



God, Gift, and Guide: Knowing the Holy Spirit

Working with the Holy Spirit¹

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.
- The third lesson explored the Spirit's works in our lives and in the church as we walk in step with Him.
- Today's lesson will focus on our partnership with the Spirit to carry out his mission to magnify Jesus Christ in the world, including His distribution of Spiritual gifts.

Understanding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

- Understanding how the Spirit is working through the church first requires understanding of what it means to be "baptized" with the Spirit.
 - Many Christians don't talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit because it's difficult to understand.
 - Many Christians don't talk about the baptism of the Holy Spirit because of abuses and mischaracterizations, including the insistence that it is always accompanied by certain sign gifts and happens in two phases.
- We begin with a Scriptural truth: All Christians have been baptized with the Spirit. This is technically a work of *Jesus Christ*, but involves the ministry of the Spirit.

¹ This lesson is broadly a summary of Allison, Gregg R. 2023. *God, Gift, and Guide: Knowing the Holy Spirit*. Brentwood, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, chapters 16-18.

- The filling of the Spirit was prophesied before Christ:
 - **Jeremiah 31:31-34** *Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³²not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*
 - God promises a new covenant marked by inward transformation, the forgiveness of sins, and personal knowledge of God.
 - **Ezekiel 36:25-27** *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And 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. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*
 - Ezekiel foretells of God's activity in completely purifying his people, characterized by the placing within his people of a new spirit that enables ongoing obedience.
 - **Joel 2:28-29** *"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.*
 - Joel anticipates a day when *all* of God's people will be indwelt with His Spirit; no longer will prophecies and other administrations of grace be limited to a select few.
 - **Mark 1:7-8** *And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*
 - John the Baptist, the final "Old Testament" prophet, declared that it was Jesus who would baptize (or immerse) his followers in the Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus, as God incarnate, was filled with the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34).

- Jesus promises to pour out the Spirit on his followers.
 - **John 7:37-39** *On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* ³⁹Now 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 14:16-17** *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷even 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.*
- The promise of the Spirit is fulfilled at Pentecost.
 - **Acts 2:1-4** *When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.*
 - **Acts 2:32-33** *This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.*
- Jesus's transformation of our lives through union with Him is so complete that he fully immerses us in the power of His Spirit. His followers are completely inundated and indwelt with the Spirit. It's God's power that produces transformation, as predicted by the prophets and Christ.
 - **Romans 6:1-4** *What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*
 - **Romans 8:9-10** *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. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*
- This baptism is not a mighty work confined to Pentecost, but is Christ's blessing to every one of his disciples. The Spirit regenerates us, and upon faith in Christ, Jesus sends the Spirit to immerse us in Him, fully incorporating us into His body, the church.

The Debates over the Baptism of the Spirit

- The aforementioned explanation of the baptism of the Spirit captures the interpretation of one segment of Christianity, but others differ.
- The development of various positions on the Spirit's baptism can be summed up by three developments:
 - **First Wave - Pentecostalism:** Spirit baptism is a "second blessing" after conversion, confirmed by speaking in tongues, and accompanied by the continuation of all spiritual gifts just as they operated in the book of Acts.
 - **Second Wave** - Charismatic Movement (mid-20th century): Pentecostal distinctives adopted within mainline denominations; emphasis on the continuation of all gifts. Comes from the root word, "*charismata*," for "gifts."
 - **Third Wave** - Evangelicalism (1980s): Spirit baptism occurs at conversion (not as a second blessing); tongues are not a required sign. The gifts as recorded in the book of Acts are *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. As a result, certain gifts are not operative today.
- Because of these debates over the nature of the Spirit's filling and how that relates to gifts, there's much confusion over the Spiritual gifts in the church today.

The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

- **Spiritual gifts:** Capacities or abilities imparted to Christians by the Holy Spirit to enable them to exceed the limitations of their finite humanity to serve other believers to the glory of God.
- What do the Scriptures say about Spiritual gifts?
 - The major sections of Scripture that address Spiritual gifts are Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:7-16, and 1 Peter 4:10-11.
- Summarizing these passages, below are scriptural affirmations about Spiritual gifts:
 - The purpose of Spiritual gifts is to build up and expand Christ's kingdom consistent with the Holy Spirit's Christ-magnifying purposes (John 16).
 - Spiritual gifts are not intended for personal growth or self-aggrandizement. They are intended for the maturation of and service to others.
 - Spiritual gifts confirm the gospel message and its messengers (Hebrews 2:1-4)

- Spiritual gifts are meant to give the church a glimpse of the expanded work of the Spirit when Christ returns, a foretaste of our heavenly future.
- Spiritual gifts manifest the ascended Christ's victory over his enemies (Ephesians 4).
- The Holy Spirit is the one who distributes Spiritual gifts according to His will. This rules out boasting and any sense of inferiority.
- The Holy Spirit is the one who empowers His gifts to make them effective.
- The gifts are dynamic depending on the will of the Spirit and the needs of the church; different churches in different times may need different gifts.

