

## **[The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit]**

There are several reasons why the study of the Holy Spirit is of special significance for us. I will offer two simple observations:

1. The study of the Holy Spirit is especially important because we live in the phase of redemptive history in which the Holy Spirit's work is featured more prominently than ever before in the history of God's people. This should tell us something. Since the time of Pentecost, the person and work of the Holy Spirit has become an undeniable feature of our understanding of who God is and what He does. We must give Him careful attention as God and as the third person of the Trinity.
2. The Holy Spirit makes our triune God an experiential, felt and personal reality in the life of the believer.

Often we think of God as transcendent and far off in heaven. And He is transcendent.

Christ helps to bridge this gap as he reveals God to us through his incarnation. But knowing God through Christ's incarnation is a reality now mediated through the Word, not by sight or sense.

But the Holy Spirit is presently active within the lives of believers; he indwells us. He is the particular person of the Trinity through whom the entire Godhead currently works in us.

God is transcendent. But he is simultaneously immanent, near to us, and in us, by His Holy Spirit.

## **[Difficulties in Understanding the Holy Spirit]**

As we begin, I must say that the study of the Holy Spirit is not without certain difficulties. There are several reasons for this.

Comparatively speaking, we have less explicit revelation in the Bible regarding the Holy Spirit especially as we consider what God has revealed to us concerning the Father and the Son. We can say with absolute confidence that this is by design.

An undeniable feature of the Holy Spirit's ministry can be described as declaring and glorifying not himself, but the Son.

Listen to the words of John 16:13–15 (ESV): When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

So we should not be surprised that the Spirit does **not** placard himself throughout the word He inspires. But he does shine a light on Christ, who in turn glorifies and reveals to us the Father.

Another impediment is the lack of concrete imagery concerning the Holy Spirit. The concept of God as the Father, is within our grasp. We are all familiar with the idea of father, even if our own fathers were absent or less than ideal examples.

The Son is not difficult to conceptualize, for he appeared to humanity in human form, as one who was heard, one who was seen, one who was touched, and was then proclaimed so that we might know him as well.

But the Spirit is intangible, difficult to visualize.

And if we are honest there is a sort of mystery surrounding the Holy Spirit.

Even Jesus describes the Spirit's work in a way that makes it hard to conceptualize, comparing Him to a sovereign wind-

John 3:6–8 (ESV): That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

This idea can be traced all the way back to Genesis 1.2 where "the Spirit of God", Hebrew-the ruach of God, "was hovering over the face of the waters." The Hebrew word for the Spirit of God here, brings with it overtones of wind and breath.

We see similar imagery emerge again in Acts 2 when on the day of Pentecost when the believers heard something like a mighty rushing wind as the disciples were subsequently filled with the Holy Spirit.

John Goldingay points out with regard to both Old and New Testaments, "Wind suggests something of the mysterious, invisible, dynamic power of God."

Nevertheless, some groups of professing Christians have capitalized on the elusive, mysterious nature of the Holy Spirit, speaking confidently where the Bible whispers, and formulating doctrines and practices that are not Scripturally warranted, engaging in measures of excess to put it kindly, all in the name of the Holy Spirit.

Because of this, the pendulum, for some, has swung in the opposite direction- and some pockets of Christianity see any sort of embrace of the Holy Spirit as a liability, and avoid speaking of Him altogether.

## **The Incomprehensible Yet Knowable Holy Spirit**

So what are we to do? How are we to think about these things? There is a sense in which we are forced to embrace mystery, understanding our limitations. We as humans are finite and fallen, God is infinite, transcendent and holy, and therefore incomprehensible.

However, in His grace toward us, God has purposed to reveal himself to us. Therefore we can know him, and know him truly. John Calvin held these important truths about God together, God as incomprehensible and yet knowable, when he famously used the idea of God's stooping down to accommodate his revelation to our particular needs as finite creatures.

