole sufficiency of the Bible, without acknowledging any power from above which could, as they would put it, come between the believer and his unrestricted reliance on the written Word of God. These would then claim that the Holy Spirit simply does not now operate otherwise than through his Word. The believer has his Bible, and needs nothing else to enable him to secure the blessing at his Lord's return.

[\[2\]](#)

## **OUR TREATMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The method adopted here is simple. In principle, what we are doing is to ask the Bible what is the truth of the matter. If it proves that the Bible offers us the power to speak with tongues and work other miracles today, then these powers are available. If the Bible is found to promise every believer, or his church, inspired understanding of God's truth without further recourse to its pages for confirmation, then that is the truth of the matter. If the Bible tells us that truth can be found only by studying its pages, but that this truth can only be worked out with the help of God's Holy Spirit if it is to be effective, then for the help of that Spirit we must seek. Finally, if it should tell us that the Book itself is all we can expect of have, we must be happily content with that.

*Isaiah 8:20*

*John 5:39*

*2 Timothy 3:14-17*

Of one thing we must beware. Our own feelings, whether we are predisposed to view with enthusiasm wielding the miraculous powers of the Holy Spirit, or whether we are inclined to suspect and resent such aspirations, must not usurp a calm enquiry into the teaching of the Word of God itself. We must neither demand more than God offers, nor reject what he does: to do either would be to make void the Word of God by our traditions.

*Matthew 15:3, 6*

*Mark 7:13*

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

Though it might not always be put in these terms, it is clear that when men of God wrought miracles (as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha), it was the Spirit of God which gave this power to them. Though the prophets, when they spoke messages from God, said "The word of the Lord came unto me", and the like, the New Testament tells us how this came about by stating: "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Words to the same effect are sometimes used by the prophets themselves, as when Moses tells us that "the spirit of God came upon" Baalam, or when David says, "The spirit of the Lord spoke to me". But apart from the special powers conveyed by the Spirit of God to special men it is clear that the people as a whole had to await such revelations, and profit from them as they received them from prophets and lawgivers, having no such inspiration of their own.

*Exodus 4:1-7, and chapters 5 2 Peter 1:19-21  
onwards*

*1 Kings 17:16-24, etc. Numbers 24:2  
Jeremiah 1:2, 4, 7, 11, etc. 2 Samuel 23:2*

There are also some indications of a quieter manifestation of the Spirit in assisting the personal lives of men of God. When king Saul ceased to seek God's ways, and the Spirit of God departed from him, to be replaced by "an evil spirit from the Lord", a man who had been helped to rule well was given over to the workings of his rebellious mind because he revolted from under God's hand; and when David in his remorse pleads that God will not take away His Holy Spirit from him, but will uphold him with a willing spirit, he is not asking for inspiration to speak or write oracles from God, but for renewed fellowship with God, to create in him a clean heart and strengthen him in righteous ways.

*1 Samuel 16:14*

*Psalms 51:10-17*

### **THE MIRACULOUS MANIFESTATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

This begins with the power granted to the aged Elizabeth to bear a child (after a pattern which had already occurred several times in the Old Testament), a power continued in her son John, who was to be "filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb". It reaches a vastly higher level when God grants a child to Mary, Himself being the Father of the child. When Jesus was fully grown, He could claim the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me", a fact revealed in all He spoke and did. He is marked out from all the former prophets by the fact that God "gave not the Spirit by measure" to Him: they must wait until they were moved by the Spirit before, "at sundry times in divers manner", they could truly speak in God's name; but the message from God was constantly on Jesus' lips, so that He spoke with an authority which never failed. The power of God was ever with Him, so that virtue could go out from Him to work healings such as had never been seen before.

*Luke 1:5-23, 26-38 John 10:25, 38  
Luke 4:17-19 John 15:24  
Isaiah 61:1-2 Luke 6:19  
John 3:34 Luke 8:46  
Hebrews 1:1-2*

Even before he died the Lord gave some power to heal to His disciples, who were able to take tours of duty, their signs bearing powerful witness to the grace of God. Yet they must await His death, resurrection, and ascension before the fullness of such powers could be granted them. "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father."

