

Chapter 9 – The Work of the Holy Spirit

Having earlier discussed the Personhood and Deity of the Holy Spirit (Chapter 7), we can move on to his work. The former deals with who the Spirit is; the subject matter of this chapter is a brief overview of what the Spirit did and does according to Scripture.

The Holy Spirit and the Old Testament

The Holy Spirit's activity and ministry in the Old Testament differs from that in the New Testament in several ways. The Holy Spirit participated in the act of creation (Gen 1:2; Psa. 104:30; Job 26:13; 27:3; 33:4).¹ He inspired writers to produce the books we call the Old Testament (2 Pet 1:20-21; cf. Acts 1:16-17; Matt 22:43-44, citing Psalm 110). There is also some relationship between human creations extending from Adam and Eve and the Spirit. In Gen 2:7 it appears that the Spirit is the point of origin for human animation and life. In Job 27:3 an equation between the animating spirit within human beings and the Spirit of God (cf. Job 33:4). In Nu 16:22 God is "the God of the spirits of all flesh."

With respect to individual people, the Spirit of God in the Old Testament came and went. The Spirit could be distributed by God upon people and then withdrawn (Num 11:24-25; Deut 34:9). His presence was not associated with anything approximating permanent indwelling of believers, but rather empowerment for specific tasks of service to God. Examples are plentiful. Prophets recognized that the Spirit entered them or "came upon" them to enable them to preach (Ezek 2:2; cf. 8:3; 11:1, 24). When the carpenter/craftsman Bezalel was chosen to construct the Tabernacle and its furnishings, we read the following about the Spirit's role. God tells Moses "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft." (Exod 31:3-5). During the period of the judges, when God periodically chose a military deliverer for his people upon their repentance from idolatry, the Spirit of God would "come upon" or "rush upon" or "stir up" the appointed judge to empower them for service (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:7, 19; 15:14). The Spirit also came upon anointed kings like Saul and David (1 Sam 10:6, 19; 11:6; 16:13-14).² The presence of the Spirit was also prophesied for the messiah (Isa 11:2; 61:1; cf. Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22).

In addition to these dramatic examples, the Spirit of God also seems to have empowered or worked through individuals in broad ways, such as administrative skills (Gen 41:38)³ using some people to teach others (Neh 9:20). In this latter reference (cf. also Psa 143:10), the Spirit is called "good." This is likely the case in at least one regard to the Spirit's role in teaching humans to do God's will (Psa 143:10) and to fear the Lord (Isa 11:2-5).

¹ The Hebrew word translated "spirit" in some English Bibles in Gen 1:2 (*ruach*) can also be translated "wind," making the reference somewhat ambiguous.

² The presence of the Spirit to enable the king to fulfill his duties is the context for Psalm 51. David is not afraid of losing salvation due to his sin but losing the kingship in the wake of his sin with Bathsheba. He is afraid, as happened to Saul before him, that the Spirit would be removed and given to another. The association of the Spirit with ongoing sanctification (obedience) is a New Testament concept.

³ The context for pharaoh's statement about Joseph is the latter's proposal for conserving food for the seven years of famine.

The Old Testament envisions a time when the Spirit of God would generally inhabit all believers, marking them as believers and empowering them in their own lives. This set of circumstances is associated with the age to come, the messianic age from the perspective of Old Testament prophets—the present age to us since the coming of the Son as messiah in Jesus Christ. Specifically, passages such as Jer 31:31-33 (cf. Ezek 36:22-38) describe what Scripture calls the New Covenant, a messianic age in which the presence and activity of the Spirit is known throughout the entire family of God, not just those selected for important tasks or leadership. The Spirit “rests upon” the messianic branch of Jesse in Isa 11:1-5, endowing him with various gifts useful for carrying out his ministry of inaugurating a kingdom of righteousness and peace. The same input of the Spirit is true in Isa 42 and 61, where the Spirit empowers messiah to bring “justice to the Gentiles.”

