

The **POWER** of the
**HOLY
SPIRIT**



The power of **God's Holy Spirit**

Almost 2,000 years ago, a miraculous, momentous event occurred—the New Testament Church was founded on the Feast of Pentecost. What made this event so astounding—and Acts 2 records that the circumstances of that day were truly dramatic—was the giving of God's Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus Christ, just as He had promised (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-14; Acts 1:4-5, 8).

What is this Holy Spirit that came on Jesus' followers that day? Why did these things happen? What should we learn from those strange occurrences? Even more importantly, what role does God's Holy Spirit have in a Christian's life?

To understand this topic, we must first understand what the Holy Spirit is and what it is not. To grasp that, we must understand what the Holy Spirit *does* in a Christian's life.

What does the Bible teach about the Holy Spirit? The answer to this question holds the truth of the amazing future God has in store for every human being. We'll see that God's Holy Spirit is the catalyst in a transformed Christian life.



The Holy Spirit: the power of God

Throughout the Bible the Holy Spirit is spoken of in the Bible as being God's divine power. The Anchor Bible Dictionary, in its article on the Holy Spirit, describes it as "The manifestation of divine presence and power perceptible especially in prophetic inspiration" (Vol. 3, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 260).

Many scriptures refer to the Holy Spirit as the power of God (Zechariah 4:6; Micah 3:8). Paul told Timothy that it is the "*spirit of...power and of love and of a sound mind*" (2 Timothy 1:7, emphasis added throughout).

Luke 4:14 records that Jesus Christ began His ministry "in the *power* of the Spirit." Luke 1:35 identifies the Holy

Spirit with "the power of the Highest." Speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death, Jesus told them, "You shall receive *power* when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." (Acts 1:8).

Peter relates how "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and *with power*, [and Jesus] went about

doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, *for God was with Him*" (Acts 10:38). The Holy Spirit is here associated with the *power* by which God was *with Him*—the power through which Jesus Christ performed mighty miracles during His earthly, physical ministry. The Holy Spirit is the very *presence* of God's power actively working in His servants.

The apostle Paul's desire was that the members of the Church in Rome would "abound in hope by the *power* of the Holy Spirit," in the same way that Jesus Christ had worked through him "in mighty signs and wonders, *by the power of the Spirit of God*" (Romans 15:13, 19).

Divine inspiration by the Spirit

The Bible also shows that God inspires and guides His prophets and servants through the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter noted that "prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

Paul stated that God's plan had been "revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:5), and that his own teachings were inspired by the spirit (1 Corinthians 2:13). Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, explains that God through His Spirit has revealed to us the things which He has prepared for those who love Him. God the Father is the Revealer, working through His Spirit in those who serve Him.

Jesus Christ told His followers that the Holy Spirit, which the Father would send to them, "will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26).

It's through God's Spirit within us that we can gain spiritual understanding and insight. "For what man knows

the things of a man except [by] the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except [by] the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11-12).

Jesus Christ had this spiritual understanding in abundance. As the Messiah, He was prophesied to have "the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:2).

What the Holy Spirit isn't

The traditional Christian view of the Holy Spirit presents it not only as the power of God, but also a third person with the Father and Son in a Trinity. But when the Bible is taken at face value it's clear that it's *never* presented as a separate person. It's always presented as an attribute or power of God. There are many scriptures that demonstrate it's not a divine person. For example, the Holy Spirit is referred to as *a gift* (Acts 10:45; 1 Timothy 4:14). We are told that it can be *quenched* (1 Thessalonians 5:19), that it can be *poured out* (Acts 2:17; 10:45), and that we are *baptized with it* (Matthew 3:11). It must be *stirred up* within us (2 Timothy 1:6), and it also *renews* us (Titus 3:5). These are certainly not attributes of a person. They certainly are attributes of God's character and power.

This Spirit is also called "the Holy Spirit of promise...the guarantee of our inheritance...the spirit of wisdom and revelation..." (Ephesians 1:13, 14, 17).

This Spirit is not only the Spirit of God the Father; it's also "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:19; 1 Peter 1:11). It dwells within Christians, leading and enabling us to be children of God (Romans 8:14).

The Power of the Holy Spirit

In contrast to God the Father and Jesus Christ, who are consistently compared to human beings in their form and shape, the Holy Spirit is just as consistently represented in a completely different manner. It is described as appearing as a dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32) and as “tongues of fire” (Acts 2:3). Jesus Christ compared it with “living water” (John 7:37-39).

There is further evidence that the Holy Spirit is not a person, but is the divine power of God. In Matthew 1:20,

we read that Jesus was begotten by the Holy Spirit (Moffatt translation). Yet Jesus Christ continually prayed to and addressed the Father, not the Holy Spirit, as His father (Matthew 10:32, 33; 11:25-27; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17, 27; 18:10, 35). He never represented the Holy Spirit as His Father.

(There’s so much more evidence that the Holy Spirit is God’s power, mind, and life essence through which He begets us as His children, and that it is not a divine person. Read all about it in our free study aid *Is God a Trinity?*)

The Holy Spirit: Defining a Christian

Exactly what is a Christian? How does the Bible define a Christian in the most accurate sense?