*Matthew 10:8*

*Mark 16:15-18*

*John 7:39*

## *John 14:12*

The apostles must, the Lord said, “wait at Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high”. The Holy Spirit (sometimes called *Parakletos*, “the Comforter”, conveying the thought of a Helper by one’s side), was to lead them into all truth, bringing to their remembrance all that the Lord had said to them. On the Day of Pentecost the sound of the rushing mighty wind announced the descent of the heavenly powers upon them. By these powers they could speak with other tongues and prophesy. They could heal the sick and even raise the dead. Those of them whose writings have come down to us joined the inspired men of the Old Testament in writing “the commandments of the Lord” under the guidance of His Spirit, so that these writings, too, came to be known as Scripture.

*Acts 1:8*

*Luke 24:49*

*John 14:16*

*John 15:26*

*John 16:7*

*Acts 2:1ff*

*Acts 21:10*

*Acts 3:1-10*

*Acts 9:36-43*

*1 Corinthians 14:37*

*2 Peter 3:15-16*

The miraculous gifts were for a time more abundant than (save in the case of the Lord Jesus alone) they had ever been before. Peter described the event as a fulfillment of the prophecy that God would ‘pour out his Spirit on all flesh’, so that “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams”. As a result numerous people, named and unnamed, are found able to exercise one or more of the gifts. Apart from the prophetic and miraculous powers of the pre-eminent Peter and Paul, we have, for example, the Spirit-guided preaching and miracles of Stephen in Jerusalem, and Philip the evangelist in Samaria. Philip’s four daughters are prophetesses, and there is a body of prophets at Antioch. Agabus is a prophet who by the Spirit predicts a famine, and also the arrest of the apostle Paul. Paul writes of the Lord’s ascension as resulting in His “giving gifts to men”, in providing and endowing apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. He recognizes as operations of one and the same Spirit the words of wisdom and knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, tongues and their interpretation, and lays down guidelines for their profitable use. In the recorded experience of the earliest Christian community much of the promise to the apostles was fulfilled: “These signs shall follow them that believe: in my name they shall cast out demons, they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly drink it shall in no wise hurt them.”

*Acts 2:14*

*Joel 2:28*

*Acts 6:8*

*Acts 8:4*

*Acts 21:9-11*

*Ephesians 4:7-13*

*1 Corinthians 12-14*

*Mark 16:18*

## **THE LIMITATIONS OF THE MIRACULOUS GIFTS**

All the same, granted the widespread existence of these powers, we must not go beyond the New Testament’s own picture of the situation. Thus the miraculous outpouring at Pentecost came on the apostolic company, but not on their audience, who were amazed at what they saw and heard. Even when three thousand accepted the call to repent and be baptized, on the promise that they would “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”, it is not said that they received any miraculous powers, for immediately afterwards we are told that “many wonders and

signs were done by the apostles” while the multitude experienced “great grace”. When seven believers “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” are selected for a special duty, no miraculous works are attributed to them until the apostles lay their hands on them and appoint them to their duties: after which Stephen and Philip, at least, are able to command attention by the wonders they work. When Philip exercises his powers in Samaria, no powers are conferred on those whom he converts until Peter and John arrive, when their prayers cause gifts, but not the right to transmit the gifts, to fall on converts there.

*Acts 2:43*

*Acts 6:5-6*

*Acts 8:14-17*

*Acts 8:18-24*

The occasions when the gifts are renewed from above seem specially designed to provide new witness that this is the work of God when a new advance makes this desirable. Pentecost provided that witness in Judea; Peter and John are granted it in Samaria; when Peter preaches to the first Gentile the signs are sent unbidden from above to assure all that this admission of the Gentiles to the faith is the work of God. The conversion of certain disciples of John in Ephesus to a truer understanding of the work of Jesus and His power to save was followed by similar evidence to convince them that this was so. So far as the Acts are concerned, that is all. There may have been such occasions elsewhere and at other times, and Paul’s references to “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (to the Corinthians), and “he that supplieth to you the Spirit and worketh miracles among you” (to the Galatians) might be indications pointing that way. But the indications of the Acts are that these effusions were rare, limited, and for specific objects.

*Acts 2:1*

*Acts 10:44*

*Acts 8:14*

*Acts 19:1-7*

*1 Corinthians 2:4*

*Galatians 3:5*

Direct guidance by the Holy Spirit also occurred: but again it seems, this was in limited measure and for special purposes. Twice Paul was deflected from his plans (to visit Asia and Bithynia), and then directed in a vision to go to Philippi instead. Through prophets, or by direct revelation, Paul was warned by the Spirit of the consequences which would follow a visit to Jerusalem. There is no evidence at all, though, that instructions of this kind were the order of the day for Christians in general, which is plain enough when we consider the pains to which the writers of the inspired Epistles went to share their revelations with their readers. The very disputes which arose, and the heresies which raised their heads in the infant community make it all too plain how much such people needed guidance from their Spirit-instructed leaders if they were to deal wisely with their problems. Direct divine guidance was the privilege of the few, and not the common property of all, or even of most, believers.