The Holy Spirit and the Gospels

The revelation of the Spirit in the New Testament begins in the synoptic gospels with the conception of the Son as Jesus of Nazareth in the virgin birth (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35). The next major role of the Spirit with respect to Jesus is the scene of his baptism, where the Spirit descends on Jesus (Matt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:31-32). The baptism is best understood as the anointing of Jesus for his royal messianic ministry (Luke 4:1, 14, 18; Acts 10:38). The anointing for messiahship by the Spirit marked and led to his endurance of the subsequent temptation in the wilderness and the release of his own messianic power in teaching, casting out demons, healing the sick, etc. This is part of the mystery of the two natures of Christ (Chapter 8). Jesus needed the Spirit’s empowerment and presence because his human nature was real. The Spirit’s presence would arrest and transcend human impulse (e.g., fear) that would become apparent given the sufferings and death faced by Jesus. The miracles of Jesus associated with his casting out demons and inaugurating the kingdom of God came about via the Holy Spirit. Indeed, their denial was construed as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (In Matt 12:31; Mark 3:28ff.; Lk 12:10ff.).

That the inauguration of the kingdom and the nature of the gospel itself are mediated through the coming of the Spirit in the messianic age is indicated by passages like John 3, where believers must experience the new birth (John 3:3), defined in one place as being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). John’s controversial description of Jesus as the bread of life and spiritual food has the Spirit at its center. In John 6:63 Jesus teaches that it is the Spirit who gives life, while he is the Bread of life (John 6:33-35). This foreshadows the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost:

“ . . . If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ ” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39)

In John 14-17, the so-called Farewell Discourse of Jesus, the coming/sending of the Spirit was prophesied. Jesus described the Spirit as the Comforter (Greek: *paraklētos*). Disciples know the Comforter, for he abides in them (John 15). In John 14:23 the Father and Son promise to abide in believers, and in 14:26 the promise of the coming/sending of the Spirit is reiterated. Mullins summarizes the Gospel of John’s teaching on these items:

The Father is to send the Spirit in the name of Christ, and He is to teach the disciples all things, quickening also their memories. In the NT generally, and esp. in John’s and Paul’s writings, there

is no sense of conflict between Father, Son and Spirit in their work in the Christian. All proceeds from the Father, through the Son, and is accomplished in the Christian by the Holy Spirit. As will appear, Christ in the believer is represented as being practically all that the Spirit does without identifying Christ with the Spirit. So far there are several notes suggesting the personality of the Holy Spirit. The designation “another Comforter,” taken in connection with the description of his work, is one. The fact that He is sent or given is another. And another is seen in the specific work which the Spirit is to do. Another is the masculine pronoun employed here (*ekeínos*; [“he/that one”]). In ver 26 the function of the Spirit is indicated. He is to bring to “remembrance all that I said unto you.” In 15:26 this is made even more comprehensive: “He shall bear witness of me,” and yet more emphatically in 16:14, “He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you.” The sphere of the Spirit’s activity is the heart of the individual believer and of the church. His chief function is to illumine the teaching and glorify the person of Jesus. . . . In 16:7–15 we have a very important passage. Jesus declares to the anxious disciples that it is expedient for Him to go away, because otherwise the Spirit will not come. “He, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (16:8). The term [translated] “convict” (*elégksei*) involves a cognitive along with a moral process. The Spirit who deals in truth, and makes His appeal through the truth, shall convict, shall bring the mind on which He is working into a sense of self-condemnation on account of sin. . . . We may sum up the teachings as to the Spirit in these four chapters as follows: He is the Spirit of truth; He guides into all truth; He brings to memory Christ’s teachings; He shows things to come; He glorifies Christ; He speaks not of Himself but of Christ; He, like believers, bears witness to Christ; He enables Christians to do greater works than those of Christ; He convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; He comes because Christ goes away; He is “another Comforter”; He is to abide with disciples forever.⁴

The Holy Spirit and the Book of Acts

Transitioning from the gospels, the work of the Spirit in the book of Acts revolved primarily around the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost that endows followers of Jesus with power, wisdom, and various giftings to spread the gospel, start and maintain churches, and otherwise do the work of the messianic kingdom. The Spirit also guided the early believers in moral decision making and aspects of the early church’s spiritual formation (e.g., Acts 5:3, 9; 7:51; 8:18 f; 13:9; 15:28). Mullins once again summarizes:

The great event is of course the outpouring or baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost followed by the completion of the baptism in the Holy Spirit by the baptism of the household of Cornelius (2:1 ff; 10:17–48). Speaking with tongues, and other striking manifestations attended this baptism, as also witnessing to the gospel with power by the apostles. . . . This outpouring is declared to be in fulfilment of OT prophecy, and the assertion is also made that it is the gift of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ (2:17, 33). Following this baptism of the Holy Spirit the disciples are endowed with miraculous power for their work. Miracles are wrought (Acts 2:43 ff), and all necessary gifts of wisdom and Divine guidance are bestowed. A frequent form of expression describing the actors in the history is, “filled with the Holy Spirit.” It is applied to Peter (Acts 4:8);

⁴ E. Y. Mullins, “Holy Spirit,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915) 1413-1414.

to disciples (Acts 4:31); to the seven deacons (Acts 6:3); to Stephen (Acts 6:5; 7:55); to Saul who becomes Paul (13:9).⁵

The Holy Spirit and the Epistles

In this present age of Christ's ministry to us, the Spirit is poured out to all believers. The presence of the Spirit is broadly associated with sanctification (i.e., our obedience discipleship to the Lord) and the equipping of the Church through spiritual gifts (called in Greek *charismata*). One of the prophecies about the new covenant ministry of the discipleship element of the Spirit makes this quite clear:

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (ESV)

Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God's Son (Gal 4:6) and the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9). It is into the Son's image that all believers are being conformed through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). The Christian life and the operation of the Spirit therein is so tightly identified that Paul refers to it as "the law of the Spirit of life" that has set the believer free "in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2). To not have the Spirit of God dwelling within is tantamount to not belonging to Christ (Rom 8:9).⁶ Consider how Paul describes the believer in the purpose of the Spirit's presence in the life of the believer in Rom 8:

⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. . . . ⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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.

The result of all this is our growth in godliness through the Spirit:

¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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!" ¹⁶ The 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 (Rom 8:14-17)

⁵ Ibid., 1415.

⁶ This does not mean that the Spirit of God did not indwell believers that sin. See below.

Toward this end the Spirit imparts and grants gifts to the Church, the body of Christ, the corporate assemblage of believers (1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Thess 1:5; 4:8). These gifts include displays of the Holy Spirit's power in miraculous sign gifts: speaking in tongues and prophecy (1 Cor 12-14; 1 Thess 5:19); prophetic knowledge (1 Cor 12:8); healing, discerning of spirits, interpretation of tongues, and other miracles (1 Cor 12:9-10). These and others are "empowered by one and the same Spirit" (1 Cor 12:11). Paul himself professed that he taught in words given by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-12; Eph 3:5; 1 Cor 2:13) and preached in the Spirit's power (1 Cor 2:4; 1 Thess 1:5). It should be no wonder, then that the Spirit helps the believer to pray and intercedes for us (Rom 8:26-27). The Christian child of God led by the Spirit will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control" (Gal 5:22). As Mullins notes,

All spiritual gifts in the church are for edification (1 Cor 14:12). Prayer is to be in the Spirit (14:15). The church is to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). Love (Col 1:8); fellowship (Phil 2:1); worship (3:3) are in the Spirit. The church is the habitation of the Spirit (Eph 2:22). The church is an epistle of Christ written by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:3). Thus the whole life of the church falls under the operation of the Holy Spirit.⁷

Special Topics Associated with the Spirit's Presence in Believers

1. The Indwelling and Sealing of the Holy Spirit

Recall that, in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God was not given uniformly or exhaustively to all believers (faithful Israelites). Rather, the Spirit came upon believers (and subsequently departed) to empower them for service of some kind. In the New Testament, several passages strongly suggest that the Spirit indwells all believers, "sealing" them (John 7:37-39; Acts 11:16-17; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13).

In three of these references (; 5:5; Eph 1:13) the text says that the Spirit is the "earnest money" or "down payment" (Greek: *arrabōn*) given to believers to certify this sealing and indwelling.

2 Cor. 1:21 - And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, 22 and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (*arrabōn*).

2 Cor 5:5 - He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (*arrabōn*).

Eph 1:13 - In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee (*arrabōn*) of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

The term is a legal one that "refers to a payment deposited by the purchaser to secure a property or article being bought (this money would be forfeited if the balance was not paid)."⁸ According to Rom 8:9, believers have the Spirit of God dwelling in them. Believers are sealed "unto the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30). These three passages refer to that indwelling Spirit as the down payment of promised

⁷ Ibid., 1417.

⁸ Silva, Moisés, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 404.

salvation. Essentially, indwelling / sealing belongs to believers only, and each believer. This indwelling is a deposit toward the inheritance of salvation.

