

# The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

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DOCTRINAL SERIES



Adapted from *A Treatise on the Holy Spirit*  
by Elder Shun Dao Hsieh

## **TRUE JESUS CHURCH**

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# The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

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## Preface to the second edition

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”

John 14:26

From these words spoken by Jesus, we can see that the Holy Spirit has a special role to play in the life of a believer. This promised gift is sent by the Father to dwell within His children, to work wonders in and through their lives. But who is the Holy Spirit and what is the significance of being “born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:5–6)? Importantly, how can we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and what is the evidence of having received it? These questions, and many more, are explored in this book.

*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* seeks to clarify the understanding of the Godhead and, specifically, to reconcile the truth of the One True God with the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, who is God Himself (Jn 4:24).

The first edition of *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* was published in 2008, after being translated and adapted from Elder Shun Dao Hsieh’s *A Treatise on the Holy Spirit*. The latter is a Chinese book first published by the Taiwan General Assembly of the True Jesus Church in 1966. Since then, Elder Hsieh has continued to study and research into the subject of the Holy Spirit, making revisions and additions to subsequent editions of his treatise.

For this second edition of *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Elder Hsieh’s supplements were translated, expanded where necessary and added to the original content of the English-language version. They include further explanations and examinations of the idea of trinity



and competing theories of the Godhead in the first chapter. Some minor proof-edits have also been made throughout the book to further smooth out the language and catch any errors remaining from the first edition.

Thank God for guiding this process, to complete the work according to His will, by the hands of many workers around the world. This includes contributions from editors, proofreaders and members of the Review Board of the International Assembly. Special thanks go to the Carmel Bookstore at the church in South Taichung, which provided a copy of Elder Hsieh's revised work, and to Sister Janet Yaw of Toronto, who translated the revisions. May God remember their diligent work.

It is hoped that readers of this book, whether they be members of the True Jesus Church, believers from other denominations or non-believers who are searching, be enlightened about the promise of the Holy Spirit and the importance of receiving Him. May the true knowledge of the Holy Spirit and His works be spread to all.

Amen.

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## Preface to the first edition

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

John 20:21–23

There are Christians who claim that the disciples received the Holy Spirit the moment Jesus breathed on them. The same people argue that whoever welcomes the Lord Jesus into his heart will experience the quiet abidance of the Holy Spirit. Other Christians believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but argue that it is not an experience every believer will have.

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Acts 1:4–5

Before His ascension to heaven from the Mount of Olives, the Lord Jesus told His disciples they would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, a few days later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out mightily. The disciples received the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

For many Christians, the issue is not whether a believer *receives* the Holy Spirit or not, but, rather, whether he is necessarily *baptized* with the Holy Spirit. They argue that these are two separate experiences and claim that a believer receives the Holy Spirit the moment he believes in the Lord; however, he may not be baptized by the Holy Spirit and

speak in tongues, unless God gives him this gift. The question is, are such beliefs valid?

Before the Lord Jesus was crucified, He promised the disciples: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:16–17). He also said, “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (Jn 16:7).

When Jesus breathed on the disciples, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit”, He had not yet ascended to heaven and “gone away”. His words indicated that the Holy Spirit (the Helper) had yet to come to dwell within man and therefore merely served to affirm His promise. However, there would soon come a time when it would be fulfilled, and the Holy Spirit would be poured out on those who truly believed in Jesus and were willing to follow Him to the end. Indeed, the Holy Spirit came after Jesus ascended to heaven, descending powerfully on the day of Pentecost to dwell within the believers (1 Cor 6:19–20) and within God’s church (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16).

The Book of Acts records that when Peter went to the house of the Gentile Cornelius and preached to his household, they all received the Holy Spirit, even as Peter was speaking. Peter and the accompanying Jewish Christians “heard them speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46). Peter said, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47).

Afterwards, when Peter returned to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him for associating with Gentiles. Peter proceeded to relate what had happened, saying, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 11:15–16). From this incident, we learn that when Cornelius and his household received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it was an audible experience—that is, they spoke in tongues.

The Bible tells us that God is Spirit (Jn 4:24), and unless He opens our eyes, we cannot know Him or understand His will. For example, God had hidden through the ages His plan to extend salvation to the

Gentiles through the crucifixion of Jesus; however, during the time of the apostles, He revealed it through a vision to Peter and through the downpour of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius' household (Acts 11:1–18). Before Jesus' death, no one was able to comprehend spiritual matters using their own worldly wisdom, confirming the fact that man cannot know the things of God, unless the Holy Spirit grants understanding (1 Cor 2:6–16).

Unfortunately, some Christians exploit the words of the Bible for their own purposes. But no matter how persuasive or moving their arguments might seem, they are merely the words of man and cannot enable people to touch the life which is contained in the word of God (1 Thess 2:13; 1 Jn 1:1–4). It is only when we receive the Holy Spirit and submit to His guidance that we can be led into all truth (Jn 16:13). Through the Holy Spirit, we can search the deep things of God; grasp the essence of the message in the Bible; interpret the Bible's meaning; and teach others the word of God accurately, thereby giving them the chance of spiritual life.

The aforementioned teachings relating to the Holy Spirit and much more are discussed in this English version of an original work by Elder Shun Dao Hsieh. *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* is part of a series of doctrinal books which are being published by the International Assembly's Department of Literary Ministry.

By way of background, Elder Hsieh's original book entitled *A Treatise on the Holy Spirit* was first published by the Taiwan General Assembly of the True Jesus Church in 1966. It was later expanded and republished in 1985. The book offered answers to issues relating to the Holy Spirit and interpreted biblical passages using the Bible as a sole reference. Elder Hsieh's work gives us an insight into his love for the word of God and his devotion to Bible study.

Ten years ago, it was the plan of the International Assembly to translate Elder Hsieh's book into different languages. Since that time, the book has been translated into Malay, as well as several other languages. Work also began on an English version. A number of workers translated the book, including Deaconess Esther Wee, Sister Pitlin Au, Sister Judy Chin and Sister Cindy Chin. Other brethren did the editing, including Sister Constance Lin, Brother Jason Hsu, Brother Ron Lear and Sister Shuhong Lim.

In July 2007, work on the English version resumed. A big challenge was the sourcing of the quotations used in the Chinese version of the book, many of which originated from English reference books. This task had to be done to guarantee the authenticity and accuracy of the quotations in the English revision. We thank God for His guidance which has resulted in the current English editor finding most of the references through research on the Internet, visits to the British Library, book loans, and the purchase of out-of-print books.

*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* is a revised version of Elder Hsieh's original work and has been developed specifically for an English readership. To this end, the language in the original translation has been reworked, the content has been expanded in some parts, and additional references have been included. The latter include Strong's reference numbers for the Hebrew and Greek words which are mentioned in the text.

We praise and give glory to God for His hand in the project, and without Him, we could not have accomplished anything. We also thank everyone involved for their contributions. Aside from the editor, we have had help from a number of proofreaders, graphic designers and the IA Review Board who kindly offered feedback on the early drafts. All these brethren have helped to bring the English revised version to completion.

May God continue to bestow His blessings, so that through the publication of this book our English-reading members will be able to have a more profound understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. We also pray that they will learn how to pursue the infilling of the Holy Spirit so that their spiritual lives may be enriched. Finally, we hope that the readers can grow to love God more, to value their faith and to treasure the truth.

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# Chapter 1

## WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

### 1.1 Introduction

The Bible presents seemingly mixed messages about the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, it teaches us to worship God in spirit and in truth for He is Spirit (Jn 4:24); on the other hand, it says that the natural man cannot perceive the things of God's Spirit (1 Cor 2:14). In truth, attempting to understand matters of the spiritual realm can be difficult. It can be likened to peering into a dimly lit mirror, and it is inevitable that some things will elude us for the time being. Nevertheless, God has provided some important insights to those who love Him and who have received His Spirit (Rom 8:5ff; 1 Cor 2:12ff). Moreover, we can take heart in the knowledge that one day we shall behold the complete and perfect picture (1 Cor 13:12).

### 1.2 The personality of the Holy Spirit

Some Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force, akin to God's motivating power or life force. In the Bible's original Greek language, the word for "Spirit", *pneuma*,<sup>1</sup> is synonymous with "breath" or "wind". So we could literally translate "Holy Spirit" as "Holy Breath" or "Holy Wind", but it would not do justice to the full range of the Holy Spirit's personality. The Lord Jesus once said that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a far graver sin than blasphemy against the Son of God (Mt 12:31–32). The strength of this warning makes it

1 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G4151.

difficult for us to accept that the Holy Spirit is merely an impersonal force which God controls like some divine tool. More to the point, in John 4:24, Jesus equates God with Spirit, and so the Spirit must be as personal as God Himself.

In John 14 to 16, Jesus uses the personal pronoun “He” five times to describe the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13, 14). In doing so, He conveys the Holy Spirit’s personality. Paul, likewise, attests to the Holy Spirit’s personality, saying, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things [i.e. manifesting spiritual gifts], distributing to each one individually as *He* wills” (1 Cor 12:11, emphasis added).

From the Bible, we see that the Holy Spirit’s personality manifests itself through three attributes: wisdom, emotion and will. Through His wisdom, the Holy Spirit created the universe and all living things (Gen 1:1–2; Ps 104:30); discerns good and evil (Eph 4:30); testifies to the truth and Jesus Christ (Jn 14:6; 15:26); searches the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10); teaches and instructs God’s people (Neh 9:20; Jn 14:26); guides believers into all truth (Jn 16:13); and reveals the mysteries of Christ (Eph 3:5). In terms of emotion, the Holy Spirit loves (Rom 15:30), extends grace (Heb 10:29), grieves (Isa 63:10; Eph 4:30), comforts (Acts 9:31), and intercedes for the believers (Rom 8:27). In terms of His will, the Holy Spirit has a “mind” (Rom 8:27); makes decisions (Acts 15:28); issues commands (Acts 8:29); commissions divine workers (Acts 13:1–4); directs the church ministry (Acts 16:6); ordains workers to divine offices (Acts 20:28); apportions spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:11); evangelizes and pastors (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:17).

### **1.3 Who is the Holy Spirit?**

If the Holy Spirit has a personality, who is He? The mystery of the Godhead cannot be fully explained because we, as humans, have a limited understanding of the spiritual realm. Whilst God is Spirit, we are but flesh. He transcends our ability to know and describe Him adequately. Not surprisingly, we see that many Christians have long been perplexed by the nature of the Godhead. But still, some have attempted to make sense of Him through man-made doctrines such as the Trinity and modalism. In most cases, these doctrines have been

at variance with each other. The Nicene Creed, as laid down at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, illustrates, for example, how the doctrine of the Trinity began as an adjudication of disputes over Christ's divinity and debates on the nature of the Godhead.

From the fourth century AD, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church have held on to the concept of the Trinity as fundamental to the Christian faith. Undeniably, there are deep mysteries inherent in trying to fully understand the Godhead, yet resorting to such a doctrine is unwise, given what the New Testament canon has already revealed to us. It is a man-made teaching, and one that illustrates how human wisdom and philosophy have attempted to rationalize the mystery of the Godhead, leading to an unfortunate departure from the original apostolic faith.

The apostle Paul says, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11). Understanding the nature of the Godhead requires spiritual wisdom and revelation through God's Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should rely on His Spirit rather than worldly wisdom in order to attain a true knowledge (Jn 14:26; 16:13; Eph 1:17).

Many times, the Bible uses "Holy Spirit" and "Spirit of God" interchangeably, highlighting that the Holy Spirit is God's Spirit. From this, we understand that the Holy Spirit is not separate from God; rather, the Holy Spirit is God Himself. The Nicene Creed states that Christ is the "very God of very God", i.e. Christ is God Himself. Yet, when it comes to the Holy Spirit, its authors seem somewhat undecided about His relationship to God and stop short of claiming that the Holy Spirit is the "very God of very God".