*Acts 16:6-10*

*Acts 20:23*

*Acts 21:4, 11*

*1 Corinthians 11:23*

*Acts 15:3*

*Hebrews 2:3-4*

*Ephesians 3:5*

*Jude 17*

There were other limitations, too. “He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have spoken unto you” is a promise which could only apply to those who had heard the Lord in the first place. The authority given to the apostles when the Lord said “Receive ye the Holy Spirit” was unique and incommunicable. The powers of healing were either not available for their own advantage or that of their friends, or were deliberately abdicated. Paul’s eye troubles, and his “thorn in the flesh”, could only have been removed by the Lord, who wished them in fact to remain. Paul’s sick friend was healed, not because Paul wrought a miracle on him, but because the Lord Himself had mercy on him.

*John 14:26*

*John 20:22-23*

*Galatians 4:13*

*2 Corinthians 12:7-10*

*Philippians 2:25-30*

Even when the Lord Jesus Himself was on earth, He made it plain that the miracles of healing were not ends in themselves. He neither healed all the sick in the land nor removed penury from their poor. One miracle, at least, was performed “that ye may know that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins”, and His signs in general were directed to establishing His person and office as Saviour, and as Son of God. They were outward signs of greater things which He could do, and the restricted and selective use of similar powers by His apostles and evangelists were to the same end. The signs had no saving power in themselves, and to dwell upon miraculous powers as though they represent now, or ever did, the essential function of the Gospel is gravely to misconceive the work of the Saviour. Even healed bodies die in the natural course, and the Lord had and has something far better to offer His disciples than a brief prolongation of their natural vigor during what must remain an essentially mortal life.

*Mark 2:10*

*John 20:30-31*

*Acts 3:6-26*

“We that are in this body do groan, being burdened”, just as they did when the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were at their height. We shall not be rid of the burden until it pleases the Lord, at His second coming, to “change the body of our humiliation and fashion it anew like unto His own glorious body.” Only then will His power be used to end all sorrow and sighing, and wipe away all tears.

*2 Corinthians 5:5*

*Romans 8:18-23*

*Revelation 7:17*

*Revelation 21:4*

*Isaiah 25:8*

## **THE PASSING OF THE MIRACULOUS GIFTS**

First as a matter of history, the period of abundant miracles was very limited. By the close of the first century the end had almost, if not quite, been reached. One factor in particular bears witness to this: the marked inferiority of the literature which follows the apostolic age to that written under the Spirit's guidance in the apostolic age, which makes up our New Testament. [3] We should hardly expect God to continue to men the gift of speaking in unknown tongues when He denied to them the gifts of supernatural knowledge and wisdom which, compared with their predecessors, they so evidently lacked.

Paul actually seems to write as though the miraculous powers may have been on the wane as early as his First Letter to the Corinthians. There were real gifts still, and men were exhorted to "covet earnestly the best gifts". There were valid tongues still, and they were not to forbid their use. But strange things were happening: unseemly competition between those claiming the gifts was evident; tongues were being spoken in circumstances inconsistent with their purpose, and calculated to bring ridicule on the faith. People produced prophecies or messages purporting to be from God, but themselves showed little of the wisdom one would have expected such endowments to bring. Mighty powers were being claimed by those who were children in understanding. Those who thought themselves "to be a prophet or spiritual"—that is, to have the corresponding gifts—were expected to acknowledge that Paul's instructions were "the commandments of the Lord", with the implication that if they failed this test they had been deceiving themselves.

*1 Corinthians 14:1-40*

Moreover, in encouraging them to concentrate on the development of the spirit of love among themselves, the apostle speaks of prophecy as being only for a time, tongues as about to be silenced, and supernatural knowledge as about to be withheld. At a time when faith and hope (both of which look to the future), and love, would be as abiding as before, the other gifts would have passed. This may not allow us to fix a date for their vanishing, but the fact that Paul presses the matter so strongly to the Corinthians suggests that they, who first received the message, were at least in some degree to feel the bereavement of their passing, and would need the assurance provided by their faith, hope, and love if they were to bear the loss without losing confidence in their calling.