The words of Dt 29.29 strike the balance we need: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

We need to approach the study of God, and therefore the study of the Holy Spirit with thankful humility. God has spoken. God has made himself known. We cannot know him inexhaustibly, but we can know Him truly.

## **The Nature of the Holy Spirit**

As we approached our study of Christ a couple of weeks back, we needed to understand the nature and person of Christ in order to understand his work.

Likewise, the "what" the Spirit does needs to be seen through the lens of the "who" the Spirit is. And so our first task is to look at the nature and person of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Deity of the Holy Spirit**

The Bible is clear concerning the deity of the Holy Spirit, just as the Bible is clear concerning the deity of the Father and the Son. Nevertheless, the deity of the Holy Spirit is not quite as front and center when we consider the persons of the Trinity.

The deity of the Father is unmistakable in the NT, the deity of the Son is affirmed and proven in the NT, and deity of the Holy Spirit is always present, unassuming.

Much of the time the Holy Spirit's deity confronts us through indirect statements. But the evidence, the scriptural data, is undeniable.

Consider Acts 5 where Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and misrepresented the nature of their offering, saying it was the total amount of what they had received.

In rebuking Ananias, Peter asks, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?” (v. 3). In the next verse he says, “You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”

It seems that in Peter’s mind “lying to the Holy Spirit” and “lying to God” were interchangeable expressions. So the Holy Spirit is equated to God.

As God the Spirit is involved with the creation, in both originating it and providentially keeping and directing it. In Genesis 1:2 we read that the Spirit of God was brooding over the face of the waters in this creative capacity. Job 26:13 notes that the heavens were made fair by the Spirit of God. The psalmist says, “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground” (Ps. 104:30).

The most abundant biblical testimony regarding the Holy Spirit’s divine work concerns his spiritual working upon or within humans, the new creation. Titus 3:5 tells us that “[God our Savior] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” This is the work of regeneration, which is God's work.

Stu has already addressed the work of the Spirit in empowering, purifying, revealing. These are distinctly divine activities as well.

In terms of the Spirit’s work of revealing, the giving of the Scriptures is another divine work of the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul writes, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

I’m convinced that this God-breathed reality is a reference to the creative, forming power of the Spirit.

Peter makes the Spirit’s role in giving us the Scriptures more explicit, emphasizing His powerful influence on the human agents involved.

“For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Some have observed that this idea of being carried along, or what we call inspiration, is also used in Acts 27 to describe a ship carried along by the wind. I do not want to press the analogy too far, but here again we see something of this idea of wind resurface.

One of the best-known evidences for the deity of the Spirit is seen in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19): “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”

The implication is that all three are divine and yet all three are distinct persons.

Peter holds the three persons of the Trinity together, noting their respective roles in the process of salvation: As he writes to the exiles of the dispersion- he reminds them that they are elect or chosen according to “the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood”- 1 Peter 1.2

There are many others as well.

We could examine this from the standpoint of the OT as well. For the sake of time I will limit us to just 1 example.

Psalms 139 is a magnificent statement of the inescapable presence of the LORD. It speaks of the omnipresence of God, which is one of God’s incommunicable attributes. In verse 7, the psalmist sings, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?”

Now if my wife were trying to have a phone conversation, and my daughters were intent on being a distraction, she might say that she is trying to get away from her children (temporarily of course), or she might say she is trying to escape her children’s presence (if she wanted to defy conventions of everyday speech). But semantically, she has said essentially the same thing.

And in my opinion, something similar is going on in Psalm 139. There is this parallelism that demonstrates that the Spirit is to be seen as equivalent to the very presence of the LORD Yahweh.

Now how this is possible would not come to light until God’s people were given greater light in the form of the Trinity in the New Testament. Nevertheless, I think this kind of dynamic is present in various places in the OT.

Seeing the Trinity, and seeing the deity of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, can be likened to being in a dimly lit room. You may be able to grope your way around the room, and make out certain features. But our senses are muted. But as we turn on the light given by the New Testament, we can then see clearly what was there all along. Nothing has changed in terms of the actual room and its layout.

