



God, Gift, and Guide: Knowing the Holy Spirit

The Spirit's Works in Our Lives & Church¹

Introduction

- In the first lesson, we were reminded from the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or mystical influence. Instead, He is the third person of the Trinity, fully God and deserving of worship and obedience.
- In the second lesson, we considered the Holy Spirit's works in revelation and salvation; we owe our salvation as much to the Spirit as to the Father and the Son.
- Today's lesson will explore the Spirit's works in our lives and in the church as we walk in step with Him.

The Holy Spirit's Work of Illumination

- The Holy Spirit did not just inspire the Word of God, He also illumines it.
 - Inspiration: He superintended the biblical authors such that the Word is God-breathed, true, authoritative, sufficient, necessary, clear, and life-transforming.
 - Illumination: He takes the Word of God and makes it clear to believers, applying it to our hearts. He enlightens our eyes and hearts to understand God's truth.
- Illumination is first required for nonbelievers whose minds are blinded by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).
 - Unbelievers cannot spiritually discern the things of the Spirit; their minds must be opened to understand (1 Corinthians 2:14).
- Illumination continues for believers, because although we follow Christ, we're still beset by sin and need light to shine to overcome our misunderstandings.
 - We may come to Scripture seeking to defend an errant theological

¹ This lesson is a summary of Allison, Gregg R. 2023. *God, Gift, and Guide: Knowing the Holy Spirit*. Brentwood, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, chapters 10-15.

position, with the wrong expectations, with the wrong motivations, etc. The Spirit overcomes these weaknesses.

- Illumination does not replace the careful study of God's Word, it works alongside it and through it. Consider the Ethiopian Eunuch or the Bereans who were engaging with Scripture; the Holy Spirit opened their eyes to both see and understand.
- It's by the illumination of the Word of God that we develop the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:15-16), and the Spirit softens our hearts to respond to it, by faith.

The Holy Spirit's Work of Intercession

- The Holy Spirit intercedes for believers, even when they don't know how or what to pray:
 - **Romans 8:26-27** *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*
- In the same way creation groans (Romans 8:21-22), Christians similarly groan under the strain of the effects of sin.
 - We struggle to pray because we still sin and live in a sinful world.
 - We face trials, temptations, loss, persecution, and other kinds of affliction, and we don't know how to navigate it. As we hold back tears, we sometimes don't know for what to ask of God.
- Our hope is not in our ability to marshal the right words, but in the truth that the Spirit Himself prays *for us*. The Spirit intercedes with unspoken groanings with divine communication we don't even understand.
- In the same way that the Father always answers the prayers of the Son (who's also praying for us!), The Father always grants the Spirit's requests to accomplish our good and His glory.

The Holy Spirit's Work in Perfection

- The Spirit is not only at work now, but will also work in the future.
- The Spirit's work is future-oriented, working to bring everything related to God's plan of salvation to its consummation: perfection.
- At Pentecost, the Spirit inaugurated the "last days" (Acts 2:17-18), the era between Christ's first and second comings. The great and glorious day of the Lord is coming when Christ returns, universal judgement occurs, the body is

resurrected, and the new heavens and the new earth are established. This mighty day dawned with the outpouring of the Spirit, and the Spirit is now working to bring everything toward that grand conclusion.

- **Personally:** The Spirit will raise us bodily from the dead with resurrection bodies, just like Christ's.
 - **Romans 8:11** *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.*
- **Cosmically:** All creation will be powerfully transformed.
 - See **2 Peter 3:10-13**; *the former, sinful, temporary existence will give way to a transformed, perfected, eternal existence in which humanity will dwell with God forever.*
 - *"Both the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" (Revelation 22:17)*

The Holy Spirit's Work in the Church

- Up to this point, most of the Spirit's works we've discussed deal with us individually as Christians, but Scripture also teaches that the Spirit works through the body as well.
- One of the most familiar images to describe the church in Scripture is that of a body (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 1:22-23).
- However, another important image is that of a temple:
 - **Ephesians 2:21-22** *in [Christ] the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*
 - **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*
- The church is the people of God constituted by both Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, a reflection of the eternal processions of the Son from the Father and the Spirit from the Son and Father. From both missions (the mission of the Son and the Spirit) flows the church as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit.
- Thus, churches should be Christ-centered and Spirit-activated.
- Spirit-activated: guided, empowered, gifted, transformed, matured, and expanded by the Holy Spirit.
- Four marks of a Spirit-activated church:

○ **The Spirit grants unity.**

- **Ephesians 4:2-3** ...*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
- We don't create this unity, we *maintain* the unity that's already established in the Spirit.
- The exhortation is to expend energy to keep the unity that's already been given to us, fostered by seven commonalities in Ephesians 4:4-6:
 - One body
 - One Spirit
 - One hope
 - One faith
 - One baptism
 - One God and Father
- The spirit also grants four virtues to maintain unity in Ephesians 4:2:
 - Humility
 - Gentleness
 - Patience
 - Forbearance

○ **The Spirit establishes leaders.**

- **Acts 20:27-28** ...*for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*
- Elders are responsible for teaching and preaching the Word of God, and for shepherding and prayer. The Spirit calls and establishes such men.
- Deacons likewise are raised up with their giftings by the Spirit, and acknowledged by the body as servants.

○ **The Spirit empowers mission.**

- **Acts 1:8** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

- All missional endeavors to engage the lost world around us through evangelism, missions, church planting, and church strengthening are empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is also the only one capable of bringing lasting fruit from these efforts.
- **The Spirit distributes spiritual gifts.**
 - **1 Corinthians 12:7, 11** *⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... ¹¹All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apports to each one individually as he wills.*
 - Each and every member of the church is given gifts that are given and empowered by the Spirit for the building up and expansion of the church! More on this topic in the next lesson.