*1 Corinthians 13:8-13*

A minor symptom pointing in the same direction may well be that whereas, earlier in the letter, Paul has recognized the existence of genuine women prophets ("any woman praying or prophesying", like Philip's daughters to which we have referred earlier), towards the end of the letter he lays down a rule of silence for female members in the assembly of the congregation, which suggests that the period when "your daughters shall prophesy" was already drawing to its close.

*1 Corinthians 14:34-35*

*1 Corinthians 11:4*

## THE CLAIM FOR MIRACULOUS GIFTS TODAY

In those early days there could never be any doubt that the gifts were there. They came spontaneously in response to the will of God. Men and women met together, perhaps for prayer, perhaps for witness; and, some few times, it pleased God to take these quiet, reverent assemblies and pour out His power upon them. "God bore witness" unmistakably, and men were reduced to trying to explain away phenomena so striking that they could not be denied. But in most cases now, when such gifts are claimed, the situation is otherwise. The time selected for "speaking with tongues" is an occasion for much enthusiastic hymn singing, and a thorough awakening of the emotions of those concerned. What is called a "baptism of the Holy Spirit" for initiates seems often to involve, under such influences, some sort of paroxysm which could not have been produced in a calmer atmosphere. It is difficult to imagine anything less like the apostolic situation, and the very idea of seeking to conjure up the gifts by creating such an atmosphere casts the gravest doubts on their genuineness. The gifts of tongues is the one on which such assemblies seem to concentrate, and of all the gifts of the Spirit this is the one which is the easiest to simulate, and the most difficult to put to objective test.

*Acts 2:1-4*

*Acts 4:31*

*Acts 6:6, 8*

*Acts 8:14*

*Acts 10:44*

*Acts 19:1*

*reference will be made below to the meaning of baptism of the Holy Spirit*

Besides this, Paul lays it down expressly that tongues are "a sign for the unbeliever". As at Jerusalem, Samaria, and Caesarea, the gift of this power to make oneself understood in the languages of the hearers (though not, in all probability, essential to the understanding of the message in view of the widespread knowledge of Greek as a common language) was evidence to those as yet unconvinced that God was with the preaching, to the silencing of the critic and the conviction of the sincere enquirer. But the majority of the tongues movements of today practise their arts in their own prayer meetings, apparently for the edification of their members, so laying themselves dangerously open to the charge against which Paul warned the Corinthians in their excesses: "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?"

*1 Corinthians 14:22-25*

What may be much more important than mistaken expectations of the bestowal of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, and self-deception in supposing that they have been achieved, is the fact that the one who looks for such things as a primary objective is looking for the wrong things, and in the *wrong* way. A man is no better for the ability to speak with tongues (or the power to use the rarer gifts either), even supposing the endowments to be real, and no worse for lacking the ability. The powers, when they were available, provided an opportunity, indeed, to witness to the reality of the Gospel message; but in New Testament times as much as now men who sought for salvation did not expect to find it because they were able to work miracles, or to lose it because they could not.

*1 Corinthians 12:12-26*

## **SALVATION AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD**

Salvation is a matter of repentance from dead works, faith towards God, and baptism, with a new life to follow in which we no longer live unto ourselves but unto God, and look to Him through Jesus Christ for the fulfillment of all our needs. What happened on the day of Pentecost is very much to the point, and must now be examined. When the Jews had been made to feel their guilt in putting to death the Son of God, they were “pricked in their hearts, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” This was a heart-cry of desperate men, conveying the idea, “Whatever can be done to win forgiveness for men as guilty as we are?” Peter’s answer must have been relevant to this urgent question:

“Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him.”

*Hebrews 6:1-2*

*Acts 2:37-39*

Note the following points: (1) Peter answers their cry by calling on them to depart from an old way of life, and embrace a new, which is the basic idea of repentance; (2) he couples their repentance with baptism, which is in Scripture the means whereby a repentant person seeks to bury his old life and rise to a new one; (3) on this condition he promises them remission of their sins, which amounts to assuring them that their troubled consciences can be healed, and themselves be reconciled to God; (4) he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit, to others also, but does not associate this promise with any reference to miraculous gifts; (5) they are not in fact said to receive any such miraculous gifts, which the apostles continue to exercise in their presence, but are said to continue “in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayer”, and to rejoice in their new calling in gladness and simplicity of heart.