In a similar way, God has always been Triune and functioned in the confines of His Triunity. What has changed, as we now read our OT, is the light now fills the room so that we may see certain Trinitarian features more clearly.

## The Person of the Holy Spirit

Let's talk about the personhood of the Spirit.

There is often misunderstanding on this point. At first glance this is somewhat understandable. The NT sometimes presents the Spirit using impersonal categories. The Spirit's activity is "a sound like a mighty rushing wind" and "tongues as of fire" (Acts 2:2–3). The Spirit fills the disciples like a liquid (e.g., v. 4) and is poured out by the risen Christ (v. 33). In the Pauline epistles the Spirit is likened to the first fruits of a harvest (Rom. 8:23), a seal (Eph. 1:13), and a guarantee or down payment on a block of land (v. 14).

So is the Holy Spirit of God personal or an impersonal force from God?"

Despite an array of biblical language used to describe the Spirit, there is ample biblical evidence for the Spirit's personhood. In fact, the personhood of the Spirit is a nonnegotiable Christian conviction.

The Spirit cannot be reduced to a mere creature or to an impersonal influence. The Holy Spirit is a person, not an impersonal force. The Bible makes that clear in several ways.

Consider Acts 13:2- While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

This text shows us the Holy Spirit speaking from a "first-person perspective," which is only explainable if the Spirit were a person. If the Spirit were a mere force or simply the energy of God in action, these words would not make sense.

In John's gospel, in the context of the upper room discourse, Jesus shared with his disciples that his leaving to return to the Father would be to their advantage because, in his leaving, the Spirit would come as the "Comforter" or "Helper" (paraklētos).

John 14:16–17 (ESV): 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 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.

The phrase rendered "another Helper" brings with it the idea of "another of the same kind" as Jesus. Just as Christ possessed personhood and relational quality, so does the Holy Spirit.

Remember that the disciples have just been told that Christ is going away. And this would have prompted a whole array of unsettled thoughts, emotions and concerns that center on losing access to Christ as a person who has been with them, along side them, with them.

John 14: 1-5: "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a

place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”

Thomas’s words are the words of a heart that is troubled- the words of someone who is trying to come to terms with the idea of losing access to a person who is very precious to him. These are the words of losing a relationship. This is the only way they knew Christ- as a person intimately involved in their lives and relational, as one who has been with them.

Therefore, Christ promises to ask the Father, and he will give another Helper, to be with you forever. Therefore, the meaning invested in the notion of paraclete as Helper and Comforter falls short if we lose sight that what Christ is promising is a relational person.

With that reality established, the disciples are now prepared to see the Spirit’s work for what they truly are- those of a person. He will teach the disciples (14 v. 26). He will bear witness to Christ, (15 v. 26). He will convict the world, guide disciples into all the truth, hear and speak, glorify and declare (16:8–15).

According to the apostle Paul the Holy Spirit may be grieved (Eph. 4:30). While it is possible to resist a mere force, one cannot grieve something impersonal.

Most notably, there is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:31; Mark 3:29). This sin, which Jesus suggests is more serious than blasphemy against the Son, surely cannot be committed against something impersonal. On that same note, if it carries with it, at least on the surface, a more serious nature than blasphemy against the Son, what does this tell us about the Spirit’s divinity? The divinity of the Son is incontrovertible. What do Christ’s words imply about the Spirit’s true nature?

The overwhelming teaching of the NT is that the Spirit possesses intelligence, will and emotions, all dynamics fundamental to personhood.

All of the foregoing considerations lead to one conclusion. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a force, and that person is God, just as fully and in the same way as are the Father and the Son.

### **Implications of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**

A correct understanding of who and what the Holy Spirit is carries certain implications:

1. The Holy Spirit is a person, not a vague force. Thus, he is someone with whom we can have a communion with.
2. The Holy Spirit, being fully divine, is to be accorded the same honor and respect that we give to the Father and the Son. It is appropriate to worship him as we do them. He should not be

thought of as in any sense inferior in essence to them. We will see a little later how the Spirit elicits our worshipful response.

