

Holy Spirit

When you study the Trinity, God the Father seems transcendent (far away), and Jesus seems far removed in history, but the Holy Spirit is active within our lives now. God is working in us right now. It is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we experience God now. It is the inward ministry of the Holy Spirit which convinces the mind that Scripture is the Word of God and is true. The Holy Spirit was the active person of the Trinity that called you to Christ initially, impressed on your heart that the Gospel was true, and played a part in your conversion. At the same moment of salvation, whether it was when you were 5 years old or an adult, the Holy Spirit was responsible for your regeneration. In passages like 1 Corinthians 12:13, this is called the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and in John 3, Jesus called it being born spiritually. It is that point in time in which you were saved and the Holy Spirit indwelt you. Now as we live the Christian life, the Holy Spirit is active in our spiritual growth which is commonly called sanctification, a progressive changing from within. In that process of sanctification that goes on as long as we live, the Holy Spirit is illuminating, guiding, teaching, gifting, and convicting as we live the life of faith.

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

We first encounter the Holy Spirit in the creation account in Genesis 1:2 as the Holy Spirit is “moving over the surface of the waters”. The Holy Spirit was present, and somehow involved in the creation. When God made man in Genesis 1:26, the text quotes God as saying “Let Us make man in our own image”. Most believe this plural reference is to the Trinity including the Holy Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament the H. S. fills certain people at certain times to enable God’s servants to carry out His will, but when they fall into sin the Spirit leaves them. We see this clearly in King Saul’s life in 1 Sam.10:6 when the Spirit came upon Him mightily and he began speaking the Word of God. Nevertheless, Saul blew it big time later in 1 Sam.13, so the Spirit left him. Even worse, the vacuum left was filled by an evil spirit (fallen angel) in ch.16. King David was also filled by the Spirit after he was anointed by Samuel as the next king in 1 Sam.16:13. After David fell hard from his sin with Bathsheba, the Spirit left him as well. David wrote Psalm 51 about the year when God left him. He was tormented by his conscience, he felt abandoned by God, and David cried out, “And do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me.”(v.11).

The Spirit of God is mentioned at least 100 times in the O.T., but most people are not seen as being enabled by the Spirit, and in the lives of people who are, the Spirit comes and goes. In Isaiah 63:7-14, Israel’s sinful behavior is said to “grieve the Spirit”. Increasingly throughout the history of Israel you can trace the departure of God’s enabling Spirit. The wickedness of the nation and the remoteness of the Spirit stood in direct proportion to each other. In Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, the biggest difference in the Old Testament (or covenant) and the New Covenant is the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. The prophets say that they had the Law written externally on tablets, but in the future New Covenant, they have the promise of God that in the new and better

covenant, the Law of God would be written on their hearts internally. Ezekiel 36: 26-27 says this will be realized through the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Another Helper of the Same Kind

Jesus announced the fulfillment of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 in His Upper Room Discourse, which was His last teaching to His disciples before His arrest. He had told them He was leaving and that they were going to crucify Him, so the disciples were very distressed. Jesus told them not to be fearful because it was actually to their benefit that He leave. He would send them “another Helper” of the same kind. Jesus had just told them in John 14:12 that they would do “greater works” than they saw Him do. They were wondering how that was possible when He sprung this awesome information on them about the coming of the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell them in Jn.14:16-17 and verse 26. Jesus called the Spirit the Paraclete (Greek for helper), then made it clear in v.26 that He was referring to the Holy Spirit. In v.17, Jesus said that the Spirit was coming to indwell ONLY believers, and in v.26 that “He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that Jesus said to you.” By this, Jesus was saying that the intense teaching that they had been given for the last three years was largely not understood by them yet, but the Spirit would illuminate all Jesus’ teaching so they could understand it, share it with others, and write it down for us.

In John 15, Jesus used the imagery of “the vine and the branches” to teach them how the H.S. would work in them. He would not force them to follow the guidance or make use of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, thus He said, “the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you CAN DO NOTHING.” If you go your own way and live for yourself, you can do no good works in God’s eyes, it is only in that abiding relationship of faith and obedience that you can experience the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

In John 16:7-15, Jesus further elaborated on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The Spirit will “convict” the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.” Then Jesus made this clear that the conviction would be in the hearts of unbelievers. When you share the Gospel, it is the ministry of the H.S. to convict that person of his great need for Jesus. Therefore you cannot fail, because after you share the truth, it is between him and God. Concerning righteousness because having no righteousness of their own, they need the righteousness of Christ. Concerning judgment because this world and the ruler of this world has already been judged and its doom is sure. Jesus said that the Spirit would guide believers into the truth, and He would glorify Christ in many ways in their life.

The Book of Acts is the immediate sequel to this teaching on the Spirit because after the resurrection of Christ, He appeared to the believers for 40 days teaching them and preparing them for their upcoming ministry. In Acts 1:4, Jesus gathered them, and commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. Then in verse 8, Jesus gave what I consider to be the Great Commission, “you

shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses..." Jesus was then "lifted up" to Heaven, and the disciples (about 120) waited around for something to happen. In other words, at this point they were still in hiding, still clueless, and nothing was going on. What could happen to wake these dummies up? Would could happen that would send them boldly out into the streets of Jerusalem to preach the Gospel? What could happen that would empower them to save thousands of souls?

In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, the church was born! In fulfillment of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36:26-27, and even more important, in fulfillment of Jesus' teaching---the Holy Spirit came upon them to stay. There was no mistaking it, since it was a brand new phenomenon, God made sure they saw, heard, and experienced the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The result was that they took to the streets sharing the Gospel and just as Jesus said, the Spirit convicted the people of their sin, so in Acts 2:37, the people were "pierced to the heart" and asked what they should do. That day 3000 souls were saved by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. From that time on, everyone who believed in Jesus was indwelled permanently with the Holy Spirit. Paul confirmed that in Romans 8:9 when he wrote that everyone who believes has the Spirit, and "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ."

The Works of the Holy Spirit

The major works of the H.S. can be broken down into two categories---the works accomplished at the moment of salvation, and the works done after salvation. Before salvation, the H. S. helps prepare our heart to believe. You could say He draws us, calls us, stirs us, or other explanations, but what is clear is that we had not believed and then we were ready to believe. He makes us a "new creation" when we are spiritually born. Some of us know exactly when that was, and others don't; it makes no difference because the outcome is the same. The Bible says we were baptized (identified) by the Holy Spirit putting us in that new relationship as being "in Christ". At that moment the H.S. indwells us forever. Paul wrote that the believer's body becomes "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor.6:19). We are given spiritual gifts by the H.S. to use in edifying the church. We are told in passages like Ephesians 1:13-14 that the H.S. is our seal, our pledge, our guarantee of our inheritance in heaven.

After salvation, the Spirit begins to work in our lives illuminating the Word of God, convicting us of sin, guiding us, empowering us in service, and praying for us. If you are like me, sometimes in a Bible study or even when I'm reading it alone, a light bulb comes on, and I understand new spiritual truths. It is clear that believers experience a heightened awareness or sensitivity to sin. When we share the Gospel, we somehow just have the words to say, and the courage to say them. We volunteer and discover our spiritual gifts in serving. The life we should be leading is called "walking in the Spirit" in Galatians 5:16, and the attitudes produced by the Spirit in that dependent life of faith are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control". God wants the best for us, and has given us His Spirit to have it.

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