*Acts 2:41-47*

It is thus probably that the “gift of the Holy Spirit” in this context does not refer to the miraculous powers with which (in the apostles’ case at least) it was accompanied, since these powers as such had no relevance to the needs of these sinful but penitent men. What they needed was forgiveness, restoration, and the intercession of the Son of God whom they had crucified; in short *salvation* in all its aspects was what they needed from the Spirit’s work. Peter speaks of the “promise” being to them and others, and although in Acts 1:4 “the promise of the Father” and in this chapter “the promise of the Holy Spirit” clearly relate it to the topic of this essay, the same word “promise” elsewhere in the Acts can relate to the fulfillment of the expectations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul does, in fact, connect the two together when he writes that Jesus died in order “that upon the Gentiles we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith”. All this is involved in Peter’s assurance that those who repent and are baptized will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 1:4*

*Acts 2:33*

*Galatians 3:13-14*

We should not expect such a promise as this to be restricted to any one race, or any one or two generations; and Peter's promise sounds absolutely universal: "The promise is to you (the Jews of that time), and to *your children* (their descendants if they showed the same repentance and faith), and to *all afar off*" (to Gentiles as well as to Jews). There is no suggestion of any exception.[\[4\]](#)

It is true that the other occasions when this word "gift" is used in the Acts are associated with evidence of miraculous powers. But this would be expected. The powers provided the evidence that the gift was real (just as the healing of the palsied man showed that his sins could be forgiven), and there could have been no such proof unless the signs had been present to confirm the Word. But this provides no justification for equating the gift with the signs, and when the same word is used in the Epistles it can refer to "the gift by grace" through Jesus for the salvation of sinners, "the gift of righteousness", and "the unspeakable gift" by means of which God is able to satisfy the believer's every spiritual need, while on the lips of the Lord Jesus the "gift of God" is associated with the giving of "living water".

*Romans 5:15, 17*

*Hebrews 6:4*

*2 Corinthians 9:15*

*Mark 2:10-11*

*Ephesians 3:7*

*John 4:10*

*Ephesians 4:7*

Whether this understanding of Peter's words to the Jews at Pentecost is, or is not, wholly correct, what we need to know is if the teaching here envisaged is borne out elsewhere in Scripture, by the Holy Spirit being spoken of as the means whereby this peace of heart, this fellowship with God, and this help towards salvation on which the power to work miracles has no bearing at all, may come about. When we examine the matter, the answer is plain. The Holy Spirit is frequently so spoken of, and in this sense it is not restricted to some brief interval in apostolic days. Thus the Lord promises that the Father will "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him", against the background of teaching the disciples to pray in terms of the Lord's Prayer. John reports that the Lord promised the Comforter forever, not only in the necessarily restricted sense of a revealer of miraculously provided knowledge to the apostles, but also as the means whereby "if a man love Me...my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him". Paul speaks of "the love of God shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us". The man who has died to his old life in baptism "walks not after the flesh but after the Spirit", for "the Spirit of God dwells" in him, even assisting in his prayers. Those who are heirs of the kingdom have "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit". The disciple's body is "a temple of the Holy Spirit". Those who wish to escape the ruin which the works of the flesh will bring must "walk by the Spirit, and they will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh", being "led by the Spirit" and bearing its fruit. Paul prays that his brethren may be "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man; that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith" – and this "unto all generations, for ever and ever". The true circumcision are those who "worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh".

*Luke 11:13, 1-10*

*1 Corinthians 6:19*

*John 14:23, 26*

*Galatians 5:16, 18*

*Romans 5:5*  
*Romans 8:4*  
*Romans 14:17*

*Ephesians 3:14-21*  
*Philippians 3:3*

The believer has renounced the way of the flesh and his own self-will. Henceforth it is possible for the Spirit of God to dwell in him. Having been taught of God by submission to the teaching of His Word, in which he continues to seek his daily guidance, he now rejoices in the Lord and in the power of his might. In Christ he is succoured against temptation, and in Him is able to do all things needful by the strength the Lord supplies in response to humble prayer. In his daily walk to the kingdom he is directed by God in the face of evil and doubt in the patient waiting for Christ. As the temple of the Lord in which the Spirit of God dwells, he waits for the redemption of the body by that same Spirit. It is in that Holy Spirit that he is taught to pray.