3. The Holy Spirit operates in one accord, with one will, so to speak, with the Father and the Son. His work is the expression and execution of what the three of them have planned together. There is no tension among their persons and activities.

4. God is never far off. This is preeminently true for the believer. In the Holy Spirit, the Triune God comes close, so close as to actually enter into each believer and indwell them.

### **The Work of The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament**

Let's talk about the work of the Holy Spirit-

For the sake of time, I must quickly survey the work of the Holy Spirit in the OT- nevertheless, attention to the Spirit's work in the Old Testament is immensely profitable and worth careful attention.

I will use a Bavinck quote referencing the diverse work of the Spirit in the OT to speed us along-

"The spirit of God is the principle of all life and well-being, of all the gifts and powers in the sphere of revelation; of courage (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 1 Sam. 11:6), of physical strength (Judges 14:6; 15:14), of artistic skill (Exod. 28:3; 31:31-35; 1 Chron. 28:12-19), of the ability to govern (Num. 11:17, 25; 1 Sam. 16:13), of intellect and wisdom (Job 32:8; Isa. 11:2), of holiness and renewal (Ps. 51:11-12; Isa. 63:10; cf. Gen. 6:3; Neh. 9:20; 1 Sam. 10:6,9), and of prophecy and prediction (Num. 11:25, 29; 24:2-3; Micah 3:8; etc.). The Spirit will rest in an unusual measure upon the Messiah (Isa. 11:2; 42:1; 61:1), but afterward be poured out upon all flesh (Joel 2:28-29; Isa. 32:1,5; 44:3; Ezek. 36:26-27; 39:29; Zech. 12:10) and give to all a new heart and a new spirit."

Suffice to say, the works of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament are as diverse and wonderful as the works of Yahweh himself. Because the Spirit is God.

Perhaps this is helpful- I often find that the opening verses of Genesis contain the seed form for almost all of our essential theology as it comes into full bloom in the New Testament. The creative and providential rule and reign of God the Father, the promise of the Seed and Savior in Genesis 3.15, and Holy Spirit in Genesis 1.2.



And it is in Genesis 1.2 where we see the Holy Spirit superintending creation, hovering over the surface of the deep; and to use the words of Sinclair Ferguson, doing this “to order and complete what has been planned in the mind of God”.

I like to think of the Spirit's work as a forming, and filling, and temple-building work- the work of creating a suitable habitation for the very presence of God himself. After all, the watery chaos was formed and then filled, becoming this inhabitable earth-temple and garden holy of holies.

And I think similar dynamics can be traced out through OT, with its tabernacle and temple, the Spirit coming upon craftsmen who were thereby endowed to construct the Tabernacle.

Tracing this theme into the NT, we see the Spirit of God as instrumental in the creation of Christ's incarnate body “The Holy Spirit will come upon Mary, and the power of the Most High will overshadowed Mary”. Later Christ, refers to himself as a temple- “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up”.

Moving forward we see the Spirit forming and filling the temple that is Christ's church, making it a suitable habitation for the very presence of God as well. I digress.

### **The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus**

The incarnate Christ's ministry cannot be understood apart from the Spirit's empowering. The Spirit was integrally involved in Christ's conception, baptism, temptations, preaching, mighty works, death, and resurrection. These Christological moments are Spiritual ones too. And when I say Spiritual, I mean that the text draws particular attention to the presence and work of the Spirit in Christ's life.

So very often these days the Spirit is subordinated to Jesus in our thinking. But pre-Pentecost, the incarnate Son very much experienced the empowerment of the Spirit. Abraham Kuyper makes the point with regard to Jesus' consecration to the office of mediator:

This ought to be carefully noticed, especially since the Church has never sufficiently confessed the influence of the Holy Spirit exerted on the work of Christ. Yet the Scripture teaches us again and again that Christ performed His mediatorial work controlled and impelled by the Holy Spirit.