This set of circumstances naturally yields the question of whether the presence of the Holy Spirit as this deposit guarantees salvation. It seems that this is indeed the goal, but we need to acknowledge what else the New Testament says about the indwelling Spirit. In Acts 5:32 Peter describes the Holy Spirit as being given by God to those who obey him. Does this describe some sort of works-based system whereby the Spirit of God (and hence salvation) is earned? The short answer is no (the subject of the doctrine of salvation is reserved for a future chapter),⁹ for, in context (Peter is speaking to unbelieving Jewish authorities) Peter is talking about something Paul called “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26). This obedience speaks of believing in Christ as messiah, the sole means of salvation. In Peter’s instance in the book of Acts, if we keep reading, the obedience to which Peter refers is defined in this way in Acts 6:7 (“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith”). The implication, then, is that the presence of the Spirit of God is only a reality when faith in the gospel is present. As I have described elsewhere (and see Chapter 13), salvation is not merited and is provided as a gift to sinners. It therefore cannot be lost due to sin. However, it can be forsaken through unbelief. Believers are eternally secure if they believe, refusing to abandon faith or transferring that faith to some other alleged Savior besides Christ. If faith fails, as the writer of Hebrews for example feared (Heb 3:12-4:13),¹⁰ then there is no such security. There are no unbelieving believers. Faith is essential for salvation, and the Spirit was given to provide assurance of salvation to those who believe.

We should add as a corollary that this in turn also means that the Spirit of God indwells believers that sin. All believers sin (1 John 1:5-10). Paul for instance charged sinning believers to stop sinning because their bodies were the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20). Paul recommended that one believer in the Corinthian church be expelled from the congregation because of sin (1 Cor 5). This command would make little sense if this person was not regarded by Paul as a believer. Part of the Spirit’s ministry is to convict the believer of sin (John 16:8).

2. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

By definition, the Spirit’s ministry of baptizing people into the body of Christ, the Church, is a New Testament ministry. This activity of the Spirit was prophesied by John the Baptist (Matt 3:11), who spoke of the messiah, Jesus. Recall that Jesus foretold the Spirit would come or be sent subsequent to his own time on earth, an event Jesus said would be fulfilled shortly after he ascended (Acts 1:5) at Pentecost.

John 14:16-17, 26 - And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. . . . But the Helper, the Holy

⁹ See also the content of Michael S. Heiser, *What Does God Want?* (Blind Spot Press, 2018), 53-64.

¹⁰ See also Heb 10:16, where the new covenant passage Jer 31:33 is quoted by the author out of concern that their faith will fail (Heb 10:19ff.). Given the data we have examined here, where the new covenant bestowal of the Spirit is associated with the change in the Spirit’s ministry, and where each person who professes belief is given the Spirit for indwelling and sealing, it is apparent the key to passages that show concern for a loss of faith are not overturned or impeded by “guarantee language” about the Spirit. These concepts work hand-in-hand.

Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 15:26 - "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

John 16:7 - Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

Tying these verses together means that the baptism of the Spirit is to be defined as the reception of the Spirit at Pentecost. That event in turn fulfilled Old Testament promises of a new covenant, which included the Spirit being distributed to all believers (Ezek 36:22-38; Jer 31:31-33). As we have seen, this distribution is related to all believers being children of God in dwelt by the Spirit (Rom 8:1-9), sealed unto the day of redemption (2 Cor 1:21; 5:5; Eph 1:13; 4:30). Consequently, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is another way of referring to the reception of the indwelling Spirit all believers experience when coming to faith in Christ. 1 Cor 12:13 is a key verse:

For in/by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.¹¹

Here the baptism of the Spirit is squarely linked to entrance into the body of Christ, the Church, which includes both Jews and Gentiles. That is, Spirit baptism happens when we enter this collective body, not sometime afterward in a charismatic experience, as some teach today. As Ryrie notes, "If [Spirit baptism] did not occur at salvation then there would exist believers who were truly saved but who, because they had not been baptized with the Spirit, did not belong to the body of Christ. Baptism is what joins a believer to the body, so if one could be saved and not baptized, he could be an out-of-the-body believer."¹² This circumstance of course makes no sense in light of the biblical statements we've discerned in this chapter.

¹¹ Translation is that of the author.

¹² Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 419.