

Holy Spirit Resource

It's tragic. The world has gone spiritual while most Christians have gone secular. This is why we must take seriously the fruit, power, and theology of the Holy Spirit. Enough neglect, confusion, and fear.

Moses foretold a future day when "The Lord will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all your heart ... that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:6) In agreement, Jeremiah and Ezekiel predict such a day.

Jeremiah 31:31, 33 – "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant ... I will put My laws in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they will be My people."

Ezekiel 36:25-26 – "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you."

God's people had been hearing about this future hope for centuries. Ever since the introduction of redemptive prophecies (to be fulfilled in the person of Jesus), God's people had been longing for this promised day. But what would be the sign that would indicate these "end times"? ***The widespread activity of the Holy Spirit.***

For the early believers the gift of "the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13) was the definite evidence that the end times had been set in motion. The prophets had predicted it:

Isaiah 44:3 - "I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground. I will pour out My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring."

Ezekiel 36:27 - "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

Joel 2:28-29 - "And it will come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And also on My menservants and maidservants I will pour out My spirit in those days."

Jesus promised His ongoing work would be through the Person of the Spirit. The early church made decisions like this: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..." (Acts 15:28) Seemed? How could they make such a claim? Because, as Paul would say, they "kept in step" with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Paul would go so far as to say we "live by the Spirit." While most Christians functionally minimize this to mean "living biblically", the book of Acts presents a much richer experience of a people who lived in a very active relationship with God the Holy Spirit.

"Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?" (Acts 19:2) What an intriguing opening question that Paul brings to a group of disciples in the city of Ephesus. If the Gospel of grace was his first priority, you can make a strong case for the reality of the Spirit as his second. Why was this so? Because, if you read the first 18 chapters of the book, you find a church that seemed obsessed with a very direct and constant relationship with God the Holy Spirit.

Positionally, every believer has the Spirit living in them.

Ephesians 1:13-14 – "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance..."

Yet every believer is not always "filled" with and encountering the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18 – "Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Holy Spirit."

The book of Acts offers a fascinating case study of how people responded to the promises of God without the baggage of 2000 years of human biases and inhibitions. Notice:

Acts 1:5 – “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Jesus speaking to a group of Jewish believers quite familiar with “baptisms.” These immersions indicated authority, identity, and new life.)

Acts 2:1,4 – “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all with one accord in one place ... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (120 out of 120 people had an experience with the Spirit, in such a way they were not left wondering; they knew they were filled.)

Acts 2:14-17 – “Peter stood up and explained, ‘These are not drunk, as you suppose ... But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: It shall come to pass in the last days that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy.’” (Important to note: A. This experience was experiential. The people were accused of being under the influence, drunk. B. Peter identifies tongues as “prophecy”.)

Acts 4:31 – “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit; and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” (Note: A. In Acts 2 they “all” spoke in tongues. Here in Acts 4, they “all” spoke the word with boldness. Nobody was arguing about whether they had the gift of tongues or evangelism; they simply interacted and responded to God. B. In both Acts 2 and 4 the ultimate evidence of the Spirit was boldness and effectiveness in witnessing, in fulfillment of the promise of Acts 1:8. Practically this means that when we’re filled, we should take that as a cue to witness. C. There is something about the tongue; all throughout Acts we find the Spirit manifesting verbally.)

Acts 8:14-18 – “When the apostles heard Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.” (Very provocative passage. A. It is striking that the apostles heard about all of this kingdom activity and yet felt urgently that something was missing. People needed the experience of the Spirit. B. Notice that there are multiple descriptions of the Holy Spirit experience. Receiving, being filled, coming upon people, etc. Paul will develop a theology of the Spirit later using some of the same terms, but the writer Luke is simply calling as he sees it. Try not to confuse Paul’s theological verbiage with Luke’s practical verbiage. C. It is possible to receive the word, be forgiven, baptized, healed, delivered, ... and still not “receive” the Spirit.)

Acts 9:17-20 – “Ananias laid hands, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized ... Immediately he preached the Christ.” (A. There is no formula. In Acts 8 they were baptized first and filled later. Here, Saul is filled first and baptized later. B. Being filled spills over into healing of his blindness. Being filled is always a wise move. C. Once again, we see the evidence of boldness to witness.)

Acts 10:44-47 – “While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. They were astonished because the gift of the Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Peter answered, ‘Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’” (A. In other cases they asked and prayed for the experience; in this one it happens spontaneously. Be open to both. B. The verbal evidence clearly seems to be the initial indicator letting believers know when the filling has occurred. C. Once again, it happened to “all” of them.)

Acts 19:1-7 – “Paul came to Ephesus. Finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?’ So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ He asked, ‘Into what then, were you baptized?’ They said, ‘John’s baptism.’ Paul said, ‘John baptized with a baptism of repentance...’ When they heard this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were 12 men in all.” (A. 12 out of 12 received and manifested. B. Leaders must be ready to lead people into this experience.)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What part of the Bible addresses the practical side of the Holy Spirit experience?

1 Corinthians 12-14, but especially chapter 14. This covers order within the gathered church.

2. By emphasizing a Holy Spirit experience, aren't you saying that the finished work of Jesus and regeneration is not enough?