Maybe he overstated his case but his point is well taken. In Jesus's life we find a pervasive and powerful presence and activity of the Spirit.

Not only his incarnation, baptism, temptations, teaching and miracles, but Jesus's whole life was “in the Holy Spirit.”

When the seventy returned from their mission and reported that even the demons were subject to them in Jesus's name (Luke 10:17), Jesus was "full of joy through the Holy Spirit" (v. 21). Even his emotions were "in the Holy Spirit." This is a description of someone completely filled with the Spirit.

John 3:34 sums it up well and leaves us with mystery- "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure."

### **But Is the Spirit-directed humanity of Christ the paradigm for us all?**

A word of caution. Christ is a unique situation. There are no NT texts that draw the reader's attention to Jesus' experience of the Spirit as prototypical or paradigmatic. Nowhere do we see a pattern for believers being driven into a wilderness by the Spirit for the purposes of testing and temptation that would otherwise crush us. We are told to flee temptation.

So just be cautious. Christ is our example, especially so in the realm of selfless sacrificial love, service, holiness, devotion, and making the good confession/faithful suffering. Listen closely to all the Scripture and do not create paradigms where there are none.

But Christ's experience of the Spirit does tell us this truth- if Christ did his mighty works anointed by and filled with and possessing the Spirit without measure, in his pristine incarnated condition, how much more should we feel our need for the empowering of the Spirit?

## **The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian**

### **The Beginning of the Christian Life**

In Jesus's teaching we find an especially strong emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in initiating persons into the Christian life. Jesus taught that the Spirit's activity is essential in both conversion, and regeneration. We may touch on this next class so I will limit my comments.

Regeneration is the miraculous transformation of the individual. Jesus made very clear to Nicodemus that regeneration is a work of the Spirit: "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.... No one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" (John 3:3, 5-6).

Clearly, regeneration is a supernatural occurrence, and the Holy Spirit is the agent who produces it. The flesh, that is human effort, is not capable of effecting this transformation.

Titus 3:5 tells us that "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit".

## The Continuation of the Christian Life

The work of the Spirit is not completed when one becomes a believer; on the contrary, it is just beginning. He performs several other roles in the ongoing Christian life.

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One of the Spirit's other roles is empowering. Christ's disciples were probably amazed when he said, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

It probably seemed incredible to the disciples, well aware of their own weaknesses and limitations, to be told that they would do greater works than the Master himself had done.

Yet Peter preached on Pentecost Sunday and three thousand believed. Jesus himself never had that type of response, as far as we know.

The key to the disciples' success was not in their inherent abilities and strengths, however.

Jesus had told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5), who would give them the power that he had promised, the ability to do the things that he had predicted: "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" (v. 8).

They served in the strength that God supplies.

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Another element of Jesus's promise was that the Holy Spirit would indwell and illuminate the believer:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper to help you and be with you forever—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" (John 14:16–17).

The Spirit has an evident teaching role. Earlier in the same discourse we read that he would bring to mind and clarify for His disciples the words Jesus had already given to them:

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

Now is not time to tease out what was specific to the disciples and what is applicable to all subsequent believers, but the Spirit's ministry of illumination does have a bearing on our lives, helping believers today to understand Scripture.

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Another point of particular interest is the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit.

We are familiar with Jesus's intercession, as the High Priest, on our behalf. Paul also speaks of a similar intercessory prayer by the Holy Spirit: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God" (Rom. 8:26–27). Thus believers have the assurance that when they do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes for them according to God's will.

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The Holy Spirit also works sanctification in the life of the believer. By sanctification I mean the progressive, continued transformation of the moral and spiritual character so that the believer's life actually comes into greater conformity to holiness and righteousness.