- **What are the Spiritual Gifts?**

- When Spiritual gifts are mentioned in Scripture, the focus is always on *that they're given* (to encourage stewardship of them) rather than on *which are given*.
- Each spiritual gift list in Scripture is non-exhaustive, but below are the major ones.
 - **Prophecy** - The reception of revelation from God that is then communicated to the church and evaluated.
 - **Service** - Any general act of ministry, perhaps overlapping with helps.
 - **Teaching** - The communication of Biblical truth and sound doctrine, together with the ability to refute false teaches and heresies.
 - **Exhortation** - Encouragement of members to become fully devoted followers of Jesus and admonition to the church toward maturity and multiplication.
 - **Contributing/Giving** - Whereas all Christians are commanded to give sacrificially for the furtherance of ministry and care of the poor, these givers contribute a substantially higher amount of their wealth and possessions based on God's unique blessing in their lives.
 - **Leading** - Setting and advancing the direction of the church.
 - **Mercy** - Acts of compassion for the relief of church members and of the poor and marginalized.
 - **Word of Knowledge** - Communicating a message that goes beyond the ordinary means of human intelligence and learning.

- **Word of Wisdom** - Communicating of messages that go beyond ordinary means of human prudence and judgement.
 - **Faith** - Advancement of the will of God by an overcoming and persistent trust in Him to fulfill His promises for the church and its purposes.
 - **Gifts of Healing** - Acts of physical restoration that overcome sickness and injury.
 - **Miracles** - Acts of power (like resurrection and deliverance from persecution) for the advancement of God's kingdom.
 - **Distinguishing of Spirits** - Discerning whether a particular influence is from the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit.
 - **Tongues** - The speaking of another real-world language for the purpose of advancing the gospel.
 - **Note:** Some define "tongues" as a secret, encoded language, but this lacks Scriptural warrant. Every time the gift of tongues is mentioned in Scripture, it's always a real-world language (that's actually what the Greek word, "glossa", means). Furthermore, Paul notes that the use of this gift requires an interpreter - namely, someone else who speaks that language to receive it.
 - **Helping** - Supporting those in need, perhaps through financial relief or physical assistance.
 - **Administering** - Designing, developing, and executing church ministries while managing members involved in them.
 - **Evangelizing** - Engaging in sharing the gospel with those outside the church on a frequent basis and with unusual fruitfulness.
 - **Hospitality** - While all Christians are called to be hospitable, some believers have a unique ability to make people feel welcome, wherever they are.
 - **Shepherding** - Discipling others through mentoring, group environments, and pastoring.
- Spiritual gifts have an internal/external dynamic. Internally, the Spirit gives you abilities like those listed above, and externally, he blesses them with supernatural efficacy for kingdom purposes.
 - This is why one can be a capable teacher in a university classroom but not be an effective teacher in the church, or why a man may be a capable business leader but not a capable leader in the church.

Discovering, Developing, and Deploying Your Gifts²

- **Discover your gifts to steward them well.**
 - Steps to discovering gifts:
 - Understand God has a plan for your life. (Romans 12:2).
 - Present yourself as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).
 - Be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).
 - Think about yourself properly (Romans 12:3).
 - Serve constantly in common ways.
 - Look for validation (and accept redirection) from the body of Christ.
 - Pray for the Spirit to make your gifts clear.
 - Some helpful questions:
 - What needs exist in the church *right now*? Say “yes” by faith to try.
 - What are you interested in?
 - What do you enjoy doing?
 - What investments have been fruitful?
 - Do you have any “natural” gifts that God has given you?
- **Develop your gifts to steward them well.**
 - **2 Timothy 1:6** *For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands...*
 - Are you aware of others with your gift and seeking to learn from them?
 - Are you looking for resources to learn how to use your gift better?
 - Are you practicing your gifts to improve them over time?
- **Deploy your gifts to steward them well.**
 - Are you serving the church body as needs arise?
 - Are you seeking out ways to use your gifts?
 - Are you actively furthering the mission of the church?
 - Are you spending your gifts to build others up?

² Adapted from Andy Davis’s sermons on Romans 12.

- **Disciple others with your gifts to steward them well.**
 - Are you making yourself available to others to learn from you?
 - Are you thinking strategically about how to invest in others?
 - Are you spurring others along in love and good deeds in alignment with their gifts? (Hebrews 10:24).