*John 6:45*  
*Romans 8:9, 11, 14, 23*  
*1 Corinthians 3:16*  
*Ephesians 6:10*

*Philippians 4:13*  
*2 Thessalonians 3:5*  
*Hebrews 2:18*

This is the merest selection from numerous passages which allow no possibility of escape (as if one could wish for escape!) from the relationship of the Holy Spirit of God to the sanctified life, throughout this dispensation.

But this relationship claims no private revelation for the believer. For his knowledge of the ways of God he remains entirely dependent on the Bible, the Word of God. It claims no control over the Spirit or power to use it in working miracles nor any gift to make him independent of the Scriptures believed and obeyed: it is needful to work out our own salvation while “God worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure”.

*Philippians 2:12-13*

We do not seek to understand, still less to explain, the manner in which God employs his Spirit for the benefit of His children. No one who has learned from the Word that “the Spirit (or wind) moveth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” would be so bold as to imagine that he can chart the course of the Spirit’s activities. We need simply to recognize that in every department of the believing life, from beginning to end, when we renounce all thought that we are sufficient unto ourselves, God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. God has made Himself known to us in His Word. God has sent His Son to die for our sins. God has raised Him from the dead, and after His pattern has received the baptized saints as risen to a new life. And now “it is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” It is no accident that this heavenly Mediator is in one passage called by the same name as the Spirit, “a Comforter (Advocate) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”. In fact, 1 John 1:1 (on the one hand) and John 14-16 (on the other), together link the work of intercession of the high Priest who is actually seated at the right hand of God with the consolation of the disciples who would enjoy the fellowship of Father and Son through the Spirit. The whole process of salvation and redemption in Christ is called in Luke “the consolation (*paraklesis*) of Israel”.

*Romans 8:31-39*

*John 14-16*

*John 3:3-8*  
*1 John 2:1*

*Luke 2:25*  
*cf. Isaiah 40:1-8*

It is the consistent teaching of Scripture that salvation is “not of works, lest any man should boast”. Even when the believer does good, if he does it in his own strength without reliance on God, it can be sin to him and lead to his undoing. The Son of God Himself confessed, “I can of mine own self do nothing”, and this is the pattern for His servants. A caution is needed, though. The necessary emphasis on the presence of God by His Spirit in the believer’s life may give encouragement to those who know their need; but it can also lead to near-despair on the part of those who know that this help is promised, but who within themselves feel but dimly the associated indwelling of Him who said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him.” It may help to recognize that even the early servants of God, in the days when the Spirit was manifested by its miracles too, could be cast down and desolate. Our own temperaments, the prevailing unbelief of our environment, the constant inability to pray as we ought, all conspire to cheat us of the confidence in God which can make sure that He is near to help. Paul knew it of his own generation. When he wrote the inspiring words to the Ephesians already referred to, praying “that they might be strengthened with all might by his Spirit in the inward man”, he prayed for something that the Ephesians found hard to apprehend. If it is hard for us too, that is no reason for despair. The natural man fights hard before he yields. The New Testament, by its constant exhortations to the believer to submit himself to the mighty hand of God, reveals how hard the conflict is before one can truly and consistently walk in the Spirit.

*Ephesians 2:9*

*John 5:19, 30*

*John 6:63*

*Revelation 3:20*

*Ephesians 3:14 –21*

The very exercise of faithful prayer is a testimony to the truth of what we have concluded. Unless “Give us this day our daily bread,” and “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil”, and many others, are so construed simply as psychological exercises, affecting the morale of the one who prays, but having no influence with Him that heareth prayer, to offer such prayers at all admits at least the possibility of an answer. When God grants such an answer, He may, of course, employ the angels, “those ministers of His that do His pleasure”, but if that answer involves a grant of strength or courage, or the supply of “the peace of God which passeth all understanding”, God must make these things available through the use of His Spirit.

*Matthew 6:6-13*

*Psalms 103:21*

*Hebrews 1:14*

*Philippians 4:4-7, 19*

The hymns we sing show plainly that the same truth has always been accepted, even when expressed in other terms. When we sing, “Abide with me”, calling upon God as the helper of the helpless, our Guide and Stay: or, “In death’s dark vale I fear no ill with Thee, dear Lord, beside me”; or, “O may the bounteous God through all our life be near”; or, “And freely with that blessed One Thou givest all”; or “Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite” —choosing words well known to all from a multitude of examples—are we not expressing confidence that God through His Son will be present to bless those true disciples who put their trust in Him? This confidence is soundly based on the Word of God itself, where we are as truly invited to seek the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, so understood, as we are to look for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God.