In Romans 8, Paul speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit. Believers are not walk and live according to the flesh, their old nature, but according to the Spirit (v. 4), having their minds set on the things of the Spirit (v. 5). Christians are said to be, not in the flesh, but in the Spirit (v. 9), and the Spirit dwells in them, a thought that Paul repeats 3 times (vv. 9, 11 twice).

v.11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

As the Spirit indwells believers, he guides and leads them, and the deeds of the flesh are, accordingly, put to death (v. 13).

All those who are "led by the Spirit of God are the children of God" (v. 14). The Spirit is now at work giving them life, witnessing that they are children rather than slaves, and thus supplying clear evidence that they are truly in Christ (vv. 15–17).

Paul in Galatians 5 contrasts life in the Spirit with life in the flesh. He instructs his readers to walk by the Spirit, keeping in step with the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, sowing to the Spirit, rather than gratifying the desires of the flesh (v. 16).

As they walk, keep in step, and sow to Spirit, the Spirit will produce in them a set of qualities collectively referred to as the "fruit of the Spirit" (v. 22). Paul lists nine of these qualities: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (vv. 22–23). They are opposed to the works of the flesh—a list of sins in verses 19–21.

The fruit of the Spirit is a supernatural work. But clearly there is a self-effort dynamic at play as we strive toward this goal. And a life led by the Spirit doesn't mean the Christian will not feel and experience constraints.

Galatians 5.17- For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

But Spirit-prompted constraint and Spirit-driven mortification of the deeds of the flesh, are not to be confused with a slavish coercion or mere compliance with external regulations. For Paul says that if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

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### **On the Gifts of the Spirit**

The Spirit also bestows certain special gifts on believers within the body of Christ. In Paul's writings there are three different lists of such gifts; there is also a brief summarizing structure concerning gifts in 1 Peter 4:11, where Peter writes:

11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Therefore the spiritual gifts can be grouped rather nicely into categories of speaking and serving.

#### *A few words about the gifts of the Spirit:*

The gifts of the Spirit are gifts of grace granted by the Holy Spirit to individual Christians. The risen Christ provides for his body's health. Gifts are given to the church to that end.

1. The gifts are bestowed on the body (the church) for the edification of the body (the church), to build up the church, not merely for individual enjoyment or individual enrichment of those who possess them (12:7; 14:5, 12). According to the Paul, these gifts are not given for personal and individual self promotion.
2. No one person has all the gifts (12:14–21), nor is any one of the gifts bestowed on all persons (12:28–30). Therefore, the individual members of the church need each other and there is no getting around that.
3. Although not equally conspicuous, all gifts are important (12:22–26). However, although all gifts matter, not all the gifts have the same value for edifying the church (12:22–23).

4. The Holy Spirit apportions the various gifts to whom and as he wills (12:11). The Spirit is the great distributor of these gifts. The sovereignty of the Spirit in this task is accented in 1 Corinthians 12:11 and in Hebrews 2.4.

5 We see clearly in 1 Corinthians 13, which is placed in the middle of the discussion of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12–14) that gifts are worthless without love. The most important measure of our spirituality is not our gifts but our godliness issuing forth in love.

### **On the difference between OT work of the Spirit and NT work of the Spirit**

To tease this out we need to better appreciate the overarching significance of Pentecost-

Although the Spirit was quite active during the time of the old covenant, Pentecost marks the first appearance of the fullness of the Spirit to permanently indwell all of God's people individually.

Pentecost essentially represents the fulfillment of three prophetic utterances.

First, the prophecy of Joel 2:28–29 (in accordance with the terms of the New Covenant);

“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. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

There is a universality to the pouring out of the Spirit on the entirety of God's people, that represents a distinction when we consider the Old Covenant people of God. Some were clearly imbued and anointed by God's Spirit, but not in the democratized way anticipated by Joel's prophecy and seen in the church.

Second, the prophecy of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11.

“I baptize you with water for 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.