Absolutely not. It's not that Jesus is not enough; it's that we need to go all the way with the Jesus who is enough. There truly are experiences with God subsequent to salvation. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the great reformed doctor-preacher said this: "There is nothing, I am convinced, that so 'quenches' the Spirit as the teaching which identifies the baptism of the Holy Spirit with regeneration ... Got it all? Well, if you have 'got it all', I simply ask in the Name of God, why are you as you are? If you have 'got it all', why are you so unlike the Apostles, why are you so unlike the New Testament Christians?"

3. Is it dangerous to highlight the Holy Spirit? Shouldn't we major on Jesus?

The Holy Spirit is God. There is only one God. And the Spirit always makes much of Jesus.

4. Have the gifts of the Spirit ceased? Do you base your theology on experience?

No. Many cessationists (those who believe that the miraculous gifts and manifestations of the Spirit have ceased) argue that Spirit-filled believers base their theology on experience. While many do, the reality is that many cessationists base their theology on *lack* of experience. Thus, we begin with Scripture. We conclude that the gifts and power and presence and guidance of the Spirit *is* abundantly available in our day, *and we draw this conclusion from Scripture*. Not subjective and unbiblical mysticism.

5. Do you believe everybody can prophesy?

We do. 1 Corinthians 14:1 says to "pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." This is important because in 1 Cor 12:29 Paul asks the question, "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? ... Do all speak with tongues?" And the clear answer is no. Not everybody holds a position in the church of a prophet or teacher or tongues.

And yet Paul exhorts every believer to desire spiritual gifts, *especially prophecy*. What is Paul doing here? Is he setting people up for disappointment, in pursuing things to which they are not called or gifted? No.

While everybody does not have the position of a prophet, we believe everybody can prophesy, when beneficial. While everybody does not hold the position of teacher, everybody can indeed teach. For example, if you are a parent, Scripture says to teach your children, whether you feel like you have that gift or not. While everybody does not have a gift of generosity, everybody should rise up and share. While everybody is not an evangelist, every believer is called to be evangelistic. While everybody is not called to the position of corporate tongues, every believer can exercise tongues privately.

1 Corinthians 12:31 is a key. "Earnestly desire the best gifts." What are the best gifts? That depends on the circumstance. If you are in a corporate gathering with other people, prophecy is almost always ideal, because "whoever prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to people." (1 Corinthians 14:3) I hope you caught that, because you have probably experienced Spirit-powered prophecy on many occasions and you did not even know it.

The "best gift" is the gift most edifying in that moment.

If someone is confused, the best gift might be a word of wisdom. If someone is sick, the best gift might be healing. God's intention was never for believers to look at a sick person and refuse to pray because they lacked that "gift." He wants people so directed by 1 Corinthians 13 love that we will pursue whatever will bring him the most glory, and people the most good.

If someone is praying by themselves, tongues is sometimes the best gift because "he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself ... he does not speak to men but to God, for no one understand him; however in the spirit he speaks mysteries." (1 Corinthians 14:4, 2) The best gift is the one that brings glory to God and good to people.

6. What's up with all the confusion and disagreement surrounding tongues?

Sin. Misunderstanding. Fear. And then, there is an enemy that has observed firsthand how potent a Christian will be when he or she walks in the fullness of the Spirit. Of course he sows seeds of discord and confusion.

But I'd encourage us not to lose sight of the forest for the trees. *The real issue is not tongues, it's prophecy.* There is something central about the place of prophecy throughout Scripture, especially as it relates to the Holy Spirit.

As early as Numbers 11:29, we find Moses responding to a complaint about people prophesying: "Oh that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" In 1 Samuel 19 we discover a foretaste of things to come. Saul sent messengers among a group of prophets, and the Spirit of God came upon them "and they also prophesied." Saul himself went as well, "and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on and prophesied." (1 Samuel 19:23) Are we seeing a pattern? When the Spirit comes upon people, it manifests on the tongue and they prophesy.

And then in Acts 2, when Peter gives the explanation of 120 speaking in tongues, he calls it the fulfillment of Joel's prediction that when the Spirit came, God's people would prophesy. In other words, tongues is a subset of prophecy.

And prophecy is a form of speech. It flows from the *tongue*. The Bible makes clear that words possess a power we do not fully understand. "Life and death are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). As early as the second verse of the Bible we read about the Spirit of God hovering, and "then God *said*, 'Let there be light.'" (Genesis 1:2-3) Where we find the Spirit, we consistently find the creative and potent effect of words.

And therein lies one of our chief problems. The tongue is like the bit in a horse's mouth or the rudder of a ship (James 3:3-4). Our life tends to live under the influence of our tongue. And yet, "no man can tame the tongue" (James 3:8). Jesus taught, "from the mouth, the heart proceeds" (Matthew 15:18). We need a power that is *outside* of us to get *inside* of us and then *empower* us to live up to our calling.

With all of this in mind, it makes very good biblical sense that when a human comes "under the influence" of the Spirit of God, it will manifest on their tongue. This is why the consistent effect of a Spirit-encounter in the biblical narratives was tongues and prophecies. It then led to empowered, emboldened witness.

7. Do you suggest any other resources to study further?

Devour 1 Corinthians 11-14. Read slowly and ask God to illuminate.

Gordon Fee is incredible. *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* is a great book to start with. He is scholarly, brilliant, and respected across the theological spectrum.

John Piper has some great resources at desiringgod.org. Here are a couple:
<http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/you-will-be-baptized-with-the-holy-spirit>
<http://www.desiringgod.org/biographies/a-passion-for-christ-exalting-power>