

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

As His earthly ministry was coming to a close and He was about to die, Christ told His disciples that He would send them the Holy Spirit to take His place on earth when He returned to the father (CP Jn 14:15-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Holy Spirit has taken over Christ's role on earth and it is only in and through Him that Christ is made known. His primary purpose is to glorify Christ (CP Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Among the many titles assigned to the Holy Spirit in scripture is the *Spirit of God* (CP Mt 10:20; 12:28; Ro 8:9, 14; 15:19; 1Cor 2:11-12, 14; 3:16; 6:11; 7:40; 12:3, 14; Eph 4:30; 1Jn 4:2). The *Spirit of the Lord* (CP Lu 4:18; Ac 5:9; 8:39; 2Cor 3:17-18). *Another Comforter* (CP Jn 14:16). The *Spirit of Truth* (CP Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). The *Comforter* (CP Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:7). The *Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus* (CP Ro 8:2). The *Spirit of Christ* (CP Ro 8:9; Ga 4:6; 1Pe 1:11). The *Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead* (CP Ro 8:11). The *Spirit of Adoption* (CP Ro 8:15). The *Spirit of the Living God* (CP 2Cor 3:3). The *Holy Spirit of promise* (CP Eph 1:13). The *Spirit of Jesus Christ* (CP Php 1:19). The *Eternal Spirit* (CP He 9:14). The *Spirit of Grace* (CP He 10:29). *Truth* (CP 1Jn 5:6). The *Spirit of Life from God* (CP Rev 11:11). One bible scholar lists thirty-nine titles of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament but those listed above will suffice for this study.

It is of the utmost importance to believers that they clearly understand the role of the Holy Spirit in God's eternal purpose for the New Testament church. Many professing Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is merely a force, or an influence emanating from God, but that is not correct. The Holy Spirit is, and has always been, an equal member of the Godhead from all eternity. It is vitally important that believers are very clear in their minds of His Deity and co-equality with both the Father and Christ in the Godhead (CP Isa 6:8-11 with Ac 28:5-8; 5:3-4; 1Cor 2:10-12; 3:16; 2Cor 3:17-18; He 9:14; 1Jn 5:6-7). These scriptures all teach the co-equality of the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in the Godhead.

When Christ told the disciples in Jn 14:16 that He would send *another Comforter* to take His place on earth when He returned to the Father, He was referring to the Holy Spirit (CP Jn 14:16, 26). *Another* in the context of V 16 means another of the *same kind*. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the same kind as Christ – a person. And also like Christ, equally God. Both Christ and Paul refer to the Holy Spirit in scripture as *He*, also signifying a person (CP Jn 14:16-17, 26; 16:7-15; Ro 8:26-27). In the KJV the Spirit is referred to in Ro 8:26 as “the Spirit *itself*”. The word *itself* is an incorrect translation of course and has been corrected in the NKJV to read *Himself*, the same as in all other versions of the Bible. Other scriptures proving the deity of the Holy Spirit and His co-equality with the Father and Christ in the Godhead are as follows (CP Isa 11:1-5; 42:1-7; 48:16-17; 59:20-21; 61:1-2; 63:1-14; 1Cor 6:11). Like any other person, the Holy Spirit can be blasphemed (CP Mt 12:21-32, (also Mk 3:28-29)); lied to (CP Ac 5:3); tempted (CP Ac 5:9); resisted (CP Ac 7:5); grieved (CP Eph 4:30); quenched (CP 1Th 5:19); insulted (CP He 10:29). The

Holy Spirit teaches (CP Jn 14:26); convicts sinners of their need for a saviour (CP Jn 15:26); guides believers into all truth (CP Jn 16:13-14); helps believers pray (CP Ro 8:26-27); intercedes for believers with the Father (CP He 7:25), etc.

The work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church first and foremost is to convict sinners of their need for salvation. How this happens is that when the gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit awakens in the heart of those open to the gospel a consciousness of sin and the need for forgiveness (CP Jn 16:7-11 with Ac 2:14, 22-24, 36-37). As they hear it, those open to the gospel are made aware by the Holy Spirit of God's standard of righteousness in Christ. They are convicted of their sins and their need for forgiveness, and believe on Jesus for their salvation. Next, the Holy Spirit baptises them into Christ and into His body, the church. This is how the church is constituted (CP Ro 6:3-7; 1Cor 12:12-14; Ga 3:26-27; Eph 4:1-6; Col 2:10-13). Ro 6:3-7 and Col 2:10-13 both illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in new believers' spiritual resurrection from being dead in sins to a new life in Christ. The Holy Spirit has raised them from death to life with Christ (CP Ro 6:13; Eph 2:1-6; 5:14).