John, is pointing us forward to Christ's work of pouring out the Spirit. What is remarkable is that John the Baptist, doesn't lay claim to this baptism as something he has already experienced in its essence, even though among those born of women none is greater than John. This Baptism is somehow the exclusive prerogative of Christ to bestow.

And third is the prophetic utterance of Jesus himself in John 14–16 concerning the another “Comforter/Helper.” like Jesus. This gift of the Spirit as this paraclete/Comforter was itself the work of the risen Christ and would not take place before then.

*What do we make of these things then?*

The Christian church has received the Spirit in a clearly intensified and democratized fashion. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the believers on the Day of Pentecost certainly indicates a profound new phase in how the Holy Spirit works. It was the fulfillment of OT prophecy, not a reality that already existed.

The Spirit is now personally in us in a fullness of power that presumably was not the same in the Old Testament. Furthermore, it is something that is given to all God's people. Through the baptism with the Spirit all believers are incorporated into the body of Christ.

A crucial aspect of the Spirit's work centers on the receiving the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father. This type of address was not characteristic of the Old Covenant.

The new covenant is marked by a more direct and immediate relationship to God, and inward awareness of God's fatherhood and saving commitment to us.

Roman 8.15- For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Galatians 4.5-And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Part of the joy of such direct knowledge of God is that we now instinctively apprehend that God is our heavenly Father and we are safe in the saving bonds of a family relationship that cannot be broken.

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With this being said, we can say that the Old Testament believers certainly knew the presence of the Spirit, even if it was apparently not with the same inner fullness that would be the case after Pentecost. After his great sins, David prayed, 'Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me' (Ps. 51:11).

Moreover, OT believers were saved. This is the undeniable testimony of the New Testament. Paul tells us that Abraham was justified by faith (Rom. 4:1–12). Hebrews can appeal to a parade of OT figures starting with Abel, focusing supremely on Abraham to illustrate the life of faith (Hebrews 11). Christians of all ages are to draw instruction from such exemplars. So they were saved and they were saved by faith, taking God at His word.

**But were OT believers regenerated by the Holy Spirit? And were they indwelt by the Spirit?**

On this question good theologians disagree.

Some maintain that saving belief is always a product of the Holy Spirit's regenerative work. Reformed theologian John Murray states, "... what is patent in the New is latent in the Old. The need is one, the covenant of grace and the way of salvation is one, the faith that saves is one."

According to this view, the OT metaphor for new birth is the circumcision of the heart. The key text supporting this is in the book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 10:16 and 30:6).

Dt. 10:15-16: Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

Dt. 30: 5-6: And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

In view of these texts what God was always pressing for was genuine obedience from the heart, not merely a coerced, outward conformity to the commandments of God. This obviously requires a profound inner transforming work. And this inner transforming work God graciously worked in those who exercised faith, taking him at his word, and bearing the fruit of obedience. The Spirit, unmentioned but assumed, is the agent of this work in the OT.

Some go as far as maintaining that OT saints were not only regenerated by the Spirit, they were also indwelt by the Spirit (e.g., Thomas Goodwin, John Owen, B. B. Warfield, and Sinclair Ferguson).

Other theologians suggest that the Spirit was certainly the key to Abraham's faith but that it is going beyond the evidence to say that he was regenerated by the Spirit. Regeneration according to this view is an NT phenomenon (e.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer, D. A. Carson, and Michael Green).

What is clear is that NT believers are indwelt permanently by the Spirit. However, it is not clear that OT believers were similarly indwelt by the Spirit in any permanent way. There was the influence of the Spirit, the anointing in some cases, a filling perhaps, but not an indwelling on par with what we see in the New Covenant. This permanent indwelling seems to be an exclusive new covenant blessing that Jesus promised his disciples in his Upper Room Discourse as found in John's gospel.



My own view is that OT believers were regenerated by the Spirit, even though, as Graeme Goldsworthy points out, "... there is no word for regeneration in the OT."

Why do I think that?