*2 Corinthians 13:14*

### **BIRTH OF THE SPIRIT**

Becoming a disciple of the Lord Jesus by baptism is spoken of as both burial to an old life and rising to a new, and the birth of a child of God. “As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God”. “Beloved, now are we the children of God.” The rebirth which gives rise to this sonship is variously described: by James it is, “Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures”; by Peter: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, of the word of God that liveth and abideth”; by Paul to Titus: “The washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”; and by the Lord Jesus to Nicodemus: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.” Because it is evidently true that our present pilgrimage falls far short of the glory that is to be revealed (“It does not yet appear what we shall be”), and because those who attain to the blessedness to come are described as “the children of God, being the children of the resurrection”, it may be tempting to take the Lord’s own promise and divide it into two parts: birth of water now in baptism, followed by birth of the Spirit in the future to become the “children of the resurrection”. But there is no need to do so, and it is not a probable interpretation of the verse. The Lord is referring to one birth, “of water and of Spirit”.<sup>[5]</sup> He proceeds at once to discuss what it is like to be born of the Spirit, seemingly making it plain that the water is the symbol and the Spirit’s motions the outcome. Such statements as, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” almost read like comments on this statement of the Lord Jesus. And the “washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” —a washing of rebirth and being made new by the Holy Spirit—is distinctly said to have been “shed forth on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” There is no need to look for some startling event, or unforgettable experience to signify this rebirth: spiritual babes, like natural ones, are born young, and full growth of the new creature in Christ Jesus is a long, and often chequered, process.

*John 1:12-13*

*1 John 3:1-3*

*James 1:18*

*1 Peter 1:22 - 2:2*

*Titus 3:5*

*John 3:1-8*

*Romans 8:14*

The acceptance of the baptism of water is the believer’s own part in offering his surrender as the ground for God’s operation. God’s own part cannot be timetabled: for the new life thenceforth is the expression of a battle between the surviving desires of the flesh and the

renewing influence of the Spirit: insofar as the former are dominant, so must the latter be impeded; insofar as the believer by prayer seems to “buffet his body and bring it into subjection”, by so much does the seed of God which abideth in him protect the believer from sin and bring his mind into conformity with Christ. There is nothing automatic about it. A person formally baptized may so resist the working of God within him that no true regeneration occurs; or he (and she) may so yield to the sweet influences which are learned from the Word and mediated by the risen Lord that the result is renewal in the spirit of the mind, with all the development of the stature of the fullness of Christ which follows from this. How much could in principle be achieved in the totally surrendered mind, with past sins abjured and forgiven and present and future ones contained by the yielding of the members of instruments of righteousness, is hinted at in the promise that the Lord “is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy through Jesus Christ our Lord”; and the corresponding one that with love made perfect one might even “have boldness in day of judgment”. Though such perfect submission is in practice achieved by few, it is nevertheless the goal to which the believer may strive without despairing.

*Galatians 5:16-25*

*1 Corinthians 9:27*

*1 John 3:9*

*1 John 5:18*

*Ephesians 4:23, 13*

*Jude 24-25, R.V.*

*1 John 4:17*

*James 1:13-14*

## **BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

In circles known as Pentecostal it is the expectation that believers will, or at least may, undergo a rapturous, ecstatic experience known as baptism of the Holy Spirit, which will establish to themselves and to others that they are the children of God. Indeed, this notion of spirit-baptism has sometimes been pressed so far that baptism in water has been rejected as superfluous. In Scriptural terms this is substantially an argument from silence, since explicit references to baptism of the Holy Spirit are uncommon, and are confined to the Gospels and the Acts.

*Matthew 3:11*

*Mark 1:8*

*Luke 3:16*

*John 1:26-34 (?)*

*Acts 1:5*

*Acts 11:16*

In these passages it is plain that John the Baptist is comparing his own limited mission with the greater work which the Lord Jesus will perform, and is looking forward to the outpouring of miraculous powers at Pentecost which will show beyond doubt that the crucified Christ is Lord indeed. In none of the cases is there any indication that an ecstatic experience will be the lot of every believer. We are simply told that the powers of the forerunner are minimal compared with those of the One whom he announces. The one will promise, and the other will realize, the activity of the Spirit of God among redeemed mankind. It is not a question of supernatural ecstatic experiences, but of the evidence that God is indeed working for the salvation of men. The fact that Peter could give evidence of this by the effusion at Pentecost and by what happened at Caesarea is in no way evidence that these miraculous manifestations must or should accompany the inauguration of the Christian life. Insofar, therefore, as the baptism of the Holy Spirit is distinct from being born of the Spirit, it is simply the supernatural witness at first granted to show that the claims of the Lord Jesus were warranted, and that His salvation was indeed available to all believing people who would become

baptized in water into the death and resurrection of their Lord. Moreover the “unquenchable fire” referred to by John must relate to the Lord’s final work of judgment.