When new believers are baptised into Christ and into His body, the church, the power of sin over their lives is broken, and they need never yield to sin again. The Holy Spirit has broken its power over them (CP Ro 8:1-4). *The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus* refers to the liberating force of the Holy Spirit empowering believers to say no to sin (CP 2Cor 3:17; 10:3-5; Eph 6:10-18). *The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus* is not a written law, but a regulative principle emanating from the Holy Spirit which energises or activates believers to desire, and to do, God's will (CP Ro 6:17-18; 7:4-6; 12:1-2; 1Cor 6:19-20; Php 2:12-13; Col 3:1-10, 12-17). The Holy Spirit empowers new believers who have surrendered their lives to Christ, to live a Godly life. This is the *newness of life* Paul refers to in Ro 6:4 and the *newness of Spirit* in 7:4 (CP Ro 6:4; 7:4 with 8:5-17; 2Cor 3:18; Ga 2:16-20; Eph 2:1-9; 1Pe 1:3-5; 2Pe 1:1-4).

It should be noted here before moving on that Ro 6:3-7, Ga 3:26-27, Eph 4:1-6 and Col 2:10-13 are all widely taught in the contemporary church as referring to water baptism. In particular, Ro 6:3-7 is taught as illustrating the spiritual significance of water baptism; that going down into the water symbolises dying to sin, and coming up out of the water symbolises being raised up in a new power to live a righteous life before God in Christ. But that is not correct. If it were then Paul would be teaching baptismal regeneration, which is totally unscriptural (CP Ro 6:3-7 with 1Pe 3:18-21). 1Pe 3:18-21 fully explains the real significance of water baptism, which is physical and cannot save. It clearly has nothing whatever to do with the baptism referred to in Ro 6:3-7 which is Spiritual, and is the only baptism whereby one can be saved. This teaching also applies to Ga 3:26-27, Eph 4:1-6 and Col 2:10-13. They too have nothing whatever to do

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with water baptism. The element into which one is baptised determines what sort of baptism it is, and clearly these scriptures all teach the baptism of illustrates the sevenfold Spiritual unity of God and believers: one body – the church; one Holy Spirit; one hope of the Christian calling; one Lord; one faith; one baptism, and one God (CP V 1-3). Paul is exhorting believers here to be unified in the spirit, because, as he points out in V 4-6 there is only one body in Christ – the church – and they were all baptised into that body (CP V 4-6 with 1Cor 12:12-14). The church is called “Christ” in 1Cor 12:12-14 here and is compared to a human body with its many members. This shows how the church is constituted: the Holy Spirit unites repentant sinners with Christ as members of His body when they believe on Him for their salvation, as was noted earlier in this study.

After baptising new believers into the church, the next step in the work of the Holy Spirit is to impart new life to them. This is what Jesus calls being *born again*, and being *born of water and of the Spirit* (CP Jn 3:3-8). Being born again expresses the change wrought in the life of a sinner after being converted to Christ. This is when sinners become saints. Being born again is a process. It is not limited to the initial act when repentant sinners are first converted to Christ, but is a continuous work of the Holy Spirit renewing and transforming their lives throughout the entire course of their Christian walk. In Jn 3:8 Jesus illustrates the activity and effect of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have been born again. Just as the wind is invisible but its activity and effect can be witnessed, so too it is with the Holy Spirit. He is also invisible, but the proof of His work is apparent. There is undeniable and unmistakable evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of born again believers (CP Ac 1:1-8; 4:33; 1Cor 2:1-5). Jn 3:3-8 teaches the doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth. This is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith (CP Ro 12:2). The new birth is the only way into the Kingdom of Heaven. The *water* referred to in Jn 3:5 is the word of God – the gospel – which is the *water of life*. Jesus uses *water* figuratively in the context of being saved by the word. Being *born of water and of the Spirit* means being saved by the word of God and being renewed by the Holy Spirit (CP Psalms 119:9; Jn 4:5-14; 15:3; Eph 5:25-26; Jas 1:18; 1Pe 1:23; Rev 21:5-6; 22:17 with Eze 36:25-28; Jn 7:37-39; Tit 3:5).