Jesus expected Nicodemus as a teacher of Israel to understand the teaching about the new birth and the Spirit's role in it (John 3:10). The implication is that His OT should have been sufficient to point him to this reality in the lives of God's people. Although the exact expression "born again" or "born from above" or "regeneration" may not have appeared in the Hebrew Scriptures, I think the concept is there epitomized by the Deuteronomy texts we read. With the OT language of "circumcised hearts," we are using the same conceptual ideas as the NT ideas of regeneration.

However, our Lord makes it plain that the indwelling of the Spirit was contingent upon his own return to the Father (John 16:7).

This is a permanent blessing for all God's new covenant people, not a temporary filling or a temporary coming of the Spirit upon a few as I think may be the case for OT believers. If I am thinking about this correctly, that would mean that the OT saints were regenerated but not permanently indwelt by the Spirit.

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**This brings me to a crucial point. And here I want us to gain a greater insight into the preciousness of the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

Here I rest heavily on the insights of systematic theologian Douglas Kelly-

After the resurrection, the risen Christ possessed a spiritual body- meaning that it was not subject to laws of space and time, as His physical body had been. The various resurrection accounts show him passing through closed doors and stone walls. He could be unrecognizable or make himself known. Apparently, he could almost materialize and be in the presence of a group. In his ascension, he taken up in a cloud of glory.

And at the same time this spiritual body was real. It could be touched by Thomas. In it he could prepare breakfast by the seaside.

His body had been so transformed, that he could be both physical yet not limited by the laws of physics.

And in His resurrection, there is such a close relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit, that Paul could say that "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

From this risen Lord, this new life of the eternal Spirit is emitted, or proceeds, at Christ's will, we see this in John 20.22.

"And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

And we see this bestowal in a greater way at Pentecost.

Kelly writes: "After His resurrection, His new creational body, fully-spiritualized, ascends to the glory of the Father, and can then be poured into the inner beings of His followers (John 7:37-39), just as it is 'breathed upon them' through the Spirit (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:1-4).

And he points out that- The energy and vigor of the ascended Jesus are poured into us by the conveying work of the Holy Spirit as Christ spiritually gives to us from His physical, glorified body.

The presence of the risen Lord is now filling and empowering his church to the end of the age, in a manner never seen before, to win the nations. And this divine presence is in the Holy Spirit who has been poured out on God's people, never to depart.

This gets at the heart of what baptism of the Holy Spirit is- it is the Holy Spirit bringing us into direct union with the body of the risen Christ. Every person who is saved receives it. It is basic and fundamental. Without it, one is not in union with Christ and his saving work. Without it, one is not truly joined to the body of Christ, that is the church. It is not, in its essence, a second extraordinary event. It is a fundamental glorious event that Christ gives to all believers when he saves them.

### 1 Corinthians 12.13

13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

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### ***The Self-Effacing Work of the Spirit***

We have seen then that the Holy Spirit focuses not on himself but supremely on the Son.

John 16: 13-15:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that

are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

J. I. Packer captures this other-person focus by describing the Spirit's ministry as a floodlight ministry. He suggests,

"It is as if the Spirit stands behind us, throwing light over on Jesus, who stands facing us. The Spirit's message to us is never, "Look at me; listen to me; come to me; get to know me," but always, "Look at him and see him, and see his glory; get to know him, and hear his word; go to him, and have life; get to know him, and taste his gift of joy and peace."

That is so well said.

A floodlight illuminates something other than itself. You do not go to the theater to stare at the spotlight—to alter the image slightly—but to watch the performance that the spotlight illuminates.

And when we contemplate this divine selflessness manifested by the Spirit, our hearts are drawn out to Him in worship as we worship the Christ he magnifies. The magnificence of the Spirit lies in His self-effacement or divine-selflessness.

Douglas Kelly writes: "It is a marvel: the Spirit inspires the testimony to Jesus of prophets and apostles, and yet it is only in Jesus that we really meet the Spirit in His personal fulness! Instead of directly seeing Him, we see Jesus, and that is what the blessed Spirit wants.