The Holy Spirit Fills Us with the Presence of the Triune God

- Humans were created as divine image-bearers, intended to be the people of God.
- As part of the curse for Adam and Eve's disobedience to His moral law, and as an act of mercy, God expelled mankind from the garden:
 - **Genesis 3:23-24** *Therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*
- Since that day, a question has echoed: "Will God yet again dwell with His people?" Scripture develops a positive answer:
 - The tabernacle and temple were God's dwelling among Israel, facilitated by covenant-keeping (Exod. 29:43-46; Lev. 26:11-13).
 - The prophets promised God's dwelling with his people again (Zech. 2:10-13).
 - The incarnation was the beginning of fulfillment: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).
- Jesus physically lived with His people, heightening God's promise of dwelling with his people, magnified by Jesus's own powerful High priestly prayer.
- Paul's prayer echoes Jesus's words:
 - **Ephesians 3:16-17** *[I pray that the Father] according to the riches of his glory [may] grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

- The association is clear: The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, along with the “inner being” of Christians. The triune God dwells with His people *through the Holy Spirit*.

The Holy Spirit Gives Life as we Walk with Him

- Considering the Spirit’s work to render the presence of the Triune God, how should we live? Scripture’s answer:
 - Be filled with the Spirit
 - Walk by the Spirit/Keep in step with the Spirit
 - Set your mind on the Spirit
- **Be Filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-21)**
 - Four key observations about this command:
 - It is a command, requiring obedience.
 - It is ongoing: “keep on being filled (controlled)” as a way of life, not a one-time event.
 - It is a passive voice imperative, demanding not just activity, but a posture of yieldedness and submission.
 - It produces fruit; we see this in the verses that come immediately after this command: deep fellowship (speaking/singing to one another), authentic worship (making music with our hearts), constant gratitude (giving thanks always), and honor (submitting to another another).
- **Walk by the Spirit / Keep in Step (Galatians 5:16-25)**
 - As Christians walk in this world, we are to be accompanied by the Spirit, not lagging behind or running ahead.
 - In Galatians 5:16-25, Paul contrasts the Spirit-filled life and the life controlled by the flesh; the two are diametrically opposed.
 - “Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with it’s passions and desires,” a new nature that has been freed from sin and its carnal urgings. Those who have transformed hearts that now love God “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16)
 - “Keep in step with the Spirit” (v. 25)—neither lagging behind nor running ahead; traveling in lockstep.
 - Following the commands of Jesus are the means by which the grace of the Spirit flows into our lives, transforming us, giving us joy, and assuring us of our salvation.

- **Set Your Mind on the Spirit (Romans 8:3-8)**

- **Romans 8:3-8** *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in 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. ⁵For 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. ⁶For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*
- This is a reference to doing the moral will of God in order to please Him.
- The mind set on the flesh leads to death and hostility toward God, the mind set on the Spirit leads to life and peace.

The Holy Spirit Guides Us to Do God's Will

- In addition to working in our salvation and in ministering to us the power and presence of God, the Holy Spirit also leads and guides us in life and ministry.
- The Bible is filled with examples:
 - Paul, Timothy, and Silas were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel in Asia, Mysia, and Bithynia, and were eventually led in a vision to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). It was after answering that call that they made their way to Philippi, and the church at Philippi began when Lydia, the jailer, and others in the city heard the gospel and believed.
 - Samson was mighty in strength when the Holy Spirit came upon him (Judges 15:9-17)
 - Philip was directed by the Spirit to engage the Ethiopian Eunuch and then was carried away to another ministry assignment.
- Scripture also captures the difficulty of discerning the Spirit's leadership sometimes; for example, consider Luke's recounting of Paul's resolve to go to Rome. Paul felt constrained by the Spirit to go, yet the church in Tyre and the prophet Agabus in Caesarea felt the Spirit's leadership was for Paul to *not* go to Jerusalem.
- Many of these are indeed spectacular examples, and we shouldn't assume that the Spirit *always* direct in the exact same ways.
- However, this underscores a critical role the Spirit plays in our lives: guiding us in the Lord's will.

- How are we to discern the Spirit's leading?
 - **Being "in the Spirit."** This is admittedly subjective, but without a posture of yieldedness to the Spirit's leading, we should not expect him to guide us clearly or grant us discernment.
 - **Scripture.** Is the perceived guidance for the Spirit in alignment and accordance with the Word of God? Even without a clear chapter or verse command, we know the voice of the Spirit always speaks in keeping with Scripture's precedents, patterns, and principles.
 - Generally, the further removed from Scriptural warrant a decision is, the more time we should spend discerning the Spirit's leadership.
 - **Jesus Christ.** Does the alleged direction of the Spirit exalt Jesus Christ? Since a part of the Spirit's work is to glorify the Son, if a direction exalts ourselves or fosters our reputation more than His, we should have less certainty it's the Spirit leading us.
 - **Sanctification.** Does the perceived guidance from the Spirit stimulate progress in holiness?
 - **Missionality.** Does the guidance we sense empower us to engage others with the gospel?
 - **The Church.** Does the church (including its leaders and those who know you well) confirm this supposed direction from the Spirit?
 - **The Spirit Himself.** Will the perceived direction from the Spirit likely bear the fruit of the Spirit in your and others' lives (Gal. 5:22-23)?
- The more we cultivate dependence on the Spirit by walking in him *now*, the greater ease we'll generally have in discerning his voice in the future.
- "The way to find God's will for the rest of your life is to do God's will for the next fifteen minutes!" - *Adrian Rogers*