During the process of regeneration, believers must never take the Holy Spirit for granted. While the Holy Spirit alone can regenerate, He never regenerates alone. Their repentance must be sincere, and believers must be completely surrendered to Christ and the authority of God’s word for the work of the Holy Spirit to be effective in their lives. Their old sinful nature must yield to the new nature of God imparted to them for the Holy Spirit to complete His work of re-creation in them (CP 2Cor 5:17; Ga 6:15).

Contemporaneous with convicting sinners of their need for salvation, baptising them into Christ and into His body, the church, the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church also encompasses teaching the church, testifying of Christ, guiding believers in all truths, glorifying Christ, imparting God’s love to believers, empowering them to overcome sin, bearing

repentant sinners by the Holy Spirit into Christ and into His body, the church (CP Eph 4:1-6). Here Paul

witness to their adoption as sons of God, making known the things God has prepared for them, distributing gifts to the church, enduing believers with power to be Christ’s witness in the world, helping them to pray, interceding for them with the Father, inviting all who are willing, to be saved. These works are not conclusive but will suffice for the purpose of this study. Also, they are not in any official order but are listed like this simply to show the extent of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church (CP Jn 14:26).

This work of the Holy Spirit is to enable believers to understand clearly and to recall the teachings of Christ in scripture (CP 1Jn 2:20). *Unction* here (KJV), is the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon believers which enables them to distinguish between good and bad teaching in the church (CP V 27). This does not mean that human teachers are not needed in the church, but that believers, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, already known the truth and have no need of any instruction from false teachers who try to seduce them from the truth (CP V 20-27) the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ. He bears witness to believers, then through them, to the world. He glorifies Christ in the outworking in believers of all the Spiritual gifts and graces He distributes to the church (CP Ro 12:5-18; 1Cor 12:4-11, 28; Eph 4:7-16). The Holy Spirit testifies of Christ in everything He has done and is doing in believers. It is only in and through the Holy Spirit that Christ is made known (CP Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-15; 1Cor 12:3; 1Jn 5:5-6).

The Holy Spirit will also raise up dead believers (CP Ro 8:11). *Quicken* here (KJV), means give life to. The Holy Spirit will raise up dead believers to life at the first resurrection, when Christ comes again to take all the saints of God back to heaven with Him (CP Jn 5:25, 28-29; 14:1-3; 1Cor 15:51-58; 1Th 4:13-18; Rev 20:4-6). The presence of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church is God’s assurance to believers of their future resurrection and eternal inheritance in Christ (CP Ro 8:23; 1Cor 6:14; 2Cor 1:21-22; 4:13-14; 5:1-5; Eph 1:3-14; 4:30; 1Th 4:14). The word *earnest* in 2Cor 1:22, 5:5 and Eph 1:14 (KJV), is used figuratively of the Holy Spirit which God has given to believers in this present life to assure them of their final redemption. Further proof of this is the love God has for believers which the Holy Spirit has poured out into their hearts (CP Jn 5:1-11). Eph 1:3-14 teaches that through their union with Christ, believers have already been made beneficiaries of every spiritual blessing from heaven in accordance with God’s redemptive plan in Christ. Whether redemption, forgiveness, bodily healing, gifts of the Spirit, the assurance of immortality, the promise of the resurrection, the inheritance of the Kingdom of Heaven, the privileges of adoption, etc. The Holy Spirit is the source of them all.

The Holy Spirit bears witness to believers’ adoption as sons of God when they receive Christ as their Saviour (CP Jn 1:12; Ga 3:26 with Ro 8:14-16; Ga 4:4-7). The Holy Spirit leads believers in the way of righteousness. He empowers them to follow after

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righteousness and not fulfil the lusts of the flesh (CP Ro 6:6-7; Ga 2:20-21; 5:24-25). The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those who diligently study God's word, and through anointed preachers and teachers God has set in the church (CP 2Ti 3:16-17 with Eph 4:11-16). The Holy Spirit sanctifies believers for their salvation (CP 2Th 2:13). *Sanctification* in this context defines the work of the Holy Spirit in believers, separating them from sin to serve God; enabling them to live holy lives unto salvation (CP Ro 6:17-18, 22; 1Cor 1:30; 6:9-11; Col 3:5-7; Tit 3:3-7). The Holy Spirit produces Christlike graces in believers that glorifies Christ and ensures their salvation (CP Ga 5:22-25). The Holy Spirit transforms believers into Christ's image. His is a ministry of constant transformation, progressively moulding and refining believers as the reflection of God's standard they behold in Christ (CP 2Cor 3:18 with Ro 8:29; 2Cor 4:6). This is part of the process of believers' sanctification.

Another work of the Holy Spirit attributed to Him in scripture is generally misconstrued by most Christians (CP 1Cor 2:9-10). The *things that God has prepared for them that love Him* in V 9 is generally construed by contemporary Christians as referring to the wonders of heaven awaiting believers in eternity. But a careful study of the context in which the words in V 9 were spoken, clearly shows that is not correct (CP V 1-10). When kept in context it is plainly evident that what Paul said in V 9 does not refer to the wonders of heaven awaiting believers in eternity, but rather to the knowledge of God's purpose for fallen man, which the Holy Spirit imparts to believers in this life, which is what V 10 clearly teaches. *The Wisdom of God in a mystery* in V 7 is the gospel – God's plan of Redemption for fallen man through the propitiatory death of His Son, Jesus Christ (CP Ro 16:25-26). It was God's plan of redemption for fallen man through the propitiatory death of Jesus Christ, His Son, that Paul was referring to in 1Cor 2:9 which was revealed by the Holy Spirit in V 10. It was not the wonders of heaven awaiting believers in eternity, as so many think (CP 1Cor 2:11-16 with Psa 31:19-24 and Ro 11:33-36). Had the religious leaders of Israel been open to receiving the knowledge of God, they would never have crucified Jesus (CP 1Cor 2:8).

Because believers sometimes do not know what they

should pray for as they ought, the Holy Spirit helps them to pray. He intercedes for them with God for that which He knows accords with God's will (CP Ro 8:26-27; 1Cor 2:11). *Groanings which cannot be uttered* in Ro 8:26 refers to prayers to God expressed inarticulately. This points to the intercessory prayer of the Holy Spirit being uttered by believers praying in tongues. The expression of believers' hearts and spirits are taken by the Holy Spirit and made into effectual prayer (CP Ac 2:4; 1Cor 14:14; Eph 6:18; Jude 20).

This is not an exhaustive study, but shows something of the vast sphere of operation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament church. It is apt then to close the study on His empowering of believers for their witness to Christ in the world (CP Lu 24:46-49 with Ac 1:4-5, 8). Being endued with power from on high, means being baptised in the Holy Spirit. The sure evidence that this has occurred is the recipient's ability to talk in tongues (CP Ac 2:1-4; 10:44-46; 19:1-6). When they are baptised in the Holy Spirit, believers are empowered to cast out demons; take up serpents; not be harmed if they drink any deadly poison; heal the sick; raise the dead; make the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak, etc. In fact, they can do everything and more, that Jesus himself did in His earthly ministry (CP Mk 16:17-20; Jn 14:12-14). This empowering by the Holy Spirit is the inherent right of every believer in Christ throughout the church age, from the day of Pentecost onward (CP Ac 2:37-39). *All that are afar off* in V 39, includes believers today. (For a more detailed study on the baptism in the Holy Spirit see Lesson 4, *Baptism in the Spirit*, in author's book **Foundational Truths of the Christian Faith, Signs and wonders in God's redemptive plan, in Advanced Studies in the Christian Faith, (Volume 1)**, and comments on Mt 3:11, Mk 16:17-18, Lu 12:49, Jn 3:3, Jn 3:5, Jn 3:8, Jn 7:37-39, Jn 14:12-14, Jn 20:22, Ac 1:8, Ac 2:1-4(a), Ac 2:1-4(B), Ac 19:11-12, Ro 8:26-27, 1Cor 12:1-11(A), 1Cor 12:1-11(B), 1Cor 13:8-12 in **A Question and Answer Study of the New Testament**).