*Acts 2:1-4*

*Acts 10:44-47*

*Romans 6:1-11*

When Paul writes that “in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit”, the baptism to which he refers is the common baptism in water, as a parallel passage shows, since “as many of us as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”. But this baptism could at that time lead to miraculous manifestations, as well as the enlargement of the quieter blessings of faith and wisdom and knowledge. In the latter sense it is the privilege of every believer yet to say “Lord, increase my faith!” Or, “Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief!”: and know that the prayer will not be unheard. Noisy and emotional eruptions claiming the influence of the Spirit are readily counterfeited, are at best unprofitable, and have no part in the beginning or the continuance of the life of the believer today.

*1 Corinthians 12:13, 4-11*

*Galatians 3:27-28*

*Mark 9:24*

*Luke 17:5*

## **THE GRACE GIVEN UNTO US**

None of us has anything which he did not receive. To begin with, God gives to all life and breath, and in Him we live and move and have our being. Then, fallen creatures as we now are, God gives the blessing of His Son to open out the way of life; and He gives His Word to tell of His purpose which culminates in that Son. To follow that, as our studies have now witnessed, He promises all needful help from above to answer the needs of His servants and strengthen them on the way of pilgrimage to the Kingdom of His glory. And though there were gifts of prophecy, healing, tongues, and the like, which for the present have ceased, [\[6\]](#) the people of God still stand in need of such services as ministry (caring for the wants of its members), *teaching* (by faithful men instructed in the Word), *exhortation* (encouragement and correction on the way of life); *giving* (in response to the gift of love which the Father has showered upon them); *rulership* (not with autocratic pretensions, but with a loving gentleness which seeks that all should be done decently and in order to the glory of God); and *mercy* (a tender forgiveness of those who have erred, and a wholehearted restoration of those who repent). In these and other respects we, individually and collectively, stand in sore need of all the help which God has promised. And in all these functions and others the apostle bids disciples offer their bodies a living sacrifice to God that, by His power and blessing, they may be both strengthened to do them and as the essential road to their own salvation, that they may be “transformed by the renewing of their mind, that they may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”, who through Christ their Lord, “is able to do

exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.”

*Romans 12:1-16*

*Ephesians 3:14-21*

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(1) The Society of Friends would claim this inner light for all believers; communities believing in the sacrament of Holy Orders, and others too, are likely to claim it in various degrees for their priests and ministers.

(2) It is extremely doubtful whether in practice, any Bible-believer does go as far as this. If answers to faithful prayer are conceded, this position breaks down.

(3) Compare the writings of any of the “apostolic fathers” with those of the apostles. A comparison, for example, of the Letters to the Corinthians of Paul and of Clemens Romanus will show how full of authority is the former, and how second-hand the latter.

(4) It has sometimes been suggested that "you and your children" means two generations only, so that, if the miraculous gifts were indeed the subject of Peter's promise, provision would have been made for their fading out, as they did, around the end of the first century. But many passages use the word tekina (children) in a much wider sense as descendants, members of a race, or members of a community. See Matthew 2:18; 3:9; 23:37; John 8:39; Acts 13:33; Romans 9:7; 1 John 3:1, amongst many others. "Those who come after you" is much the most likely meaning here.

(5) 5 cf. John Carter, *The Christadelphian*, 1955, p.450.

(6) The powers of God which the world has hitherto seen will, of course, be utterly dwarfed by the manifestations which will accompany the return of the Lord, and lead to the resurrection and glorification of His saints, when “they shall run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.” But our minds should be kept open to the possibility that God may yet reveal His will in supernatural ways before that further “great and dreadful day of the Lord” which is yet to come. The passage in Joel 2:28-32 which Peter quoted in Acts 2:17-21 may perhaps have a further fulfillment in association with the Lord’s coming, that when the Lord’s judgments are poured out on a rebellious world, those who are then punished will be without excuse (Revelation 10:5-11:14:6-7). But if and when such a thing comes to pass there will be no mistaking it.