The Scriptures clearly identify who belongs to Christ—that is, who we might term a true Christian. Notice the apostle Paul’s teaching in Romans 8:9: “Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, *he is not His*” (emphasis added throughout). The Holy Spirit, then, is an essential aspect of the biblical definition of a Christian. Further, only those who are led by God’s Spirit have access to eternal life.

Paul continues in verse 11, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit [which] dwells in you.”

It becomes abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit plays a major role in the lives of Christians. In verse 14 Paul defines the Christian very clearly: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, *these are sons of God.*” The Holy Spirit identifies us with Christ (verse 9), it makes immortality possible to human, mortal beings (verse 11), it makes possible an obedient, overcoming Christian life (verse 13), and it truly leads (guides, empowers and motivates) the sons of God. In short, God’s Spirit—also called the Spirit of Christ—is what makes one a Christian, a Spirit-led follower of Jesus Christ.

If the Holy Spirit is what defines a Christian and makes one a child of God, it is most vital that we learn and understand more about that Spirit and its role.



God gives Christians divine help through His Spirit

What does God’s Holy Spirit do for us as Christians? This question goes to the heart of our religious beliefs, because without the power of God’s Spirit we can have no deep, close relationship with the Father, nor can we become His children. It is because the Spirit dwells in us that we are called the children of God (Romans 8:14-17).

We must understand what it means to be “led by the Spirit.” God’s Spirit doesn’t drive, drag or push us around; it *leads* us. It will not prevent us from sinning, nor will it force us to do what is right. It leads us, but *we must be willing to follow.*

How does God’s Spirit lead us? Let’s consider a few ways.

The Holy Spirit keeps us in contact with God’s mind

God’s Spirit works with our mind. The apostle John describes it this way:

Photo: Lucas Allen/Digital Vision/Thinkstock.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

“Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit [which] He has given us” (1 John 3:24). Through God’s Spirit, which He gives us, we can be influenced by Him for the good and obey God’s commandments. This is in stark contrast to the world around us and our own nature, which influence us toward evil.

God’s Spirit also helps us come to a deeper comprehension of His truth. When Jesus promised the apostles He would send the Spirit to them, He said it would “guide [them] into all truth” (John 16:13).

God’s Spirit inspires a deeper understanding of His Word, purpose and will

As we read earlier, 1 Corinthians 2:9-11 tells us: “But as it is written, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who

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love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us *through His Spirit*. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except [by] the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except [by] the Spirit of God.”

Without God’s Spirit a person cannot understand God’s divinely expressed Word and will, “for they are foolishness

to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (verse 14).

The Spirit of God convicts our conscience and helps us see sin as it really is

In speaking of the Holy Spirit, which would be given to His followers after His death and resurrection, Jesus said it would “convict the world of sin” (John 16:8). God’s Spirit within us, working with our conscience, helps us to recognize and avoid sin. The guilt we feel is real when prompted by recognition of sins.

The Holy Spirit produces godly fruit in us

Just as an apple tree produces apples, God’s Spirit produces a particular type of fruit in the life of a Christian. Paul lists the fruit that should be evident in those who are led by God’s Spirit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV).

Each aspect of this fruit is worthy of a detailed study in itself, coupled with a self-analysis to see to what extent these traits are evident in our lives. (You can download our article reprint series on “The Fruit of the Spirit,” which explores each of these in detail.)

The apostle Peter sums up the process of growing to spiritual maturity: “[God’s] divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and

goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may *participate in the divine nature* and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly

kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to *make your calling and election sure*. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the

Paul didn’t acknowledge the Trinity

If God were a Trinity, surely the apostle Paul, who recorded much of the theological underpinnings of the early Church, would have understood and taught this understanding. Yet we find no such concept in his writings.

Paul’s standard greeting in his letters to churches, as well as individuals to whom he wrote, is, “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” There is no mention of the Holy Spirit.

This same greeting, with only minor variations, appears in every epistle that bears Paul’s name: Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; and Philemon 3.

The Holy Spirit is *always* left out of these greetings—an unbelievable oversight if the Holy Spirit were

indeed a person coequal with God and Jesus Christ.

This is even more surprising when we consider that the churches to which Paul wrote had many gentile members from polytheistic backgrounds who had formerly worshiped numerous gods. Paul’s epistles record no attempt on his part to explain the Trinity or Holy Spirit as a divine person equal with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

In Paul’s writings, only in 2 Corinthians 13:14 is the Holy Spirit mentioned along with God the Father and Jesus Christ, and there only about our “fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (New International Version) with God and Christ (see 1 John 1:3).

The apostle Paul states clearly that “there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things...and one Lord Jesus Christ...” (1 Corinthians 8:6). He makes no mention of the Holy Spirit as a divine person.

eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:3-11, NIV).