The Debate over Spiritual Gifts

- There is a debate in the church over whether certain gifts are operating in the church today.
- Succinctly put, some Christians broadly fit into one of two categories:
 - Continuationists: All the gifts, including the miraculous sign gifts, continue in the church today.
 - Cessationists: The miraculous sign gifts have ceased in the church today.
- Within Continuationism:
 - Minimum: Affirms the operation of all the gifts, but never practices the sign gifts.
 - Medium: Affirms the belief in all the gifts, and occasionally practices the sign gifts. "Open but cautious."
 - Maximum: Affirms the belief in the operation of all the gifts, and regularly practices them.
 - Manic: Affirms the operation of all gifts, and uses them irresponsibly.
- Within Cessationism:
 - Interruptive: While affirming generally that Cessationism is the case, this view allows for the possibility that the Holy Spirit occasionally distributes one or more of the sign gifts as the need arises.
 - Regionalized: While affirming generally that Cessationism is the case, this view allows for the possibility that the Holy Spirit distributes one or more of the sign gifts depending on the location, especially in pioneering missionary work where the Scriptures aren't yet available.
 - Absolute: Affirms that Cessationism is the case, and anyone who claims to have the gifts is either deceived or is giving into peer pressure to act like they have a gift.

- **Some Guiding Principles:³**

- It's important to remember that the book of Acts is descriptive, not prescriptive. Just because something happened then does not make it prescriptive for the church now.
 - For example, the office of apostle was a "gift" of the Spirit during the early church age, commissioned by Christ as those who were eyewitnesses to his ministry and resurrection, to spread the gospel and establish churches. However, no such office exists now. Instead, the authority to carry on that work was given to local pastors, deacons, and congregations - not apostles.
 - Baptisms were performed under apostolic authority before churches were formed (like with Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch), but the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper were given to the church by Jesus. The normative pattern in the post-apostolic era was for the ordinances to be performed under the authority of local churches.
- Similarly, the sign gifts served a purpose in the apostolic era to authenticate the message and the messengers of the gospel (Hebrews 2:1-4). However, once the canon of Scripture was closed, they were no longer needed in the same kind and measure because the Scriptures are the sufficient revelation of Jesus Christ.
 - Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Spirit to lead them in all *the truth*, the revelation of Jesus, and that the Spirit would teach the apostles what they needed to write the Scriptures.
 - The New Testament writers elevate the importance of Scripture - not the sign gifts - as the supreme source of authority, faith, and practice for the ongoing ministry of the church. It's fascinating that the sign gifts - while amazing - aren't given much primacy as the basis of the church's success even within the early church.
 - The "revelatory" gifts (especially prophecy) are no longer needed, because there is no new revelation.
 - As we noted earlier, the Spirit distributes gifts as *he* wills; to assert that gifts *must* be operating in a certain way at certain times neglects this reality.
- Furthermore, definitions are important - especially related to how certain gifts may have changed in their utility as the church developed. In the same way Jesus did signs but then dramatically expanded his

³ This section is informed by chapter 18 of Alison's *God, Gift, and Guide*, but expanded with thoughts from Chase Jenkins.

ministry through the church in the outpouring of the Spirit, in the same way, the sign gifts were fulfilled and expanded in the church as it grew.

- The gifts no longer follow individuals because the gifts are given to *the church*, ministered through the Word and prayer.
- Whereas prophecy before the New Testament was completed was speaking the authoritative words of God by direct revelation, now every Christian has the authoritative Word of God in the Scriptures. In other words, every time you open your mouth and share a Bible verse, you *are* prophesying! There is no office of prophet for the same reason there's no office of priest - every Christian is a prophet and priest.
- Healing abilities followed the apostles in an increased measure to authenticate their message, just like Christ. But in the same way all ministry expanded after Christ ascended and sent the Spirit, so too after the apostles died the healing work continues through the prayers and ministry of every believer.
- Speaking in tongues was never an automatic sign of Holy Spirit filling; it was empowered by the Holy Spirit to undo the curse of Babel to enable people from different nations to hear God's Word in their language. As the Word of God has been translated into more languages, there's been less of a need for this kind of revelation - though it's still possible for the Spirit to supernaturally translate!
- Church history shows a precipitous drop in the use of sign gifts after the apostolic era with the more "ordinary means of grace" taking center stage. Some look at this as evidence that the church has lost the "faith" required for the sign gifts to be operative; however, this assertion seems to undervalue the "ordinary" means of grace and the Scriptures.
- **In Summary:** In the debate of Cessationism and Continuationism, both sides see Scriptural warrant for their position.
 - We must avoid pitfalls on both sides: We cannot say that the Spirit is *always* acting in the same way He did during the apostolic era, for such a position negates the Spirit's divine will. On the other side, we cannot say the Spirit *never* distributes these gifts, for that similarly restricts the Spirit from doing as He pleases.
 - Scripturally, it seems best to follow the Spirit's leading with relation to the gifts, and to test the use of any gift by the Scriptural standards.
 - Now that the Spirit has completed his work of inspiring the Scriptures and delights to magnify Christ through them, the revelatory gifts no longer take primacy in favor of this much better, more authoritative

revelation.

- The opinion of this teacher: The Spirit will distribute the gifts as he sees fit, and may distribute the more miraculous sign-gifts in those places and among peoples that require them. However, across 20 centuries of church history, it appears to be the normative pattern of the Spirit to not distribute sign gifts, instead opting to elevate the primacy and sufficiency of His inspired Word, ministering through the "ordinary" gifts and means of grace, and answering prayer for healing and wisdom among all Christians.