

The Holy Spirit: His Work

Theologian Alister McGrath once identified the Holy Spirit as “the Cinderella of the Trinity. The other two sisters”, he said, “may have gone to the theological ball; the Holy Spirit got left behind every time.”¹ Ouch! The Holy Spirit is a mystery to us and He is often overlooked and misunderstood. Let’s take the opportunity to explore the truths of who the Holy Spirit is and the fullness of His work.

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. He is the personal presence of the eternal God. He is the agent of God’s activity.

As the agent of God, the Holy Spirit is always at work. He is the One who prompts us to understand our need for God. He increases our desire and ability to know God and His ways and to implement those ways in our lives.

The Indwelling of the Spirit

At conversion, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells inside of us as we ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of our lives—we call this indwelling. We enter into new spiritual life through receiving the gift of salvation provided by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17 states this truth so beautifully: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Transformation by the Spirit

At this point, our transformation through the Holy Spirit begins.

“However much we may wish it otherwise, when we receive the Spirit at conversion divine perfection does not set in, but divine “infection” does! We have been invaded by the living God himself, in the person of his Spirit, whose goal is to infect us thoroughly with God’s own likeness. Paul’s phrase for this infection is the fruit of the Spirit. The coming of the Spirit, with the renewing of our minds, gives us a heavenly appetite for this fruit. The growing of this fruit is the long way on the journey of Christian conversion, the “long obedience in the same direction,” and it is altogether the work of the Spirit in our lives.”² [...]

“These fruit cover a broad range, including all manner of attitudes, virtues, and behavior. Every aspect of Christian life, across the broadest possible spectrum, is the work of the Spirit. Fruit include the experiences of joy and peace within the believing community; attitudes such as gentleness, forbearance, and self-control; and behavior such as love, kindness, goodness, and all others consonant with these...”³

This transformation by the Holy Spirit is a life-long endeavor. There are profound pictures throughout scripture describing this process—the potter molding the clay, the master gardener in His vineyard, as well as the athlete training and finishing the race. All of these scriptures help us come to an understanding of the transformation process that the Holy Spirit is

¹ C. Samuel Storms, *A Sincere and Pure Devotion to Christ*, 51

² Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, 112

³ Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God*, 115

completing. He is very “hands on” in our lives, as is the potter and the master gardener. Also, we have a significant role to play as well. We partner with the Spirit in our openness to Him and His promptings, our perseverance in implementing changes in our thoughts, habits, actions, and lifestyle.

There is an awesome mystery that comes within the process. Although He is working His same fruit within each of us, the ways, times, depths and seasons that He does this work is unique to each one of us.

The Holy Spirit is always at work. He works in seasons of ease in our lives, as well as seasons of difficulty.

“If you think having the fruit of the Spirit in your life is only possible when you have a lot of time on your hands, an ability to spend hours sitting under a tree reading, then you don’t understand the fruit. If we all had this ideal environment, we could develop a semblance of the fruit of the Spirit. But the great thing about the fruit of the Spirit is that it operates in difficulties. It’s really seen most clearly then. In writing to the Galatians, Paul knew they had seen the fruit of the Spirit in his life when he had been under extreme pressure and adversity. God’s Spirit in us works whether the temperature is emotionally cold or hot. In all kinds of temperatures, the Spirit of God is seeking to bear fruit.”⁴

The Gifts of the Spirit

Another major aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work is the giving of additional gifts for the advancement of the mission of the Church—to glorify God, to advance His Kingdom here on earth, and to edify and encourage the saints. All of these gifts are given out of love from our Heavenly Father to His children.

These gifts of the Spirit are given because of our human weakness. We have been given the awesome task of advancing His Kingdom. Only God has full understanding and knowledge, only God can accomplish the impossible. The gifts of the Spirit are given to help bless and strengthen us in the midst of our partnership with God to accomplish His mission.

These gifts are given to be ministered through love and sensitivity to others. God loves His Church to such a capacity that He desires to break through and directly communicate with His Church through the gift of prophecy. His Spirit within us so deeply desires to fully express worship, intercession, and adoration without being hindered by our limited understanding. So, God has given us the gift of public tongues and interpretation.

These gifts edify and build up the Church, encouraging the advancement of His Kingdom. A prophecy spoken in wisdom and love can deeply in a time of needed encouragement, direction, or clarification. As 1 Corinthians 14:3 explains, prophecies are given for another’s “strengthening, encouragement, and comfort.” A public tongue and interpretation can move a non-believer to the point of recognizing, as 2 Corinthians 14:25 states, that “God is really among you!”

What a truly remarkable God we have, to give such amazing gifts to His Church to help us accomplish His awesome task of advancing His Kingdom!

⁴ Dr. George O. Wood, *Living in the Spirit*, 110

God desires for us to partner with Him and He gives us Himself, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. But He doesn't just leave us with this "divine infection," He continues to grow His character in us through His continual transformation and through growing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Then, He further helps us accomplish His mission through the gifts of His Spirit working through our lives.

Questions for Discussion

- How has this article impacted the way that you understand the Holy Spirit and His work?
- The article describes the Holy Spirit as "the Cinderella of the Trinity," having been "left behind from going to the theological ball." Which work of the Spirit are you most familiar with? Which work do you have the least understanding about?
- Our relationship with the Holy Spirit is dynamic, and His work in our lives is constant. In light of this description, is there a character area of your life that you would like to invite the Holy Spirit to further transform?
- Would you like to further understand or experience the gifts of the Spirit in your life? What could be a next step for you in this area?

Indwelling Presence of the Spirit

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| John 3:3-8 | (v. 7) ... <i>'You must be born again'...</i> |
| Romans 8:11-16 | <i>And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is...</i> |
| 2 Cor. 5:17 | <i>Therefore, if anyone is in Christ...</i> |
| Eph. 1:13-14 | <i>And you also were included in Christ...</i> |

Transformation by the Spirit/Fruit of the Spirit

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|----------------|---|
| Isaiah 64:8 | <i>...We are the clay, you are the potter...</i> |
| John 15:1-8 | <i>"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener..."</i> |
| 1 Cor. 9:24-27 | <i>...Run in such a way as to get the prize...</i> |
| 2 Cor. 3:18 | <i>...are being transformed into His image...</i> |
| Gal. 5:22-23 | <i>But the fruit of the Spirit is...</i> |
| Titus 2:11-14 | <i>...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness...</i> |

Gifts of the Spirit

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|-----------------|---|
| Romans 12:6-8 | <i>We have different gifts...</i> |
| 1 Cor. 12:4-11 | <i>There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit...</i> |
| 1 Cor. 12:27-31 | <i>Now you are the body of Christ, and each one...</i> |
| 1 Cor. 14:1 | <i>...eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit...</i> |
| Eph. 4:11-13 | <i>So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets...</i> |
| Heb. 2:3-4 | <i>(v. 4) ...and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed...</i> |