The Spirit of God also comforts, encourages and otherwise helps us

Jesus Christ promised to send His followers the Holy Spirit as a “Helper” (John 14:16) or “Comforter” (King James Version). True comfort and reassurance come from God’s Spirit dwelling in us. We need not be unduly worried about what may happen to us. God’s Spirit gives us the assurance that whatever happens will work out for the good “to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His

Jesus Christ promised to send His followers the Holy Spirit as a “Helper” or “Comforter.”

purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This assurance provides an outlook on life that is rare in our world. Yes, a Christian can get discouraged, but it is through the Holy Spirit that we can begin to look at life differently. As noted earlier, peace is another fruit of God’s Spirit in the life of a Christian.

We see the wonderful truth of how and why God works in our lives to transform us—enabling us to obey Him and grow in His way while in this physical life. His Holy Spirit works in us that we may experience an awe-inspiring transformation in the future at Christ’s return.

How to receive God’s Spirit

The story of the new Christians baptized by Philip in Samaria illustrates the importance of the ceremony of laying on of hands in the giving of the Holy Spirit.

After the martyrdom of Stephen, most of the Christians in Jerusalem fled the city in fear of Saul (who later became the apostle Paul).

“But the believers who had fled Jerusalem went everywhere preaching the Good News about Jesus. Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. Crowds listened intently to what he had to say because of the miracles he did. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims. And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was great joy in that city...

“But now the people believed Philip’s message of Good News concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized...

“When the apostles back in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God’s message,



they sent Peter and John there. As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new Christians to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:4-8, 12,

As a person becomes convicted of the truth of the Bible and the need for Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, he or she also sees the need to become baptized. They then have hands laid on them by a minister of God.

14-17, New Living Translation).

We can see the process that the early Christian Church established for new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. As a person becomes *convicted* of the truth of the Bible and the need for Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, he or she also sees the need to become baptized.

Baptism is only part of the process, however. A baptized individual must then have hands laid on them by a minister of God, as made clear in the following passage:

“...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” (Acts 8:15-17).

Notice that these Christians *had already been baptized*. But the Holy Spirit wasn’t given to them until the apostles laid hands on them.

“When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and

prophesied” (Acts 19:5-6).

Peter had preached that those who repented and were baptized would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). But from these examples, we see that the

Holy Spirit didn’t come immediately when a person was immersed in water, but came after a minister of God put his hands on the person and prayed for the Holy Spirit to be given to him or her.

Is the laying on of hands necessary for us to receive the Holy Spirit?

The Bible gives us a clear answer. Paul came upon some believers in Ephesus who had been baptized by no less than John the Baptist. Yet they had not received the Holy Spirit for two reasons. One is that they did not have the laying on of hands. The other was that they apparently did not fully understand the Christian way of life, the covenant into which one enters through baptism.

What did their baptism by John accomplish? Undoubtedly, it helped prepare them for conversion, for he preached repentance. And it likely strengthened their resolve to obey God. But the baptism didn’t bring about their conversion or result in their receiving the Holy Spirit. Clearly, many factors have to be in order for that to take place, including knowledge of sin (the transgression of God’s law, 1 John 3:4), an awareness of the need for forgiveness, true repentance (turning from sin to obedience), faith toward God and Christ and a clear understanding of the obligations of Christianity. In addition, the baptism should, under normal circumstances, be done by a minister of God’s Church,

followed by the laying on of hands and prayer to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

You can read this encounter in Acts 19:1-6, where you will see that Paul—after counseling the believers—baptized them again and laid hands on them.

Like baptism, the practice of laying on of hands has its historical roots in the Old Testament. In ancient times this practice, often accompanied by anointing with oil, was used to set men apart to serve God in the offices of king or priest. It was also sometimes invoked in setting apart sacrifices or other things for holy use. Similarly, laying on of hands after baptism signifies that the newly baptized person has now been set apart for God.

Since the days of the apostles, the laying on of hands after baptism has signified the actual moment of the receiving of the Holy Spirit and the setting apart of a convert as a child of God. It is only through the gift of God’s Spirit that we can develop the godly attitude of obedience and faith. The practice of laying on of hands for the receiving of God’s Spirit is mentioned in Acts 8:17; 19:6; and 2 Timothy 1:6.

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The power to live a godly life

Correctly understanding the scriptural truth that the Holy Spirit is God's power that can transform our lives helps us better understand His purpose and will for us.

It is also a key to understanding the whole purpose and intent of the New Covenant. God did not establish the New Covenant to abolish His laws, which are holy, just and good (Romans 7:12). He established it to remedy the flaw that was *in the people* (Hebrews 8:8)—the weakness, disobedience and lack of faith inherent in all of us that leads us to sin (Romans 3:10-18). Through His Spirit, God empowers us to develop holy, righteous character and resist temptation and the pulls to sin.

With God's Spirit at work within us, God's wonderful promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33-34 can be fulfilled: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and

they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Receiving the Holy Spirit gives a Christian the spiritual power needed to live a godly life. It helps provide the motivation and strength that make it possible for us to be able to obey God's commandments, make right choices, overcome and persevere (Romans 5:5; 8:26; 12:2; Philippians 2:5; 2 Peter 1:3-4).

How great is our loving God and Father who has made all things possible through His Son Jesus Christ! (Matthew 19:26). His work within us is accomplished through the greatest gift that could ever be made available for human beings: the power, love and mind of Christ through the Spirit of God at work in our lives.

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