From the Bible, we see that the Holy Spirit has various titles:

- "The Spirit of the LORD" (Judg 3:10; Lk 4:18)
- "The Spirit of God" (Mt 3:16)
- "The Spirit of [the] Father" (Mt 10:20)
- "The Spirit of Christ" (Rom 8:9)
- "The Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7)
- "The Spirit of His [i.e. God's] Son" (Gal 4:6)



These titles reveal that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the heavenly Father and the Spirit of Jesus.

### **1.3.1 The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the heavenly Father**

Genesis 1:1 tells us that “God created the heavens and the earth”, and Genesis 1:2 says, “The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” before everything was created. So God and the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) are one and the same.

In the Old Testament, God promised to pour down the Holy Spirit on His people. In doing so, He repeatedly referred to the Spirit as His Spirit (Ezek 36:27; 37:14; Joel 2:28–29). As we reflect on the prophetic messages, we cannot help but be amazed that God ever contemplated dwelling within man. Yet, from the Bible, we know it is true: the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, causing apostle Peter to declare that God’s promise had been fulfilled (Acts 2:16–18). Today, we know that God’s promise continues to be fulfilled, for 1 John 3:24 says, “And by this we know that He [God] abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.” Also, 1 John 4:13 says, “By this we know that we abide in Him [God], and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”

Jesus said, “The Father is in Me” (Jn 10:38). God is Spirit (Jn 4:24); therefore, for the Father to be in Jesus, the Spirit of the Father must have been in Jesus. That is to say, the Spirit whom Jesus received after baptism was the Spirit of the Father (Mt 3:16; Lk 4:18).

Apostle Paul’s writings also show that the Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit: “It is the same God who works all in all” (1 Cor 12:6); “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13); “One God and Father of all, who is . . . in you all” (Eph 4:6); “Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you” (1 Cor 6:19). Paul also talks about the spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit in this way: “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11). Elder James adds, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (Jas 1:17).

All the Bible verses above indicate one fundamental point—the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the heavenly Father Himself. He is not a

third, distinct and separate “person” of a triune God, as claimed by those who uphold the doctrine of the Trinity.

### 1.3.2 The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus

In Acts 8:26–39, we read of Philip being sent to preach the gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch and subsequently baptizing him. The writer, Luke, describes how “the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot’ ” (v. 29), and concludes with how “the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away” (v. 39). Luke’s concept of the Godhead equates the Holy Spirit with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. The same equation can be seen in Acts 16:6–7: “They were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (v. 6); “After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit<sup>2</sup> did not permit them” (v. 7).

Apostle Paul also equates the Holy Spirit with Jesus’ Spirit in Galatians 4:6, which talks about how God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. To further illustrate the point, 2 Corinthians 3:17 says that “the Spirit of the Lord” gives us freedom, while Romans 8:2 states that “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” sets us free.

Concerning the work of creation, Genesis 1:2 says, “The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” before all things were created. The apostles also testified that all things were created through the Lord Jesus (Jn 1:3, 14; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16–17; Heb 1:2). This indicates that the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit—is also the Spirit of Jesus.

In his first Epistle, John writes, “But the anointing which you have received from Him [i.e. God] abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things” (1 Jn 2:27). Here, the “anointing”, which lives in our hearts and teaches us all things, refers to the Holy Spirit. It brings to mind the promise spoken by Jesus: “And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Helper...the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (Jn 14:16–18). Jesus indicated that He

<sup>2</sup> The eclectic Greek text in the 26th edition of the *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (N)* and the 3rd edition of the *United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (U)*, i.e. the NU-Text representing Alexandrian/Egyptian type texts, add “of Jesus.”

would soon go to the disciples—as the Spirit of truth—to live with them forever.

From the above biblical references, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. Again, it needs to be said that the Holy Spirit should not be viewed as a third and separate person of the Godhead.

#### **1.4 Exploring the concept of the Godhead**

Following the Council of Nicaea, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, laid the foundation for the modern doctrine of the Trinity, which is accepted today by the majority of Christian churches and denominations as a fundamental doctrine. Moreover, the Catholic Church pronounced as heretical anyone who did not confess the Nicene Creed.

The creed was a response to the heresy of Arius which held that God's absolute transcendence and unity were somehow in conflict with Jesus' full divinity. Arius had argued that Jesus was created by God the Father, and so could not be equal to the Father. There are undoubtedly major problems with Arius' concept of the Godhead, yet we can sympathize with his desire to uphold the unity (some say, monarchy) of God. In fact, the issues which arose in the post-apostolic period over the Godhead were generally the result of the tension between Jesus' oneness with God (Jesus' divinity) and His distinction from God (as the Son of man). Inevitably, the debates spilled over into matters pertaining to the Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is the belief in one God who subsists in three persons of one substance.<sup>3</sup> Christians who uphold this concept do not believe in three Gods (tritheism), as some people mistakenly think. Rather, they believe in a Godhead which comprises the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—three distinct persons in one. They claim that each “person” has a separate personality and is capable of separate existence; are coequal in position, glory and authority; are coeternal—that is, they existed separately from the beginning of time and will continue to exist separately for the rest of eternity.

Trinitarians often cite Matthew 28:19 as evidence for their belief. They argue that the one “name” mentioned in this verse indicates the

3 *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia (Electronic Database)* (Biblesoft, 1996).

oneness of God, while references to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit show the existence of three distinct persons.

Trinitarians also make use of a number of other biblical passages to support their views:

- When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and the heavenly Father's voice said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). They argue that this incident reveals the existence of three persons in the Godhead.
- Jesus often prayed to the heavenly Father during His earthly ministry (Mt 11:25–26; 14:23; 26:39, 42, 44) and interceded for His disciples (Lk 22:32; Jn 17:9–11, 20–23). They argue that if Jesus was not distinct from God, whom was He praying to?
- Jesus stated, "My Father is greater than I" (Jn 14:28). They argue that these words prove His distinction from the Father.
- The Bible describes Jesus as the Mediator between God and man, who lives forever and sits at God's right hand, interceding for the believers (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:22–25; 1 Jn 2:1). They argue that these descriptions show that Jesus is distinct from God the Father.
- Prior to being stoned, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw God's glory and Jesus standing at God's right hand (Acts 7:55–56). They argue that this incident shows, once again, that Jesus is a separate person from God the Father.

The founders of the doctrine of the Trinity were wise enough to avoid falling into the trap of tritheism and to uphold God's unity and oneness. However, they neglected the better approach, which was that of the apostles, who made no attempt to rationalize the mystery of the Godhead using human wisdom and human concepts.

For example, in order to maintain the oneness of God, Trinitarians describe the three persons of the Godhead as having one substance, or one "body". They use the analogy of marriage to support this idea:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24

However, this verse does not denote the literal oneness in flesh, spirit, or essence of husband and wife. Being joined as “one flesh” or body merely illustrates the intimate relationship between the two parties, where they remain forever as separate beings. Similarly, describing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one body does not adequately manifest God’s unity; it only portrays an intimate relationship between the three persons within the Godhead.

The doctrine also expounds a hierarchy within the Godhead, which is defined in this way: the first person of the Trinity is God the Father; the second is God the Son; the third, God the Holy Spirit. This imposed order of first, second and third is not found in the Bible, and further delineates the three persons of the Godhead. Whilst attempting to reject tritheism, this appears to be a move towards it.

Another central idea of the doctrine of the Trinity is the “eternal generation” of God the Son—that He is “eternally begotten”. This finds its origin in the work of scholars such as Augustine of Hippo, who attempted to reconcile the belief in the eternal nature of the Son with verses that call Him “the only begotten of the Father” (Jn 1:14, 18; Ps 2:7). This was later enshrined in the Nicene Creed as “Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father”. The creed emphasizes that the Son was “begotten, not made”. In AD 381, the Council of Constantinople revised the creed, adding “begotten of the Father *before all ages*” (emphasis added). But, if the Son was begotten before all ages, this suggests there was a point at which His existence began and conversely a time when He did not exist, thus negating the Son’s divinity.

In contemporary adaptations of the Nicene Creed, commonly used in Christian liturgy, this phrase has become “eternally begotten of the Father”. However, “eternally begotten” is a contradiction in terms. “Eternally” means there is no beginning and no end, whilst “begotten” denotes there *is* a beginning. For these reasons, it is confusing and unbiblical to assign the attribute “eternally begotten” to the Son.

From this brief analysis, it is apparent that the doctrine of the Trinity neither conforms to the teachings of the Bible, nor the language

that it uses. But does this mean we can never know anything of God's nature? Not at all. If we look carefully into the Bible, we find that it gives us some rich and profound insights. Specifically, there are three key topics which, when studied, can provide us with a clearer understanding of the Godhead: 1) the oneness of God's Spirit; 2) the biblical theme of salvation; 3) the Holy Spirit's transcendence over time and space.

### 1.4.1 The oneness of God's Spirit

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, the resounding message of the Bible is that God is one:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!  
Deuteronomy 6:4

Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Mark 12:29

However, because God has had, and continues to have, different work to undertake, particularly in relation to salvation, He has manifested Himself to humankind for a time as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is not helpful to see these manifestations as "persons" as such, because the Bible simply does not use this term (though for the purposes of clarity, we have used this term here in order to discuss the doctrine of the Trinity using its own language). Therefore, we cannot accept the views of those who uphold the doctrine of the Trinity and who claim that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God subsisting in three separate persons. The Bible tells us simply that God is one: He was one from the beginning of time and will be one to the end. The crux of the matter is that God is Spirit (Jn 4:24), and we cannot use physical concepts or concepts of our own devising to describe Him. If we do, we will merely get ourselves into a tangle.

Jesus once said of Himself, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of man who is in heaven"<sup>4</sup> (Jn 3:13). Some biblical texts say that the Son of man came down from

<sup>4</sup> The NU-Text omits "who is in heaven".

heaven, yet is in heaven. Understanding these words demands spiritual wisdom. Specifically, we need to appreciate that Jesus transcends time and space: He can be both on earth and in heaven at the same time. Hence, Jesus told Philip directly, “. . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9); “Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? . . .” (Jn 14:10). Jesus’ words tell us that He and the Father are one and the same Spirit.

Concerning God’s manifestation in the flesh, the mystery is that Jesus was both fully man and fully God. For this reason, we see a distinction in terms of the attributes of the Father and the Son:

- The Father’s position was greater than that of the Son. Jesus pointed out, “My Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28). As the Son, He was subject to the Father. He also had all the weaknesses and limitations associated with His humanity. Being sent by the Father, His words and deeds had to comply with the Father’s will (Jn 7:6, 8; Jn 12:49–50; Mt 26:39).
- The Father’s power was greater than that of the Son. As the Son, Jesus had to prepare for His earthly ministry by fasting and praying for forty days. Only then was He filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome Satan’s temptations (Lk 4:1–15). Throughout the rest of His ministry, Jesus prayed for power to accomplish the work entrusted to Him by the Father (Mk 1:35; Lk 5:15–16; Jn 17:4). Peter later testified to the source of Jesus’ power: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38). Hence, Jesus was not merely setting an example to us when He prayed; He relied on them to overcome the weakness of His flesh.
- The Father’s authority was greater than that of the Son. In His parting prayer, Jesus said that the Father had given Him all authority (Jn 17:2). It included the power to uphold the universe (Heb 1:3) and to control nature (Mk 4:37–41). From the Bible’s accounts of the prophet Daniel’s visions (Dan 7:13–14), the prayer of Jesus (Jn 17:2), and the Lord’s commission to His disciples (Mt 28:18–19), we understand that Jesus’ authority refers to His complete sovereignty over

the universe. When the gospel is preached to the ends of the earth, and the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord (Mt 24:14; Rev 11:15)—when God’s plan of salvation is fully complete—Jesus will have all the authority befitting His status as the King of kings (Rev 17:14; 19:16). At that time, all the visions that Daniel saw concerning God’s everlasting kingdom will be realized.

- The Father’s glory was greater than the Son’s glory. In His parting prayer, Jesus prayed to the Father, saying, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (Jn 17:4). The Son reflected the Father’s glory (Heb 1:3). So, in all that Jesus did—healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, being crucified on the cross and resurrecting from the dead—He did for the glory of the Father (Lk 17:15–18; Jn 9:1–3; 11:3–4, 40; 13:31–32; 17:1; Eph 1:20). According to the Father’s will, Jesus first had to wear a crown of thorns, undergo death, resurrect and ascend to heaven, before being crowned with glory and honour (Mt 27:29; Lk 24:26; Jn 7:39; Heb 2:9; Phil 2:8–11). In this sense, the glory of Jesus was less than that of the Father.
- The Father’s knowledge was greater than the Son’s knowledge. All that Jesus spoke was according to the Father’s command (Jn 12:49–50) and teaching (Jn 8:28). When talking about the “end of age”, He said, “When you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (Mt 24:33). But as to the day and hour of His second coming, Jesus added, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Mt 24:36). From these words, we see that the timing of Jesus’ second coming is hidden, even from Himself. In the same way, during His ministry, Jesus often had to wait for the heavenly Father to direct Him where to go (Jn 7:3–10). From these Bible passages, we understand that the Father’s knowledge was unlimited, whereas the Son’s was limited: all that the Son knew was revealed to Him by the Father.



The aforementioned passages seemingly put Jesus in a subordinate position, but we need to remember that they depict His position as the Son of man. Spiritually speaking, He was, and is, fully God.

In summary, when Jesus said, “My Father is greater than I” (Jn 14:28), He was referring to the heavenly Father being greater than Him in terms of position, power, authority, glory and knowledge. However, this difference was, and is, only for the duration of the work of salvation. We should therefore not fall into the same trap as the Christians in the post-apostolic church who claimed that Jesus was somehow less than fully God (e.g. the Arian controversy). The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are eternally one Spirit.

#### **1.4.2 The biblical theme of salvation**

The central theme of the Bible is God’s salvation. The Old Testament plants the seeds for God’s plan and points to the coming of Jesus Christ, while the New Testament describes the fulfilment of God’s plan through Jesus Christ. It proclaims Jesus as the Saviour, sent to save humankind from the bondage of sin (Mt 1:18–25; Lk 2:8–11).

Since the Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit (1 Jn 3:24), and Jesus was conceived through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is the Almighty God and Everlasting Father Himself (Isa 9:6; Rom 9:5). In Jesus “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). He was the manifestation of God in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16; Jn 1:14).

It was for the sake of carrying out the plan of salvation that God came in the flesh as Jesus to die on the cross for humankind (Ps 129:3; 22:13–18; Mt 16:21; 27:26–50). He died for our trespasses and was raised to life for our justification (Rom 4:25; 2 Cor 5:21). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus simultaneously fulfilled God’s divine justice, while maintaining God’s divine love. Because He justified us, no one can now condemn us (Rom 5:6–10; 8:33–34).

However, God’s salvation plan is not yet fully complete (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14; 4:30). According to the Bible, the salvation of His people will only be complete at the second coming of Jesus Christ. At that point, the dead will resurrect—some to eternal life, and some to eternal punishment (Jn 5:28–29; 1 Thess 4:14–17). In the meantime, Jesus stands at God’s right hand, serving as the Mediator between

God and man. He continues the work of salvation, mediating for a better covenant and interceding for God's chosen people (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:22–25; 12:22–24; 1 Jn 2:1).

The Holy Spirit also has a key role in God's salvation plan. The Book of Acts tells us that, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Soon afterwards, 3,000 people were baptized, and the early church was established (Acts 2:1–4, 41).

The Holy Spirit's descent has since served to accomplish the work of salvation by enabling believers to understand the truth (Jn 16:13); inspiring people to know Jesus as Lord (Mt 16:15–17; 1 Cor 12:3); acting as witness during water baptism to give it the efficacy to remove sins (1 Jn 5:6–7; Acts 22:16); justifying and renewing believers (1 Cor 6:11; Tit 3:5); and sanctifying God's people (2 Thess 2:13).

We have briefly looked at the biblical theme of salvation which encompasses Christ's birth, death, resurrection and ascension, and have seen how each event was necessary for God's plan of salvation. We have also looked at the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. To summarize, the Bible shows that throughout eternity, there was, there is, and there will be only one God. The Old Testament, for example, never mentions there being more than one God; yet, it is filled with prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus Christ and the downpour of the Holy Spirit. What this reveals is that God manifested, and continues to manifest, as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—until the time when His work of salvation is complete. After this, Christ will no longer need to mediate and intercede for the believers, and the Holy Spirit will no longer need to work on earth to support the church. Their roles will come to an end (1 Cor 15:28), and heaven and earth will be reconciled (2 Cor 5:17ff; Rev 11:15).

### **1.4.3 The Holy Spirit transcends time and space**

The third important point to understand about the Godhead is that the Holy Spirit is not subject to the confines of time and space. As human beings, we understand that physical matter is limited by these two things. For example, an object cannot exist in two places at once.

In contrast, the Holy Spirit can transcend such physical constraints, for He fills the entire universe (Ps 139:7–10; Jer 23:23–24).

When Jesus came to the world in the flesh, He was subject to the confines of time and space. Therefore, the Gospels show that He never appeared in two places simultaneously, at least, not prior to His death. However, after He resurrected, He put on a spiritual body and was no longer subject to these limitations. Hence, Jesus could appear and disappear before His followers (Lk 24:31, 36) and could suddenly enter into a house (Jn 20:19–26). These accounts show the distinction between His existence in the flesh and His existence in the spiritual body.

From the Bible, we see further evidence that God is Spirit who can transcend time and space:

- The Holy Spirit enabled Mary to conceive, to bring about the manifestation of God in the flesh (Mt 1:18; Lk 1:35; Jn 1:14; 1 Tim 3:16).
- When Jesus was being baptized, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove, and the Father spoke from heaven (Mt 3:16–17). So Jesus, who descended from heaven as the Son of man, could simultaneously be on earth and in heaven (Jn 3:13).

We can only understand these passages in a spiritual sense. And it is only by equating the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as being one and the same—transcending time and space—that we come to understand a little of the nature of the Godhead. So while Trinitarians prefer to use a non-biblical term to unify God, namely, a metaphysical “substance” (in Greek, *homoousios*), we would prefer to unify God in terms of a “oneness of Spirit”.

Let us take a practical example to illustrate how the Spirit transcends time and space. If 100 believers pray at the same time in different places, all of them can receive the Holy Spirit because He transcends geographical space. We cannot naively conclude, then, that there are 100 Holy Spirits at work—there is but one Spirit. Furthermore, we cannot say that each believer only receives a one-hundredth portion of the Holy Spirit; again, there is only one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:4). The Bible tells us that, by “one Spirit”, we are all baptized into

one body and made to drink of the “one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Therefore, we must grasp the concept of the oneness of the Holy Spirit and also appreciate His transcendence over time and space if we are to understand the Godhead. God cannot be limited to the physical—the one Spirit can simultaneously dwell in you, me and others.

The fundamental flaw in the doctrine of the Trinity lies in its use of metaphysical terms. Its proponents state, for example, that there are three persons in the Trinity who are coequal, when, in fact, the Bible tells us that there is but one God who is Spirit (Jn 4:24). It makes no reference either to “persons” or to a “Trinity”. Proponents also argue that God is of one substance, which sounds logical enough, but this still puts an infinite God into a physical and man-made box.

We know that God gives the Spirit without measure (Jn 3:34), for He is boundless. Therefore, those who claim to uphold the oneness of God, yet attempt to explain the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’s work in limiting terms—for example, by saying that Jesus is only a “portion” of the Holy Spirit manifested in the flesh, or that believers receive a “portion” of the Holy Spirit—have not yet left their physical preconceptions of the Godhead behind.

The belief of the True Jesus Church is that God is one (cf. Deut 6:4; Zech 14:9). Compared to that of other denominations, our view of the Godhead is simple, as summarised in one of our ten articles of faith:

The true God was manifested in the flesh as the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the remission of our sins, and was resurrected on the third day. Jesus is the one and only Saviour of mankind, the Creator of heaven and earth, and the only true God.

Our Basic Beliefs: An Introductory Brochure

This is not to imply that other Christian faiths are polytheistic: as previously noted, the concept of the Trinity seeks to uphold the oneness of God, though it does not explain the Godhead satisfactorily. At the other extreme, Monarchianism affirms the sole deity of God the Father. It is an idea that developed into two branches: Dynamic Monarchianism and Modalistic Monarchianism.

The former was taught by Theodotus in the late second century AD, in which Christ is but a man, miraculously conceived and adopted by

God, from whom He received an infinite degree of divine wisdom and power. Theodotus was excommunicated for espousing this belief.

Modalistic Monarchianism, on the other hand, was taught by Praxeas and Sabellius in the second and third centuries AD, and held that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are different modes or aspects of one God. They are distinctive roles played by a single person, only differentiated by the perception of the believer, as opposed to three coeternal persons.

Though these two Monarchian perspectives are extremely monotheistic compared to the doctrine of Trinity, neither offers a comprehensive understanding of God in accordance to the Scriptures and are both deemed heretical by mainstream Christianity.

We should think of the Godhead as “one God, one Spirit” to emphasize that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are of the same Spirit. It is the same Spirit of God that has worked throughout history to accomplish His salvation, through the manifestation of the Word in the flesh; the resurrection and ascension of the Son; His continuing mediation for humankind in heaven; and the descent of the Holy Spirit to establish the church on earth. If we cannot grasp the truth that “God is Spirit”, we will never appreciate the oneness of God

## **1.5 Some difficult questions**

The best approach for interpreting questions relating to the Godhead is to look at what the Bible says. Christians should not need to argue over obscure issues—issues that the apostles never felt a need to explain, beyond some fundamentals. However, because so many Christians currently uphold the doctrine of the Trinity as proof for authentic belief, we will examine what the Bible says about some key points.

### **1.5.1 The Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all titles of God—a differentiation necessary only in the scheme of salvation. The title “Father” implies a father-son relationship between God and man (Lk 3:38; Eph 4:6). However, this relationship is different from that of our earthly fathers,

for God is the “Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9). Also, the Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, originated from the bosom of the Father (Jn 1:18; 3:2, 17; 7:29); therefore, God is rightly called the Father (Jn 3:16; Mt 11:25–27; Jn 17:1).

Even though we usually think of Jesus as the Son, spiritually speaking, He is one with the Father. This is because He was God manifested in the flesh (Jn 1:14; Mt 1:18–21; 1 Tim 3:16). Therefore, Jesus said, “I and My Father are one” (Jn 10:30). He also said, “To see Me is to see the Father”, because there is no other Father in this universe (Jn 1:18; 12:45; 14:9–11).

Although Jesus Christ was born in the capacity of the Son, He did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant. He humbled and submitted Himself to the Father, even to the point of death on the cross. Following His resurrection and ascension to heaven, God exalted Jesus and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name so that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow—whether in heaven, on earth, or under the earth (Phil 2:6–10).

The Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son—not the third person of a triune God. Although the titles, “Spirit of God” (Mt 3:16), the “Spirit of the Father” (Mt 10:20) and the “Spirit of the Son” (Gal 4:6) are all found in the Bible, they refer to one and the same God.

### **1.5.2 God addresses Himself as “Us”**

Genesis records: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (Gen 1:26). Christians who believe in the Trinity often claim that this Bible verse proves that God is triune or, at least, alludes to His plurality. However, there are a number of reasons why such a view is incorrect.

Firstly, the personal pronouns “we” and “us” were commonly used by ancient monarchs when referring to themselves. The first-person plural was used to convey a king’s sovereignty over his kingdom and the king’s absolute authority and representation of that kingdom. In times past, his word was the law, which had to be obeyed by all his

subjects. And the king's will was taken as the people's will because no one was allowed to contradict it.

Taking an example from history, Roman Catholic popes used to use "we" as a form of self-address to indicate their absolute authority and representation of the church. They did this because they were seen as God's representatives on earth, that is, "Christ on earth". However, after John XXIII became pope, there was a reformation in the Roman Catholic Church's traditional concepts and regulations. Among the reforms was the form of self-address for the papacy. Popes were no longer to use "we" to identify themselves, but would use "I" instead, signifying that they could not consider themselves as "Christ on earth", or as holding supreme authority. In pushing through this reform, Pope John XXIII,<sup>5</sup> whose term of office lasted from 28 October 1958 to 3 June 1963, revealed himself as one of the most enlightened and democratic popes in the long history of the Roman Catholic Church.

From the Bible, we understand that God is the Lord of the universe, the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Acts 17:24; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 19:16). His glory and majesty surpass those of anyone on earth (Eph 4:6). In documenting God's self-address as "We/Us", the Bible is not indicating that He exists, or subsists, as a plurality of persons within the Godhead; rather, it is highlighting His absolute power and sovereignty over His kingdom, including His creation. It reminds us that every created being must submit to God's rule (Ps 103:19–22).

Secondly, the Bible uses the third-person singular possessive pronoun "His" (as opposed to the plural "Their") in Genesis 1:27 to follow on from its use of "Us" and "Our" in Genesis 1:26. This latter verse, therefore, does not indicate a plurality of persons in the one God; rather, it simply illustrates God's form of self-address, as used by ancient sovereigns.

Thirdly, the Jewish concept of God is strongly monotheistic (belief in one God). There is no possibility that Moses, the author of Genesis, could have understood God to be three persons of one substance. If the "Us" in Genesis 1:26 denotes a triune God, why would the Jews, who have been studying the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) from ages past, continue to uphold the belief that God is one?

<sup>5</sup> Brusher, Joseph, *Popes Through The Ages* (S.J. Electronic version, 1996).

### **1.5.3 The simultaneous manifestations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 3:16–17

This Bible passage refers to the simultaneous manifestations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, giving some Christians the impression of three distinct persons in the Godhead. In truth, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in Spirit. We recall that, to understand the Godhead, we must transcend our conception of God as being bound by time and space. God is eternally and absolutely one, but He has the power to reveal Himself in the flesh as the Son, in the form of a dove as the Holy Spirit, and in the voice of the heavenly Father—all at the same time.

Jesus once said, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (Jn 14:16). His words indicate that the Holy Spirit has the ability to manifest Himself in the world—in different places and at different times.

### **1.5.4 The Pauline benedictions**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

2 Corinthians 13:14

Paul’s benediction does not prove the validity of the concept of the Trinity; but it does appropriately describe God’s work for humanity. The Bible tells us that God is love (1 Jn 4:8). His love was manifested through the sending of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into the world (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8). He was the Word become flesh, full of grace and truth, who brought God’s abundant grace to humankind (Jn 1:14). Because of God’s love, Jesus bore the sins of the world (1 Pet 2:24) and freely saved us (Tit 3:5). The characteristic work of the Holy Spirit is that He moves human hearts to confess Jesus Christ as Lord (1 Cor 12:3) and to sanctify believers for salvation (2 Thess 2:13).



It is this working of the indwelling Holy Spirit in our hearts that allows us to commune deeply with God. So Paul's benediction is best described as characterizing God's salvation work through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It has no bearing on a theological concept of God subsisting in three distinct persons of one substance.

### **1.5.5 Jesus at the right hand of God**

So then, after the Lord [Jesus] had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

Mark 16:19

But he [i.e. Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Acts 7:55–56

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Romans 8:34

The above Bible verses all say that Jesus sits, stands, or is at God's right hand. There are similar references in other parts of the Bible (Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 10:12; 1 Pet 3:22).

Trinitarians claim that these verses reveal the co-existence of two distinct and separate persons of the triune God (Father and Son) in heaven, and one person of the Holy Spirit who governs the church on earth. However, as we have discussed, God's salvation plan has yet to be completed (see section 1.4.2), and so Jesus Christ continues in His capacity as the High Priest and Mediator of the new covenant (Heb 8:1; 7:22–25). Similarly, the Holy Spirit will continue His work in the church until God's chosen are saved (Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14; 4:20).

## **1.6 References to the Godhead in the Bible**

After the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, the apostles were guided by the wisdom and revelation of the Holy Spirit. Their understanding of the Holy Spirit was both adequate and clear. Unfortunately, some Christians in the post-apostolic period felt the

need to go beyond what the apostles taught, by attempting to explain the Godhead using their own human wisdom. Matters culminated in a major controversy sparked off by Arius of Alexandria, at which point the church felt it was expedient to establish a doctrine on the Godhead at the Council of Nicaea, thereby formalising the doctrine of the Trinity. Today, we need to remove any preconceptions about the Godhead and, instead, look into the Bible for insights and teachings. This is because the biblical canon speaks louder than any church council creeds.

### 1.6.1 Baptism in the name of Jesus

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). However, when the disciples later baptized converts, they did so in “the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38; 10:48) or in “the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16; 19:5). It is significant that, according to the accounts in Acts, they never baptized in “the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. We can therefore conclude that the disciples understood that “the Father”, “Son” and “Holy Spirit” are not the name(s) of God—they are merely His titles. However, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit all have a name—that name was understood by the disciples to be “Jesus”.

Since “the name” in Matthew 28:19 is singular, we should not baptize using the formula: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (cf. *Didache* 7:10ff).<sup>6</sup> As we have said, this baptismal formula does not actually invoke the name which can save, which is “Jesus” (Acts 4:12). Some fundamental points which we must grasp about the Godhead is that God is one; His name is one (Zech 14:9); and His name is “Jesus”.

Concerning the name of the Father, John writes in John 17:12: “I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept” (cf. Jn 5:43). From these words, we can conclude that the name of the Father is “Jesus”.

<sup>6</sup> Knight, Kevin, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV. Online Edition (Robert Appleton Co., 1999).

Concerning the name of the Son, Matthew says, “And she [i.e. Mary] will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus” (Mt 1:21). Also, John writes, “I [i.e. Jesus] have come in My Father’s name” (Jn 5:43). Therefore, the name of the Son is “Jesus”.

Concerning the name of the Holy Spirit, Matthew writes that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father (Mt 10:20) and the Spirit of God (Mt 3:16). The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of God’s Son (Gal 4:6), the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9) and the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7). The name of the Holy Spirit is therefore “Jesus”.

The apostles implemented Jesus’ command to baptize people “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” by duly performing baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” or “in the name of the Lord Jesus”. In doing so, they were not deliberately contravening His instructions, as set out in Matthew 28:19; on the contrary, they were obeying Him by correctly interpreting His meaning.

### **1.6.2 Ananias and Sapphira’s deception**

In the early days of the apostolic church, the believers shared everything they had with one another. They would sell their material possessions and lay the proceeds at the apostles’ feet for distribution. The entire church was like one big family, with no one claiming anything as his own (Acts 4:32–35). Following this practice, a believer, Ananias, sold a piece of his property, but kept back some of the proceeds. He then brought a portion to the apostles’ feet, claiming that it was the full amount. Peter, through the Holy Spirit’s revelation, saw through his deception and rebuked him, saying, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? . . . You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3–4). Immediately, Ananias fell down and died. Three hours later, Ananias’ wife, Sapphira, came to Peter and told the same lie. He then rebuked her, saying, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9). She also fell down and died at his feet.

If we read the passage in Acts 5:1–10 carefully, we will see that Peter describes Ananias and Sapphira as having lied to the Holy Spirit (v. 3);

lied to God (v. 4); tested the Spirit of the Lord (v. 9). He clearly understood the fundamental equation between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and was merely using different titles to refer to the one and same God. Peter did not muddle his words, trying to distinguish three distinct persons in one God.

From this example, we learn that the Bible does not distinguish between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three consubstantial persons subsisting under one Godhead. Instead, the Bible presents one God with three titles: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

### **1.6.3 The outpouring of the Holy Spirit**

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Romans 8:9

In this verse, Paul uses three different titles interchangeably to refer to the indwelling Holy Spirit: 1) the “Spirit”; 2) the “Spirit of God”; 3) the “Spirit of Christ”. As there cannot be three separate spirits dwelling in our hearts, the message is clear: the Spirit is one.

In verse 10, Paul no longer uses the different titles to describe God’s indwelling Spirit; he merely states that Christ dwells in our hearts. In other words, he equates the Holy Spirit with Christ’s Spirit and with God’s Spirit.

Despite the difference in context and usage, when we compare Paul’s words in Romans 8:9 with Peter’s words in Acts 5:1–10, we discover a united understanding of the Godhead. Both apostles understood that God is one. While Trinitarians also understand that God is one, their concept centres on distinguishing between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rather than equating them.

### **1.6.4 The powerful Advocate**

The Lord Jesus told His disciples that they would, one day, stand before the political authorities. At the same time, He commanded them not to

be anxious over what they should say in the event. Jesus told them not to worry because “it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Mt 10:20).

Aside from this verse, there are three other verses which record the same teaching, but with subtle variations: “For it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mk 13:11); “For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say” (Lk 12:12); “For I [i.e. Jesus] will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist” (Lk 21:15). They show the equation between the Spirit of the Father, the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. The three are referred to interchangeably to denote the one powerful Advocate. Therefore, we come to understand that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father who, in turn, is the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

### **1.6.5 The Lord of the heavens and the earth**

Genesis 1:1 says that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters at creation. In the New Testament, a number of passages refer to Jesus Christ as the Lord of creation, through whom all things were created and upheld (Jn 1:1, 3, 14; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–17; Heb 1:2).

From the Bible, we discover an underlying equation between the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in creation: there is only one Lord of the heavens and the earth, and there is only one God. The Bible never tries to distinguish the Lord of creation as three separate persons.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

God’s divine nature is truly mysterious. As human beings with inherent limitations, we are bound to fall short if we attempt to fully understand and explain an infinite God. However, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we can, at least, gain some insights into the nature of the Godhead. A key point which emerges from the Bible is that, for the purpose of accomplishing His plan of salvation, God manifested, and continues to manifest, as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for a time.

There will come a point when salvation is complete, and there will be no more need for God to reveal Himself to us in this way.

God is one (Deut 6:4; Mk 12:29) and He is Spirit (Jn 4:24). We can therefore reject any doctrines which go beyond the Bible and which are based on human wisdom. We can also take heart from the knowledge that, while we only understand a little of the nature of God right now, there will come a time when everything about Him will be wonderfully revealed:

But we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

1 John 3:3

### **Review questions**

1. How do we prove the personality of the Holy Spirit?
2. What are the origins of the doctrine of the Trinity?
3. What are the main errors in the doctrine of the Trinity?
4. Why did God address Himself as “Us”?
5. How do we explain the simultaneous manifestations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit during the baptism of Jesus?
6. Why do you think Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God before he was martyred?
7. How do we prove that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same God?

# Chapter 2

## TITLES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 2.1 Introduction

The Bible tells us there is one Holy Spirit whose name is Jesus (Mt 28:19; Jn 14:26; Acts 2:38). However, He has many titles which serve to indicate the multifaceted nature of His character and ministry. This chapter will look at some of them.

### 2.2 Holy Spirit

The Bible uses the title “Holy Spirit” most often when referring to God’s Spirit—190 times in all. In essence, God is Spirit (Jn 4:24); therefore, the Holy Spirit is God’s Spirit.

A fundamental characteristic of God is holiness (Lev 11:44; Jn 17:11), and the title “Holy Spirit” reflects this. Nebuchadnezzar, an ancient Babylonian king, testified to the holy nature of God by calling the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of the Holy God” (Dan 4:8, 9, 18). In the same way, the apostle Paul called Him the “Spirit of holiness” (Rom 1:4).

In terms of the indwelling Holy Spirit’s work, He primarily serves to stir believers to sanctification for salvation (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2). As long as we submit to His guidance, He can empower us to overcome our sinful nature and fleshly desires (Gal 5:16). In this way, the Holy Spirit is essential for our holiness before God.

### 2.3 Spirit of truth

The Bible tells us that Jesus is the truth (Jn 14:6), and that the Holy Spirit is truth (1 Jn 5:6). As Jesus' Spirit is the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:17), the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of truth. Therefore, when Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit, He referred to Him as the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). In the same way, apostle John wrote about the "spirit of truth", whom he contrasted with the "spirit of error" (1 Jn 4:6).

The Holy Spirit has the mission of bearing witness for the Lord Jesus (Jn 15:26). Since Jesus embodies the essence of truth, the Holy Spirit testifies of Jesus and the truth. In this regard, He has the vital role of leading believers to understand both the complete truth and the truth of things to come (Jn 16:13). The truth, both now and in the future, can be compared to a sealed scroll. If the Holy Spirit does not open the seal for us, we can never grasp the complete and perfect truth (Isa 29:11–12; Rev 5:1–5; 1 Cor 2:11).

### 2.4 Helper and Comforter

The Bible also refers to the Holy Spirit as "Helper", "Comforter" and "Counsellor", depending on which version we read. In the Greek text, the word used is *parakletos*.<sup>1</sup> The original meaning of *para* is "beside", while *kaleo* is "to call". Combining these two words, *parakletos* literally means "called to one's side". The root of this word contains the idea of comforting, consoling, exhorting, encouraging and advocating. The term *parakletos* is found five times in the Bible, always in the Johannine writings (Jn 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 Jn 2:1).

In John 14:16, Jesus said He would pray to the Father to give His disciples "another Helper". The word "another", from the Greek *allos*, means "another of the same kind".<sup>2</sup> Jesus' use of *parakletos* indicates that the Helper would take His place when He left the disciples. It helps us to understand His other statement: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (Jn 14:18), as well as the equation between Jesus

1 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G3875.

2 Ibid. Strong's reference no. G243.



and the *parakletos* in 1 John 2:1. Reading all these verses together, we come to realize how both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are closely related to the concept of *parakletos* and to each other.

To understand better the word *parakletos*, we can look at the historical and literary context of the biblical passages which contain the word, especially with regard to Jesus' usage of it. The context for His use of *parakletos* can be seen in John 14 to 16, which records the disciples sharing their last supper with the Lord Jesus. At that time, the disciples were filled with inexpressible sorrow because Jesus, who had lived and had fellowship with them for so long, was soon going to leave them. The disciples most likely became anxious and wondered: *If Jesus leaves, who will lead and counsel us? Who will help and comfort us? Who can give us the power to withstand our persecutors?*

To dispel His disciples' fears and worries, the Lord Jesus used the word *parakletos* to promise that the Holy Spirit would come and live with them. His words are recorded in four important Johannine gospel passages. In the first passage, Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor...the Spirit of truth...I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you" (Jn 14:16–18, RSV). Here, Jesus' use of *parakletos* carries the meaning of "comfort".

In the second passage, He said, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you...Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (Jn 14:26–27, RSV). Here, Jesus' statement conveys the Holy Spirit's roles as teacher, comforter, helper, and one who empowers.

Jesus' third use of the word *parakletos* is found in John 15:26 (RSV): "But when the Counselor comes...he will bear witness to me." Jesus' third statement conveys the Holy Spirit's role as a "witness".

Jesus used the word *parakletos* a fourth time, when He said, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" (Jn 16:7–11, RSV). The last of Jesus' statements is perhaps the most difficult to understand

because of the varying interpretations of “convince” (also translated as “convict”). Yet, generally speaking, His fourth discussion of *parakletos* reveals the Holy Spirit’s convicting work—work which goes beyond His role as Comforter.

From the biblical context of the above passages, we can see that *parakletos* conveys the diverse roles of the Holy Spirit as comforter, teacher, helper, witness, one who empowers, and one who convicts. Different English translations of *parakletos* attempt to express the rich meanings behind the titles of the Holy Spirit. As a comforter, the Holy Spirit has the mission to comfort (Acts 9:31). As a teacher, the Holy Spirit enables believers to understand the truth (1 Jn 2:27). As one who empowers, the Holy Spirit gives power to believers to witness for Christ (Acts 2:4, 14–36; 4:19–20, 31). As a witness, the Holy Spirit testifies for Jesus Christ and counsels Christians in their witness for Him (Mk 13:11; Lk 12:11–12).

Another Johannine writing which refers to *parakletos* is found in 1 John 2:1. Often translated “Advocate”, the word *parakletos* in this verse conveys the popular meaning of the Latin word *advocatus* (“counsel for the defence”), which was a term originating from the law courts. Both *parakletos* and *advocatus* mean “he who is called to help”, particularly in the context of someone who is being accused or subjected to trial. As a result of the legal etymology of *parakletos*, some translators feel that *parakletos* could rightly be translated as “divine legal assistant”. The customary practice in ancient law courts was to appear before the court with one or more influential friends. The persons who appeared and interceded on behalf of others were called *parakletos* (in ancient Greek) or *advocatus* (in Latin). These advocates would defend their friends’ cases as if they were their own.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, He became an Advocate to the believers (1 Jn 2:1), interceding for them against the devil’s constant accusations (Rom 8:33–34; Rev 12:10; Heb 7:22–25). Therefore, Jesus now intercedes and serves as our Advocate in heaven; but He has also given us the Holy Spirit to intercede and advocate for us on earth. Paul explains the role of the Holy Spirit in this way: “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts

knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26–27).

We can see that Jesus’ advocacy role during His earthly ministry was partly similar to the role which He now has in heaven (Lk 22:31–32; Jn 17:9–10, 15, 17, 20). But when He was in the flesh, His work was somewhat constrained: He could only be in one place at a time and could only offer limited help, power, guidance and comfort to His disciples. But He promised them an Advocate in the Holy Spirit, who would be free from all physical limitations—He would live in their hearts to counsel, comfort and help them (Jn 14:17, 20, 23). The disciples’ subsequent experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) enabled them to truly understand Jesus’ initially perplexing words of comfort: “It is to your advantage that I go away” (Jn 16:7).

## **2.5 Spirit of wisdom and revelation**

In Ephesians 1:17, the Holy Spirit is called the “spirit of wisdom and revelation”. This is because He gives wisdom and reveals God’s hidden purposes, including His plans for the future (see 1 Pet 1:10–12 and Jude 14–15 for more teachings).

The following are a few examples of how the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation guided God’s people in the past:

- By God’s Spirit, Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams that predicted God’s future plans for Egypt. As a result of the interpretation, Pharaoh set Joseph over Egypt as his prime minister (Gen 41:37–41).
- Bezalel, of the tribe of Judah, and Aholiab, of the tribe of Dan, were both filled with God’s Spirit of wisdom to create artistic designs with gold, silver and bronze for the tabernacle, according to God’s will. Furthermore, they were able to teach others (Ex 35:30–36:2).
- After Moses laid hands on him, Joshua was filled with the Spirit of wisdom to lead the Israelites into Canaan (Deut 34:9).

- The prophet Daniel was filled with God’s Spirit of wisdom and revelation to interpret dreams and visions. For example, when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a dream about the future of the kingdom, he wanted his wise men to interpret the dream, without being able to recall the dream himself. Fortunately, God revealed the content of the dream and its meaning to Daniel. As a result, Daniel became chief administrator over all the wise men in Babylon (Dan 2:46–48). Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, he further revealed a message of judgment, written by God’s finger, to King Belshazzar, the successor to Nebuchadnezzar. The message predicted the fall of the king and the city of Babylon (Dan 5:10–16, 25–30).

In 1 Corinthians 2:11, Paul writes: “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” God’s wisdom far surpasses human wisdom. It is only through the infilling of His Spirit of wisdom and revelation that we can begin to appreciate and comprehend the depths of God’s wisdom, grace and power (Rom 11:33–34; Eph 1:17–21).

God’s Spirit is particularly vital for the revelation of the gospel of salvation. The fact is, the gospel is the wisdom of God; and without His Spirit, we cannot know it, or, at least, not in full. This is why Jesus promised to send His Holy Spirit, the “Helper”, to enable us to understand this truth:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

John 14:26

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

John 16:12–13

A good illustration of the Holy Spirit’s power of revelation is the faith journey of the apostle Paul. Prior to his conversion to Christ, he was already well versed in the Scriptures. Yet, all his learning did not

enable him to understand the truth about Jesus Christ. It was only when the Holy Spirit opened his eyes that he could see:

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:11–12

If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I wrote before in a few words, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.

Ephesians 3:2–5

## 2.6 Other titles of the Holy Spirit

Apart from the above four titles of the Holy Spirit, there are many others in the Bible which clearly express His nature and attributes:

### A. Titles that indicate He is the Spirit of the true God:

- Spirit of God (Mt 3:16; Rom 8:9, 14; 1 Cor 2:11; 3:16)
- Spirit of the LORD (Judg 3:10; 1 Sam 10:6; 2 Kgs 2:16; Isa 11:2; Lk 4:18)
- Spirit of [the] Father (Mt 10:20)
- Spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3)
- Spirit of the Holy God (Dan 4:8, 9, 18; 5:11)

### B. Titles that indicate He is the Spirit of Jesus:

- Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9; 1 Pet 1:11)
- Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7)
- Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:19)

- Spirit of the Lord (Acts 5:9; 2 Cor 3:17–18)
- Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15)

**C. Other titles:**

- The Spirit (Mt 4:1; Lk 2:27; Jn 3:5, 6, 8, 34)
- Eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14)
- Spirit of glory (1 Pet 4:14)
- Spirit of wisdom and understanding, Spirit of counsel and might, Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD (Isa 11:2)
- Generous Spirit (Ps 51:12)
- Spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning (Isa 4:4)
- Spirit of grace (Heb 10:29)
- Spirit of grace and supplication (Zech 12:10)
- Spirit of justice (Isa 28:6)
- Spirit of holiness (Rom 1:4)
- Good Spirit (Neh 9:20)

## Review questions

1. Why is God's Spirit called the Holy Spirit?
2. Why is God's Spirit called the Spirit of truth?
3. Explain the various meanings of the Greek word *parakletos*.
4. Why did Jesus say it was to the disciples' advantage for Him to leave and ascend to heaven, rather than stay with them on earth?
5. Why is the Holy Spirit called the Spirit of truth and revelation?
6. Which three titles of the Holy Spirit indicate that He is the Spirit of God? Cite the relevant Bible verses.
7. Which three titles of the Holy Spirit indicate that He is the Spirit of Jesus? Cite the relevant Bible verses.
8. Give two titles of the Holy Spirit which reveal something of His attributes. Cite the relevant Bible verses.

# Chapter 3

## SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 3.1 Introduction

Biblical symbolism is the use of signs or objects to represent abstract ideas and concepts. In some cases, they point to events in history, or events at the time of writing. In other cases, they prefigure events which will take place at a future point in time.

Symbols can bring to life profound spiritual meanings and nuances. They enable us, for example, to gain a far richer appreciation for the divine qualities that God wants believers to manifest: holiness, a sacrificial spirit, empowerment, and so forth. Examples in the Bible include white garments, symbolizing holiness (Rev 3:4); the cross, symbolizing self-sacrifice (Mt 16:24); and the rod, symbolizing power (Ex 4:17, 20; Num 24:17). All these symbols materialize the abstract concepts they represent, painting a far richer picture than a literal definition.

The Bible also refers to “types”. The *Reader’s Digest Universal Dictionary* defines a “type” as “a figure, representation, or symbol of something to come, such as an event in the Old Testament that foreshadows another in the New Testament.” An example of a biblical type is Noah and his family who were “saved through water” in the ark; this event foreshadowed water baptism, which is referred to as the “antitype” in the New Testament (1 Pet 3:21).

Whether we are talking about symbols or types, we must not forget that they can never substitute the reality which they represent—they are merely shadows.

The intention of this chapter is to convey some of the beauty and economy of the Bible’s use of symbolism to describe the Holy Spirit.



## 3.2 Symbols in the Bible

The Bible uses fourteen different symbols and/or types to portray the Holy Spirit's characteristics and His work.

### 3.2.1 Dove

The dove has a particularly long tradition in Christianity of symbolizing the Holy Spirit. This is because it has many attributes which reflect the nature of God's Spirit.

The dove is a monogamous creature, pairing with one mate for life. So well known is its faithful nature that King Solomon used the dove to symbolize the ideal bride in the Song of Solomon (Songs 5:2; 6:9). Like a dove, the Holy Spirit loves with devotion, waiting patiently for straying believers to return to Him. Spiritually speaking, when we wander away from God, we are guilty of infidelity, of causing the Spirit to grieve (Eph 4:30) and to yearn for us with jealousy (Jas 4:4–5; 2 Cor 11:2).

Another characteristic of doves is their special affinity to their homes. Even after having flown far away, they always find their way back (Isa 60:8). The Bible tells us that the church is God's household (1 Tim 3:15; Eph 2:19–22; 1 Cor 3:16)—the abode of the Holy Spirit. If we are guided by God's Spirit, even though we may stumble on our spiritual journey, we will always find our way back to God's church.

Doves also symbolize peace. When we allow the Holy Spirit to be our Advocate, we will live in peace with God and with others (Jn 16:7; 1 Jn 2:1; Eph 2:14–18). The apostle Paul teaches us that peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

Doves are gentle creatures and symbolize the gentleness of the Holy Spirit (Mt 10:16). Paul tells us that gentleness is another attribute of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:23). So, when we are filled by God's Spirit, we can be gentle like Jesus (Mt 11:29).

Doves also symbolize innocence and purity. This is why Jesus commanded His disciples to be as innocent as doves (Mt 10:16).

In the Bible, doves were used as messengers of news (Gen 8:8–11). In the same way, the Holy Spirit bears witness to Jesus Christ (Jn 15:26) and takes His good news to humankind.

In the Old Testament, doves were considered clean animals which could be used for burnt offerings (Lev 1:14). They were distinguished from unclean birds, such as ravens. We see the difference between doves and ravens illustrated in the account of the events following the flood in Noah's time. Before the floodwaters subsided, it is conceivable that the earth was filled with the dead bodies of animals and people. The Bible records that Noah sent out a raven to test if the waters had subsided, but it never returned (Gen 8:7). From our knowledge of the raven's tendency to feed on carrion, we can speculate why this was the case; this type of bird was considered unclean with good reason (Lev 11:13, 15). In contrast, the dove, which Noah also sent out, failed to find any dry place on which to settle and duly returned to the ark (Gen 8:8–9).

The moral here is that, like the dove, the Holy Spirit is pure and holy and will not come upon anyone who is unclean, double-minded and fleshly. If we live unholy lives, such that the Holy Spirit fails to find any "dry places" in our hearts, He will avoid making His home in us (Jas 4:8).

The Bible records that Noah sent out the dove three times to check if the floodwaters had subsided (Gen 8:8–12). This prefigured the pattern of the Holy Spirit's relationship with humankind. When the dove was sent out the first time, it returned home because the floodwaters had not yet receded: this incident pointed to the Old Testament period when the indwelling Holy Spirit had yet to descend (Jn 7:39). The second time, the dove returned with a freshly plucked olive leaf: this pointed to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church, which began at Pentecost but subsequently ceased (i.e. the early/autumn rain period; Deut 11:14; Joel 2:23; cf. Ps 52:8; Jer 11:16; Rom 11:17). After the third time, the dove did not return: this pointed to the Holy Spirit's outpouring in the last days (i.e. the latter/spring rain period; Deut 11:14; Joel 2:23). The Bible tells us that, in the latter rain period, the Holy Spirit will dwell within God's true church until the Lord comes again to destroy the world—this time with fire (i.e. the summer period; cf. Mt 24:32).

### 3.2.2 Dew

A second symbol of the Holy Spirit is dew. Like the dew, the Holy Spirit brings us the fullness of God's grace. God pours out His precious Holy Spirit to fill and comfort our hearts, even though we are sometimes unfaithful to Him and betray His love. He also continues to bestow grace on His creation, faithfully and lovingly, day after day (Prov 19:12; Hos 14:5).

The Bible likens the human heart to a field (Mt 13:1–9, 18–23). Without proper moisture, the ground is bare and useless (Jer 4:3). The dew, which moistens the ground, symbolizes the daily renewal of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 4:13–16; Heb 6:7f; Tit 3:5). When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, the barren land is turned into a fertile field; the listless human spirit finds newness of life (Isa 26:19).

At the end of a hot day, when there is a lot of moisture in the atmosphere, water droplets condense on cool surfaces, such as grass and leaves, to form dew. Plants are sustained by it, enabling them to grow and to withstand the daytime sun. The hotter the daytime temperature, the more dew is produced at night. It brings to mind the role of the Holy Spirit in supporting the early church: the greater the persecution that she faced, the more the Holy Spirit filled her (Acts 5:40–41; 7:54–60; 13:50–52). During the most challenging times, the disciples were filled by the Holy Spirit and with joy to overcome sufferings and tribulations. He helped them to lift up lifeless hands, strengthened weakened knees, and empowered them along the spiritual journey to God's everlasting kingdom (Heb 12:12).

Dew also symbolizes beauty—a beauty that reveals itself when the morning sun dawns upon the land. Like a myriad of diamonds, the dew reflects and refracts the sun's glorious rays, sending out arrows of light. While it is never adequate to compare the preciousness of the Holy Spirit to any kind of worldly treasure, the Bible paints a rich symbolic picture to convey the nature of God's Spirit and grace (Mt 13:43ff; Rev 21:10ff).

### 3.2.3 Rain

The Holy Spirit is also symbolized by rain. Rain represents God's

righteousness and abundant love (Hos 10:12; Mt 5:45). The Bible says that He sends rain upon both the righteous and unrighteous (Mt 5:45). Similarly, He pours out His Holy Spirit on everyone—both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 11:15–18; Hos 6:3).

After a dry season, open fields will often be parched and barren. Only with sufficient moisture from the dew and rain can they become productive (Lev 26:4). Rain showers serve to soften the land to prepare it for planting (Ps 65:10) and to enable seeds to take root and sprout. The human heart can be likened to a dry and hardened field: before the seeds of the truth can take root and grow in our hearts, we need the Holy Spirit's showers to transform our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh (Mk 4:14; Ezek 36:26–27). Importantly, we need to learn to submit to God's will (Jas 1:21) and be filled by His Spirit so that we can produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9).

In ancient Palestine, the two main rainy seasons were autumn and spring (Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24; Jas 5:7). The autumn rain fell before the planting season, while the spring rain fell before the harvest. Just like the autumn and spring rains in Palestine, the Holy Spirit was poured out in two distinct dispensations. We call the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit the autumn or early rain. This early rain period began with the Holy Spirit's initial descent on the day of Pentecost, which marked the beginnings of the early church (Acts 2:1–4, 41). We call the second outpouring of the Holy Spirit the spring or latter rain, which has been bestowed upon God's true church in the last days (Mal 4:5; Rev 7:2–3; Eph 1:13).

### 3.2.4 Water

For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,  
And floods on the dry ground;  
I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,  
And My blessing on your offspring.  
Isaiah 44:3

Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

John 4:13–14

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive.

John 7:37–39

Water, encompassing its manifestations as dew and rain, is the most frequently used biblical symbol of the Holy Spirit. The three passages above make use of this symbolism. They all expound on the Spirit's ability to quench a person's spiritual thirst.

At Rephidim, the Israelites complained to Moses that they had no water to drink. So God commanded Moses to strike a rock with his rod. After Moses did this, water came out of the rock, and all the people were able to drink (Ex 17:1–6). This event, recorded in the Old Testament, is perhaps the first use of water to typify the Holy Spirit. Apostle Paul explained its spiritual significance many years later, saying, "And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4). Just as the water from the rock at Rephidim gave the Israelites life and joy, so, today, our Lord Jesus Christ pours out His Holy Spirit, like a river, to bring us life and joy.

By looking at the nature of water and what it represents, we can gain a wealth of spiritual insights into the nature of the Holy Spirit.

Water is a cleansing agent (Heb 10:22). Dirty dishes and vessels can be washed clean with it (Lev 11:32). In fact, during Old Testament times, water was often used in cleansing rites (Ex 29:4; Num 8:7). Today, in the New Testament period, the Holy Spirit cleanses us from a life of sin. He lives in our hearts, sanctifying us, until God's work of salvation is complete (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13).

We often think of water as being soft, serene and gentle; yet, wild rivers, monsoons and tsunamis all testify to the immense power that water can unleash—power which can impact deeply on the world and on our lives. Analogous to this is the spiritual power that Christians can attain from above—power from the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8).

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tze writes in his classic work, the Tao Te Ching:

That whereby the rivers and seas are able to receive the homage and tribute of all the valley streams, is their skill in being lower than they—it is thus that they are the kings of them all.

Lao Tze (chp. 66)

The natural tendency of water is to flow downstream. The further down it travels, the greater the build up of volume. This characteristic can symbolize the work of the Holy Spirit: just as water flows downwards, so the Holy Spirit flows into those with humble hearts. As the Bible says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).

Water’s fluid nature enables it to fill any type of container, whether big or small. Similarly, the Holy Spirit will fill anyone who comes sincerely to God (cf. Acts 2:39; 10:34). Moreover, the larger the container, the more water it can hold. And likewise, the Holy Spirit will fill those who truly thirst and make room for Him in their hearts (Mt 5:6; Lk 1:53).

Just as water sustains the life of living things, so the Holy Spirit preserves our spiritual life in Christ. If we are filled by the Holy Spirit, we can have an abundant life, overcome sin and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Rev 22:1–2, 17; Jn 10:10; Rom 8:2; Gal 5:22–23). Even in suffering, a Spirit-filled Christian will be able to feel the peace and joy that He bestows (Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can keep our hope alive in Christ, despite our weaknesses and the trials of life (Rom 15:13).

### 3.2.5 River

Ezekiel 47:1–12 records how God’s Spirit guided the prophet Ezekiel to the temple door. There, he saw a vision of water flowing out from under the temple’s threshold, towards the east. As Ezekiel’s vision progressed, the waters rose higher and higher. Verses 6 to 12 describe the various functions of the water. The temple typifies the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn 2:21), while the water issuing from the temple typifies the Holy

Spirit sent by Him (Jn 7:37–39; 16:7). By studying Ezekiel 47:1–12, we can gain spiritual insights from the symbolism of the river.

Ezekiel says, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah” (Ezek 47:8, RSV). In Hebrew, *Arabah* means desert and is symbolic of the human heart, which is often barren and fallow (Jer 4:3–4). It needs the power of the Holy Spirit to nourish it.

“When it [i.e. the water from the temple] reaches the sea [i.e. the Dead Sea], its waters are healed” (Ezek 47:8). The waters of the Dead Sea serve to typify the sufferings and emptiness which often weigh down our hearts. Yet, when the Holy Spirit flows like a river into us, we can be healed and refreshed (Mt 11:28; Jn 16:33; 4:14).

“And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live” (Ezek 47:9). The river gives life to everything in its path. Likewise, when we are filled by the Holy Spirit, He will give us a dynamic spiritual life. Therefore, we must take care how we live our lives: we should continually pursue after the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that we can overcome the flesh and its desires (Rom 8:2; Gal 2:20; 6:14; Phil 3:8).

“There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes” (Ezek 47:9). Like symbolic fish in a river which depend on the water for their lives, a Christian’s spiritual life depends on the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that any branches which become separated from the true vine will wither and perish (Jn 15:5–6). Therefore, we should take care never to depart from the Holy Spirit, or else, we will forfeit the new life that God has given to us (Rom 8:6).

“It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many” (Ezek 47:10). The Bible teaches us that “to fish” means to preach the gospel of salvation and the “fishermen” refers to those who do the preaching (Mt 4:19). In this way, we understand that Ezekiel’s words, “Their fish will be . . . exceedingly many”, prefigure the opening of the door of salvation to diverse peoples (Gal 3:28). This prophecy was fulfilled in the apostolic church, starting from the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to preach the word of God to people of all nations. Today, the same power has been given to the true church by the latter downpour of the Holy Spirit.

“But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt” (Ezek 47:11). Here, the swampy and marshy places refer to sinners who are lost in worldly pursuits and the satisfaction of their fleshly desires. They are unwilling to repent, reject God’s grace of salvation (Lk 12:16–21; 16:19; Mt 22:1–7) and are unworthy to receive new life (Jn 3:19–20; 14:17) and spiritual restoration (Gal 5:16–17; 2 Tim 3:6–7).

“Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine” (Ezek 47:12). Here, the “trees” represent believers (Isa 5:7), while the “fruit” are their good works (Lk 13:6–9). Spirit-filled believers can live an abundant life and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; Eph 5:9; Phil 1:11; Rev 22:1–2). Moreover, the Holy Spirit empowers them to perform miracles, which serve to confirm the gospel that they have been entrusted to preach (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:4).

In Ezekiel 47:2–5, prophet Ezekiel saw the water from God’s temple rising higher and higher, going from ankle-deep to the depth of a river that could not be crossed. This rising water level symbolizes the Holy Spirit’s increasing depth and power, which is revealed when we enter into the depths of the Spirit. From the rising water level, we learn another important lesson: the Spirit’s work will progress ever more rapidly and powerfully to build up God’s temple in the last days (Hag 2:9).

### 3.2.6 Oil

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is often symbolized by oil. We are familiar with oil as a lubricant, which is used in machinery to reduce friction and prevent over-heating. By way of analogy, the church is like a machine with many parts, or a body with many members (1 Cor 12:12). The Holy Spirit anoints the hearts of believers so that they can co-exist in peace and unity (Ezek 11:19; Eph 4:3).

From the Old Testament, we know that the act of anointing with oil was used in the ritual consecration of priests, kings and prophets (Ex 29:7–9; Lev 8:12; 1 Kgs 19:16). The Bible also tells us that the Lord Jesus was anointed by God through the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:27;



10:38) to become the Prophet who delivered the message of the gospel (Lk 4:18; Acts 3:22); the High Priest who sacrificed Himself for the redemption of man's sins (Heb 9:11–15); and the King who rules over God's kingdom (Jn 18:36–37; Acts 5:31). Today, Christians in the true church have likewise been anointed by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 1:21) to enable them to undertake priestly, royal and prophetic duties (1 Pet 2:5; Rev 5:10; 1 Cor 14:31).

Anointing with oil can, furthermore, signify the bestowal of grace (Heb 10:29). In ancient times, oil was often used to treat wounds, as illustrated in the parable of the good Samaritan (Mk 6:13; Lk 10:34; Jas 5:14–15). In the same way, the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual grace (2 Thess 2:13; Heb 10:29). Often, the state of our souls can be compared to the pitiful man in the parable who was beaten by robbers, stripped and left for dead. Just as love and grace saved the man, so we are healed and saved by the anointing oil of God's Spirit of grace (1 Jn 2:20).

In the Old Testament, oil was also used in purification rites to cleanse leprosy (Lev 14:16–18), which was a symbol of sin. Like oil, the Holy Spirit has the power to cleanse believers of their sins.

The Bible records how Elisha increased oil for a poor widow to enable her to live (2 Kgs 4:2–7). Like the oil which sustained her, the Holy Spirit gives us abundant grace. Moreover, without Him, we cannot have spiritual life.

In ancient times, oil was used to fuel lamps (Lev 24:2). As Christians, we are lamps that give out light (Mt 5:14). Only when we have sufficient oil can we shine forth God's glory to brighten the darkness in the world (Mt 25:4; 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12). Importantly, if we are prepared to greet the Lord with lamps trimmed with oil and burning brightly, we can joyfully enter into the marriage feast with Him (Mt 25:10; Rev 19:9). If, on the other hand, we are unprepared when He meets us, we will not be admitted. By then, it will be too late to repent—we will find ourselves weeping helplessly outside (Mt 25:11–12). The moral is to prepare now, while we still have time to pursue the fullness of the Holy Spirit and to lead holy lives. Then we can confidently await the Lord's second coming, when He will collect His bride, which is the true church (Rev 19:7).

In Hebrews, the Holy Spirit is also called the "oil of gladness" (1:9). This teaches us that if we are filled by the Holy Spirit, we will

have abundant joy (1 Thess 1:6) and courage to overcome our fears (Acts 9:31). Paul tells us that joy is another characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

### 3.2.7 Seal

Seals were commonly used in ancient times. Even today, seals are used to certify documents and contracts to attest to their authority and authenticity. For example, the seal from a court of law attests to the authority of the law. In the same way, a royal seal on a king's decree certifies the king's decision. In ancient Persia, such royal decrees were irrevocable (Est 8:8). Even the king himself could not change a royal decree once it was sealed (Dan 6:8, 12, 15–18) in order to safeguard his credibility. The king's word was the law.

The Holy Spirit can be likened to a seal from God, the King of kings (1 Tim 6:15). If we are under God's authority, we are no longer under the bondage of sin. Crucially, if our foreheads bear His seal (Eph 4:30), we will escape His wrath on the last day (Rev 7:2–3; 3:10).

As stated, a royal seal represents the king's integrity, power and authority. Whoever bears the royal seal acts with the full authority of the king. Since we (the church) bear God's seal—the Holy Spirit—we are empowered to forgive or to convict the world of its sins (Jn 20:22–23; Mt 16:19; 18:18).

After the Lord Jesus was baptized, He was sealed by the Holy Spirit. And God's heavenly voice bore witness that He was truly the Father's beloved Son (Mt 3:16–17). If we believe in Jesus and the complete gospel, we shall surely be sealed with God's promised Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). In this way, God confirms that we are His beloved sons and daughters. For this reason, apostle Paul says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God... and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:16–17).

The language and symbol of the Holy Spirit as a seal is found in apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The reason was that the reference to the seal as a pledge of purchase was particularly familiar to the believers in this vibrant city, which was famous for its timber trade. Bickersteth gives us an insight into the use of the seal at that time:

The method of purchase was this: the merchant, after selecting his timber, stamped it with his own signet, which was an acknowledged sign of ownership. He often did not carry off his possession at the time; it was left in the harbour with other floats of timber; but it was chosen, bought, and stamped; and in due time the merchant sent a trusty agent with the signet, who, finding that timber which bore a corresponding impress, claimed and brought it away for the master's use.

Edward Henry Bickersteth (p. 176)

As Jesus' followers, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Our seal signifies that we no longer belong to ourselves, but to Jesus who purchased us with His blood (1 Cor 6:19–20). The Ephesian believers understood the importance and significance of the seal, and so Paul made use of their understanding to convey how the Holy Spirit had sealed them for the day of their redemption (Eph 1:13; 4:30). He wanted them to realize that they were no longer their own—they now belonged to Jesus Christ. The Bible makes this point clear, for on God's seal is written: "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Tim 2:19).

### 3.2.8 Guarantee

In Ephesians 1:14, we come across the Greek word for guarantee, which is *arrabon*.<sup>1</sup> This word was commonly used to denote a deposit given as a guarantee, whereby a full payment would be made at a later date. It was commonly applied by the Greeks and Romans in the course of trade.

Here, the word is used by Paul to describe the Holy Spirit as a pledge of the Christian's heavenly inheritance. Those loved by the Lord will, one day, enjoy the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. It is a grace that will be realized at the Lord's second coming (1 Pet 1:13). In the meantime, God gives us a guarantee to assure us of His promise.

The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirits that we are God's children, and that we have the right to the heavenly inheritance (Rom 8:16–17). Knowing this, we must cherish our noble status and set our mind on

1 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G728.

the things above (Col 3:2), because our true hope lies above, where God dwells in the fullness of His glory. For the sake of knowing Jesus Christ better, we need to disregard the things of this world (Phil 3:8).

The Holy Spirit guarantees eternal life (2 Cor 5:4–5) and our future resurrection and transformation into a spiritual body (2 Cor 5:1–3). With the Holy Spirit’s assurance, we have this living hope and do not need to be afraid of death. We can look forward to the time when we will be together with the Lord (2 Cor 5:6–8).

The Holy Spirit guarantees the promises made to us by the Lord. The Bible says, “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor 1:20–22). Job says, “Now put down a pledge for me with Yourself. Who is he who will shake hands with me?” (Job 17:3). Also, the psalmist says, “Show me a sign for good” (Ps 86:17). From these verses, we understand how important it is to have a guarantee of our future hope.

### **3.2.9 Fire**

Prophet Isaiah says, “And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and he who remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning” (Isa 4:3–4). Here, Isaiah talks about “the spirit of burning”, referring to another of the Holy Spirit’s titles. Isaiah’s term, “the filth of the daughters of Zion”, refers to the church’s impurity and sin. Yet, after the Holy Spirit burns away the impurities of God’s people, they will be “recorded among the living in Jerusalem”. In other words, the church will receive eternal life.

A refiner’s fire purifies metals. It removes all the impurities to produce a fine and burnished metal (Mal 3:2–3). Like a refiner’s fire, the Holy Spirit spiritually refines, renews (2 Cor 6:6; Tit 3:5) and sanctifies the believers (1 Pet 1:2).

In the time of the prophet Isaiah, God relayed an important message, telling His people that they needed a spirit of burning to

remove their impurities. Similarly, God's people in the present time—His holy city, His church—need to be refined in order to realize the glory of the New Jerusalem, as depicted in the Book of Revelation (Rev 21:11,18–27; cf. Isa 1:25).

Fire has the power to dissolve metal and the elements, fusing them into a solid mass (cf. 2 Pet 3:10–12). Spiritually speaking, the Holy Spirit can dissolve our self-seeking and self-centred ways. He can also remove the lines which we often draw within the church, such as lines of racial and social divide. Under the Spirit's guidance, God can unite diverse peoples to be one in Christ Jesus (Eph 4:3; Gal 3:28).

When a fire burns, the flames and smoke ascend heavenwards. Likewise, as God's Spirit burns ever hotter inside of us and fills our hearts, we will no longer feel attracted to the world's sinful pleasures. Instead, we will be compelled to leave them behind. Moreover, with the Holy Spirit's guidance and power, we can focus on spiritual matters and live out God's teachings (Mt 6:19–20; Col 3:1–4). Apostle Paul set us a good example, because he allowed the Holy Spirit to burn mightily in his heart to remove all personal will and ambition. The Spirit of fire stirred within him the great desire to be with Jesus (2 Cor 5:1–8; Phil 1:23) and to count everything as loss (Phil 3:7–8).

From the time of the Old Testament, the power of the Holy Spirit to cultivate selflessness has always been learnt as a spiritual lesson. In his battle with the Midianites, Gideon (one of ancient Israel's judges) won the battle against his enemies by smashing jars to uncover the light of the torches inside (Judg 7:16–23). This symbolic action teaches us about the powerful, yet hidden, presence of God's indwelling Spirit. Only when we demonstrate our willingness to break our own "self", can Jesus' light and glory be revealed (2 Cor 4:10).

The Spirit of burning also empowers us to spread the gospel with a spirit of boldness. For example, the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples at Pentecost (Jn 20:19; Acts 4:31). In fact, the early Christians preached so boldly thereafter that they were described as "those who have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). God's spirit of evangelism also burned within the prophet Jeremiah, who could not hold back from speaking out in the name of the Lord (Jer 20:9; cf. Ps 39:3; Job 32:17–22). We pray that the Lord gives the true church today this same burning spirit.

### 3.2.10 Pillar of cloud and fire

The Bible says, “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so as to go by day and night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night from before the people” (Ex 13:21–22). This pillar of cloud and fire which led the chosen people symbolizes the Holy Spirit.

After their exodus from Egypt, the Israelites journeyed for forty long years in the wilderness. The journey must have seemed endless. Without a compass to guide their path during the day or a bright enough light to direct them by night, it would have been impossible for them to find the right way to the promised land. Thankfully, God provided them with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Reading the Old Testament text, there appears to be two separate pillars, but, in fact, there was only one which took on two different forms. It never departed from God’s people and acted as an ever-present guide, leading them safely into Canaan.

God provided the pillar of fire to give the Israelites guidance and light, so that they were able to continue their journey by night (Ex 40:38). Today, we may sometimes feel lost on life’s path, but we must never forget that God’s Spirit is an omnipresent Guide and Helper. He is like a fiery light, guiding us, even though there is darkness in the world. We can have the confidence that God will eventually lead us to the spiritual Canaan, which is our heavenly home.

The Bible says this concerning the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt: “And the Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night” (Ex 14:19–20). As the Egyptian soldiers pursued the Israelites, the pillar of cloud moved between God’s people and the Egyptians. Amazingly, it enclosed the Egyptians in a cloud of darkness, whilst shining brilliantly for the Israelites.

This incident is rich in spiritual teachings. It shows that the Holy Spirit can either close or open a person’s spiritual eyes. For the Egyptians, the Holy Spirit brought darkness. Likewise, for those who

fail to believe in the Lord, or who harden their hearts, God may further enclose their eyes in spiritual darkness (cf. Rom 1:28; Eph 4:18; 2 Thess 2:11). For those of us who believe, we must endeavour to be “sons of light” by walking under God’s guidance and protection (1 Thess 5:5). The Lord Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (Jn 8:12). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor 3:17), and those who believe in Him should endeavour to be led by His Spirit. We must no longer walk in spiritual darkness because, like the Israelites, we have been graced by God’s Spirit of light.

The pillar of cloud and fire did not just lead the Israelites through the wilderness, it also served as their shield to protect them from their enemies in times of danger. It reminds us that the Holy Spirit not only guides and leads us through life, He also protects us from spiritual death. When we are tempted to sin and to forsake the right path, He calls us back. Therefore, our ears need to become attuned to the Spirit’s calling—to listen and not resist.

Apostle Paul also writes about the pillar of cloud and fire: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor 10:1–2). From this, we learn that the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea and their passage under the pillar of cloud and fire typify water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit respectively.

### **3.2.11 Light**

As mentioned earlier, the Holy Spirit is symbolized by fire. Fire emits light, and so the latter also symbolizes the Holy Spirit. When Asaph composed a psalm to remind God’s people of their deliverance from Egypt, he wrote, “In the daytime also He led them with the cloud, and all the night with a light of fire” (Ps 78:14).

Jesus said, “God is Spirit” (Jn 4:24), and James referred to God as the “Father of lights” (Jas 1:17). So God, who is the Holy Spirit, is our source of light. He is the true light who shines to guide those who earnestly and sincerely seek after Him.

Light has many properties which, when studied, help us to understand why the Bible uses it as a symbol for the Holy Spirit:

- Light exposes things hidden in darkness (Jn 3:20; Eph 5:13). Similarly, the Holy Spirit reveals the darkness of our souls. We see this illustrated in the example of two Christians in the early church: Ananias and Sapphira, who were exposed for lying to the Holy Spirit. They met a tragic end after their deception was revealed (Acts 5:1–16). This incident brings to mind the words of Solomon: “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Eccl 12:14; cf. Lk 12:2).
- Light symbolizes good. When it shines in the darkness, the latter can never overtake it (Jn 1:5). In fact, light has the power to dispel darkness. Therefore, evil can never receive God’s Spirit of light (Jn 14:17); instead, the Holy Spirit disperses it. It follows, then, that where evil exists, the Holy Spirit will not abide. For this reason, we must live godly and holy lives if we desire God’s Spirit to fill our hearts and our lives.
- The sun is our natural source of light. It does not discriminate against anyone, but bestows its rays of warmth on everyone equally (Mt 5:45). Likewise, the Holy Spirit graciously illuminates every type of person. Like the sun, He gives us spiritual warmth and life and brings us out of the shadow of darkness and death (cf. Mt 4:16; Lk 1:78–79).

### 3.2.12 Sword

The Book of Genesis gives us the earliest reference to the sword as a symbol for the Holy Spirit: “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the Lord God sent him [i.e. Adam] out of the garden of Eden... and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen 3:22–24).



After Adam and Eve had fallen from God's grace, they were expelled from the garden of Eden and kept away from the tree of life. As a result, all humanity lost the grace of eternal life, for God had warned Adam and Eve that they would die if they ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17). To keep humanity from returning to the garden of Eden, God placed cherubim and a flaming sword to guard it. The flaming sword turned in every direction to prevent people from entering in.

The physical garden of Eden symbolizes the heavenly garden of Eden. Like the earthly Eden, the garden of Eden above also has a tree of life (Rev 22:14). From the fall of humankind to the arrival of God's salvation, He sealed off the way to the tree of life with a sword. No one was able to enter the garden, and no one could find the way to eternal life because sin kept humanity at bay. But our Lord Jesus Christ reopened this sealed-off way through His death on the cross (Mt 27:50–51; Heb 10:19–20). Therefore, Jesus proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6; 10:9). He is the only way by whom we can receive salvation and eternal life.

The flaming sword at the entrance of Eden, which symbolizes the Holy Spirit, has the power to kill and destroy. Whoever wishes to enter in to obtain eternal life must first taste death. Paul teaches us that we all need to die and be buried with Christ through water baptism (Rom 6:3), because only when the sinful body is destroyed can we obtain eternal life in the Lord (Rom 6:6, 19, 23). Following this, we need to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit so that the deeds of the body can be put to death, and we can live (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:16).

So the flaming sword, which once blocked the way to eternal life, does not signify that we are resigned to live in hopelessness. Rather, it has reopened the way to salvation, revealing the two-fold truth that humanity must both die through water baptism and be reborn through God's Holy Spirit. Only then can we enter God's kingdom and receive eternal life (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5). And from the Bible, we know that the Holy Spirit works in both water baptism and the baptism of the Spirit (Jn 3:5; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13). For this reason, apostle Paul told the church in Galatia that they had "begun in the Spirit" (Gal 3:3). In the same way, our journey back to eternal life begins with the Holy Spirit. Apart from Him, there is no other way back to Eden.

Apostle Paul gives us a further insight into the link between the sword and the Holy Spirit in his letter to the Ephesians: “The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17). His words help us to understand that:

- The sword symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
- As a weapon, the Holy Spirit enables us to slay our fleshly desires and to overcome the spiritual powers of darkness (cf. Eph 6:12).
- The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Only when we are equipped with this sword, can we have the boldness to take the offensive in our spiritual warfare against the spiritual powers of darkness.

God’s sword carries power: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). God’s word, like a sharp sword, can penetrate our hearts, searching our thoughts and motives. Unfortunately, Ananias and Sapphira decided to test the Holy Spirit and paid for their mistake with their lives (Acts 5:3, 9–10). We should learn from their mistake: instead of testing how far we can push the Holy Spirit by living an untrue life, we should rely on Him as our source of spiritual power and strength. With the sword of the Spirit, we can both slay our own evil desires and also spread God’s word to all those who need it.

### 3.2.13 Wind

The Hebrew word for “wind” is *ruah*.<sup>2</sup> This same word is often translated as “spirit”, “breath” and “air”. The Greek word is *pneuma* and similarly means “wind”, “spirit” and “breath”.<sup>3</sup> On three occasions, the Bible uses “wind” to symbolize the Holy Spirit: 1) Ezekiel 37:5–10; 2) John 3:8; 3) Acts 2:2.

The first biblical passage reads, “Then [God] said to me, ‘Prophecy

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Strong’s reference no. H7307.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G4151.

to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.’” So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army” (Ezek 37:9–10).

This passage from Ezekiel is one of the most important Old Testament passages where wind is used as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. It describes the prophet’s vision of the resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit. If we read the passage in context, we discover a subsequent verse which clarifies the prophet’s message. In Ezekiel 37:14, the Lord says, “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live.” From here, we see that the Holy Spirit gives life. Concerning this resurrecting power of the Spirit, apostle Paul says, “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom 8:11).

In the second passage, Jesus teaches, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8). Here, He talks symbolically of the Holy Spirit as wind, which blows wherever it wishes and cannot be restrained. It also fills the earth like an invisible and intangible force. From Jesus’ words, we learn that the nature of wind reveals the spiritual qualities of the Holy Spirit.

In the third passage, wind, as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, was powerfully manifested at Pentecost when He was poured out on the disciples. Acts 2 describes the event: “And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2, 4).

### **3.2.14 Seven eyes**

The prophetic books in the Bible sometimes use the symbolism of “seven eyes” to describe God’s Spirit:

For behold, the stone  
That I have laid before Joshua:  
Upon the stone are seven eyes.  
Zechariah 3:9

They are the eyes of the LORD,  
Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.  
Zechariah 4:10

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Revelation 5:6

The number seven is a symbol of completeness or perfection; while “eyes” represent wisdom. So the seven eyes in the above passages represent God’s perfect and spiritual wisdom. The seven eyes also symbolize the Holy Spirit’s all-seeing nature, that is, His omniscience. He searches the depths of God (1 Cor 2:10), can perceive Satan’s work (Acts 16:16–18), and looks deep into our inner hearts (Acts 5:1–11). God watches over both the good and the evil (Prov 15:3); nothing can be hidden from His sight. Knowing this, we need to strive to live holy, pure and righteous lives.

## **Review questions**

1. What is (a) a type (b) a symbol? Why does the Bible use these?
2. Explain how the dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
3. Explain how the dew symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
4. Explain how the rain symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
5. Explain how water symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
6. Explain how the river symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
7. Explain how oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
8. Explain how the seal symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
9. Why is the Holy Spirit referred to as a “guarantee”?
10. Explain how fire symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
11. Explain how the pillar of cloud and fire symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
12. Explain how light symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
13. Explain how the sword symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
14. Explain how wind symbolizes the Holy Spirit.
15. Explain how the “seven eyes” symbolize the Holy Spirit.

# Chapter 4

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

### 4.1 Introduction

The Holy Spirit personally established the church of God, both in the time of the apostles and in this present time. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was particularly significant because it signalled the restoration and gathering of God's scattered people, as prophesied in Ezekiel 36 and 37. Whereas God had once scattered the people of the world and confused their tongues at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), He was now bringing them together again and unifying their tongues in praise (Acts 2:4–11).

### 4.2 Definition of the church

The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia* from *ek*, meaning “out of”, and *klesis*, meaning “a calling”.<sup>1</sup> So the literal translation of *ekklesia* is “a called-out assembly”. In the ancient world, *ekklesia* referred to “lawful assemblies” in Greek cities (also known as “regular assemblies”). Upon hearing the blowing of the city horn, city residents would come out and gather together. Jesus also used the word “assembly” to refer to His church (Mt 16:18).

Many important ancient texts, such as the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), used *ekklesia* in place of the Hebrew *qahal* to refer to the assembly of God's covenantal people in the Old Testament (e.g. Deut 23:2–9). For example, *ekklesia* was used to

1 *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1992). