

The Spirit of Jesus

“they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” Acts 16:7b

“And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.” Romans 8:9b

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Introduction

The Holy Spirit is also known as the Spirit of Jesus. This title for the Holy Spirit comes from the book of Acts – which tells us “they tried to enter Bithynia, but **the Spirit of Jesus** would not allow them to” (Acts 16:7b).

In this essay we will examine who the Holy Spirit is, how He relates to Jesus, and how we should relate to Him.

The Holy Spirit is Divine

The Holy Spirit is not merely a force or a power or some sort of emanation. The Holy Spirit is God Himself.

We know this because of passages such as:

Now **the Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from **the Lord, who is the Spirit**. (2 Cor 3:17-18)

This is a straightforward statement and is enough to settle the case by itself. I am even more intrigued by the way Peter casually embeds his convictions about the divinity of the Holy Spirit into his rebuke of Ananias:

Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that **you have lied to the Holy Spirit** and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? **You have not lied just to human beings but to God.**” (Acts 5:3-4)

Observe the parallelism between the two bolded excerpts. Who did Ananias lie to? He lied to the Holy Spirit, which Peter says is the same as lying to God. Peter had such a bedrock conviction that the Holy Spirit is God that it formed the foundation of his arguments even when in the grip of strong emotion.

The Bible is clear: the Holy Spirit is divine.

The Holy Spirit is a Divine Person

Not only is the Holy Spirit God; the Holy Spirit is a person. Some people think the Holy Spirit is just the spirit of God in the same way that my spirit, the spirit of Glen, is not a separate person from Glen. How can we know that the Holy Spirit is a personal being?

Jesus spoke of Him as another person. In John 14:16 Jesus says,

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another advocate** to help you and be with you forever— **the Spirit of truth.**”

We also know that the Holy Spirit is a person because He speaks (all over the NT) and can be lied to (as we just saw in Acts 5:3). He is described in personal terms by James at the Jerusalem council (“it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” in Acts 15:28) and in 1st Corinthians 12:11 it says,

“All these [gifts] are **the work of one and the same Spirit**, and **he distributes** them to each one, just as **he determines.**”

And very significantly for our purposes, the Holy Spirit can be grieved - “And do not **grieve the Holy Spirit** of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” This means He feels.

So the Spirit speaks (and therefore has intellect), makes decisions (and therefore has volition), and feels (and therefore has emotions). What else do we mean by person than a thinking, feeling, deciding being?

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus

We have seen that the Spirit is divine and that the Spirit is a person; in other words, the Holy Spirit is a member of the Godhead. He is one with the Father and the Son; they collectively comprise the Trinity. While the Spirit is one with the Father, in this essay we are particularly interested in His oneness with Jesus which is alluded to several times in the New Testament.

- Romans 8:9, “You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not **have the Spirit of Christ**, they do not belong to Christ.”
- Philippians 1:19, “I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of **the Spirit of Jesus Christ** what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance”
- Acts 16:7, “When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but **the Spirit of Jesus** would not allow them to.”
- And most remarkably, in 1 Peter 1:10-11 He is referred to as the Spirit of Christ even before the Incarnation: “Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care,¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which **the Spirit of Christ in them** was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. “

Why the tight connection? The Son became flesh and walked upon the earth doing God’s work, and when He ascended into heaven He poured out the Spirit to pick up where He left off.

Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will be “another advocate” (ἄλλον παράκλητον) in John 14:16. The Spirit will relate to them in the same way Jesus relates to them. Jesus goes so far as to say that it will be better for us when He ascends into Heaven, for upon His ascension He will pour out the Holy Spirit and we will have another Advocate who will dwell not merely with us but within us.

What does that mean for us practically?

We Live by the Spirit

In Galatians 5:25 Paul urges us: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

There are two components here:

- 1) We need to recognize that we live by the Spirit.
- 2) We then have an obligation to keep in step with the Spirit.

What does Paul mean when he says, “we live by the Spirit?”

He means precisely that—our entire life as Christians is rooted in the Holy Spirit. When we become Christians we are born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8) and without Him we have no spiritual life. This means that every believer is already in relationship with the Holy Spirit.

It is nonetheless true that the Holy Spirit is the most confusing member of the Trinity. As one theologian observed, He is the first we encounter and the last we understand. Partly this is because Jesus is easier to relate to. He was human as well as divine, whereas the Spirit is purely divine. It is also because the Spirit comes to give glory to Jesus, and so when we look upon the Spirit we see Christ. The Holy Spirit is like an angled mirror reflecting Jesus to us, so noticing details about the mirror itself is hard.

One of the best ways to understand the Spirit is through the images the Bible uses to describe Him. There’s the dove at Jesus’ baptism. There’s the metaphor of a stamp of authenticity that Paul uses. There’s the metaphor of oil. But there are two recurring images that show us what it means to live by the Spirit: air and water.

We Live By The Spirit Like Air, The Holy Spirit Invisibly Surrounds Us

Air – or wind – is the central image for the Holy Spirit in the Bible. In fact, both the Greek word πνεῦμα (pneuma) and the Hebrew word רוּחַ (ruach) not only mean spirit they also mean breath or wind or air. The Holy Spirit’s name in the Bible could just as easily be translated as the Holy Breath or the Holy Wind.

This imagery recurs again and again:

- “And with that [Jesus] breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” John 20:22
- “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:2, 4a)
- “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

One of the defining facts about air is that we cannot see it but we know it’s there. We know it’s there because we’re alive. There are lot of things we need for life, but nothing more desperately than air. We can go without food, water, or sleep for days. Without air we will only last minutes.

The second way we can know air is there is that we can see its effects. The wind blows leaves about, we feel the wind on our faces, but we don’t see it.

That’s the nature of the Holy Spirit. How can we tell the Holy Spirit is here?

- We’re alive. As Paul said, “we live by the Spirit.”
- We can see the Spirit’s effects.

What kind of effects?

1. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual strength. In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prays, “that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be **strengthened with power through His Spirit** in the inner man”

2. The Holy Spirit encourages us. We read in Acts 9:31, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and **encouraged by the Holy Spirit**, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.”
3. The Holy Spirit gives us insight. As Paul says in 1 Cor 2:12-14 “Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, **so that we may know** the things that are freely given to us by God. And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those **taught by the Spirit**, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (NET)
4. The Holy Spirit facilitates worship. Jesus tells us that “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Paul reminds us that we “**worship in the Spirit of God**” (Philippians 3:3). Paul is even clearer about the connection between the Spirit and worship: “be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph 5:18b-20).
5. The Holy Spirit gives us confidence in our relationship with Christ. Romans 8:16, “**The Spirit Himself bears witness** with our spirit that we are children of God.”

These effects are evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. Like the wind the Holy Spirit cannot be seen directly. This is by design. But we can know He is there by the works he does in and through us.

We live by the Spirit like we live by air.

We Live By The Spirit Like Water, The Holy Spirit Quenches Our Thirst and Washes Us Clean

The next primal metaphor is the Scripture uses for the Spirit is water.

As Jesus famously said, “On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, **out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.**’ Now **he said this about the Spirit**, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” John 7:37-39, NRSV

As water, what does the Holy Spirit do? He quenches thirst and He washes us clean.

1. The Holy Spirit quenches our thirst. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to **drink of one Spirit.**” 1 Cor 12:13, NRSV. Not only does our new life in Christ begin in the Spirit, it is sustained by the Spirit. Suppose you have a garden. What do you need to do? You need to plant seeds and water them. If you do not water a plant periodically it dies. In a similar way, we need to regularly invite the Holy Spirit into our lives and drink from His presence. Without Him, we are spiritually parched.
2. The Holy Spirit washes us clean. 1 Corinthians 6:11, “And that is what some of you were. But **you were washed**, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and **by the Spirit of our God.**” Likewise in Titus 3:5b, “He saved us through **the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.**” He does this both by the mystical work of forgiving us and also by the practical work of transforming our character. In Romans 15:13b, Paul prays that we will “overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” In Galatians 5:22-23, we learn that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” In 1 Peter 1:2, the apostle

reminds us of “the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.” These and other verses attest to the fact that our moral progress as Christians is a byproduct of the Spirit working within us.

Without the water of the Holy Spirit we would be parched and filthy. With Him, we are refreshed and clean. We live by the Spirit like we live by water.

Let Us Keep In Step With The Spirit

Having seen that we do indeed live by the Spirit, let us ponder the second half of Paul’s command in Galatians 5:25, “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

What does it mean to “keep in step with the Spirit”? Paul no doubt had many things in mind as he wrote those words, but at a minimum he was suggesting that we need to move beyond receiving the passive work of the Spirit that sustains our spiritual life to embracing the active work of the Holy Spirit that empowers our daily life. In other words, he does not simply mean “since we live by the Spirit keep living by the Spirit” or “do what you’ve always done.” He means for us to go beyond the elements of our spiritual life we have already discussed.

Throughout the book of Acts the Holy Spirit is guiding believers and performing signs and wonders. Some theologians have suggested that we not call it the Acts of the Apostles but instead the Acts of the Holy Spirit. When Paul says keep in step with the Spirit, he is talking about stuff like that. The Spirit is on the move and it is our job to keep up.

But how?

In Acts 1:5 Jesus instructs the apostles, “For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be **baptized with the Holy Spirit.**”

The imagery of baptism bespeaks immersion. Baptism in the Spirit suggests that we are surrounded by the Holy Spirit. What should we expect to happen when the Holy Spirit surrounds us? We should expect that we will find ourselves doing the sorts of things the Holy Spirit does. For example, in John 15:26 Jesus teaches that the Holy Spirit “will testify about me” and in John 16:14 that “He will glorify me.” The Holy Spirit draws attention to Jesus. We ought therefore not be surprised that those baptized in the Spirit do the same thing. This is what Jesus promised His apostles in Acts 1:8, “**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Baptism in the Holy Spirit (which is sometimes called “receiving the Holy Spirit,” “being filled with the Holy Spirit,” or “having the Holy Spirit come on you”) has a purpose – it allows us to keep in step with the Spirit. We become God’s partners in doing His will on earth.

Although every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (that’s how we become Christians), not every Christian has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. There’s a fascinating story in Acts 8:14-17 highlighting this:

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because **the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.** Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Notice the details: they had been baptized in the name of Jesus, but there was an experience of the Holy Spirit that they lacked. And somehow this lack was obvious to external observers, because when Peter and John arrived they could tell that

the Samaritans had not received the Spirit yet. This suggests that the baptism in the Holy Spirit produces evidence that is clear to those who are looking for it.

A similar experience occurs in Ephesus in Acts 19:4-6

Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

They believed and were baptized, and it was shortly after that they had an experience where “the Holy Spirit came on them.” The gap in time between the two experiences is much shorter here than in Samaria (minutes rather than weeks), but there is nonetheless a distinction between the two.

This doesn’t mean that there always has to be a gap. In Acts 10:44-48 a group is baptized with the Spirit as they are in the process of receiving Christ.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Here again we see that baptism in the Spirit is an observable thing. Peter and his fellow believers could instantly tell that it happened. The evidence that persuaded them was speaking in tongues. We saw this same evidence in the Ephesian story. In fact, when we survey all the stories of baptism in the Holy Spirit told in the book of Acts, tongues plays a role whenever any description is given.

- On the day of Pentecost, we read in Acts 2:4, “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”
- With the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house, “the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.” The word *for* is significant in this passage. It demonstrates that speaking in tongues was taken as evidence that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them.
- When Saul became a Christian, Ananias said “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). This passage is interesting because Ananias prays for Saul and nothing more is said about his being filled with the Spirit, but later we see Saul saying things like “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues” (1 Cor 14:5) and “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you” (1 Cor 14:18).
- In Ephesus we see that “the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6).

This is impressive consistency. Anytime Spirit baptism is described tongues are included in the list of phenomena, and the two times when it is merely mentioned and not described tongues are either later demonstrated to be a significant part of the person’s Christian walk (Saul) or there is clear allusion to observable phenomenon (Samaria).

In other words, it seems as though God has kindly given us specific evidence to look for that can let us know we have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. This is wonderful, because many aspects of our walk with Christ are difficult to quantify. In particular, experiences with the Holy Spirit can feel very vague in our memories. We are aware of His presence at a retreat, and later when we seek to recall it the experience is hard to reconstruct. Very often we seem to use our emotional intensity as a proxy for the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We get baptized in goosebumps and call that sufficient, but the evidence that persuaded apostles is that they heard people speaking in tongues.

Praying For the Spirit Is The Safest Prayer We Can Pray

Keeping in step with the Spirit, being baptized in the Spirit, speaking in tongues – all this makes many people nervous. This is why Jesus went out of His way to assure us that praying for the Holy Spirit is safe.

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:11-13)

If you pray for the Spirit, nothing bad will happen to you. You won't open yourself to evil spiritual influences. You won't be given a counterfeit. The absolute worst-case scenario is that nothing happens because God's timing is different from yours. The best-case scenario is that you will have a deeper encounter with the Holy Spirit. And that is always a good thing.

We Should Eagerly Seek Spiritual Gifts

The work of the Spirit is often subtle: He molds our character, He gently guides us, or He fills our hearts with peace. There is another type of work the Spirit does that can be loud and visible and a little bit weird. These are usually called “spiritual gifts” and Paul gives several lists of them.

- “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.” 1 Corinthians 12:7-10
- “And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.” 1 Corinthians 12:28
- “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” Romans 12:6-8

Some of these are normal things empowered to a new level (serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, etc) and others are extraordinary things we would not normally expect people to do at all (gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, etc).

There is virtually no controversy about the “normal” spiritual gifts. We are grateful that God gives teachers and leaders to the Church. We yearn for the Spirit to help us become encouraging and generous people. These are the spiritual gifts nearly everyone wants.

There are also extraordinary spiritual gifts. Paul was quite enthusiastic about them:

- “Follow the way of love and **eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit**, especially prophecy.” (1 Cor 14:1)
- “**I thank God that I speak in tongues** more than all of you.” (1 Cor 14:18)
- “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, **be eager to prophesy**, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.” (1 Cor 14:39)

Paul is very clear: people who love Jesus should want extraordinary spiritual gifts. We are told to eagerly desire them. This means that we should regard the gifts in a positive light – with joyful anticipation. Furthermore, we should regularly pray for spiritual gifts. We should pray that God enables us to prophecy, to speak in tongues, and to heal the sick. We should want to practice all the gifts.

Why?

Because Jesus operated in spiritual gifts, and so practicing them makes us more like Jesus. And that is the Spirit’s role: to make us Christlike. Through the fruit of the Spirit He conforms us to the character of Christ, and through the gifts of the Spirit He empowers us to fulfill the ministry of Christ.

What does that look like?

1. Being filled with the Holy Spirit empowers our prayers. Jude 20 and Ephesians 6:18 both remind us “**pray in the Holy Spirit**.” This is similar to the way Paul describes speaking in tongues in 1st Corinthians 14:14-15, “**For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays**, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? **I will pray with my spirit**, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.” Romans 8:26 goes even further and tells us “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” Insofar as we want a more vibrant and effective prayer life, we should want to be filled with the Spirit.
2. Being filled with the Holy Spirit gives us power for witnessing. This is one of the biggest consequences of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised in Acts 1:8, “**you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you**; and you shall be My witnesses.” Paul teaches this as well from the other side, describing how people were touched by his ministry: “our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). If we want to see our friends come to Christ, we should yearn to be baptized with the Spirit.
3. Being filled with the Spirit helps us follow God’s guidance. Paul testifies in Acts 20:22-23 - “And now, **compelled by the Spirit**, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city **the Holy Spirit warns me** that prison and hardships are facing me.” Paul is speaking about all the prophetic words the church was receiving, warning him of his upcoming arrest. If we desire to help our friends understand God’s will, we should want God to speak to them through us.
4. Being filled with the Holy Spirit enables us to serve Christ in the Church. Speaking of spiritual gifts, Paul tells us that “to each one **the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good**.” (1 Cor 12:7). The spiritual gifts are about loving our neighbor as ourselves. Here’s another way to think about it: when I receive the gift of healing, who really receives a gift? The one who is healed is blessed far more than the one who is praying for the healing. When I receive a prophetic word, who is blessed most? Those who receive the word and are encouraged by it. To the extent we want

to bless those around us, we should eagerly desire spiritual gifts.

When we are afraid of or nervous about the gifts of the Spirit, we are afraid of or nervous about Christlikeness. We are nervous about praying better, witnessing more effectively, and serving with greater impact.

The Holy Spirit is truly the Spirit of Jesus. He makes us more like Jesus and helps us perpetuate the mission of Jesus. Since you live by Him, keep in step with Him.

Additional Reading

- Jack Deere, *Surprised By the Power of the Holy Spirit*. Well-written and very Biblical. This book was particularly helpful to me as I processed the Biblical arguments about whether or not spiritual gifts were something we should expect today. Read this book if you mostly want to know “why.”
- Sam Storms, *The Beginners Guide To Spiritual Gifts*. This book is a practical guide to spiritual gifts. Read this book if you mostly want to know “how.”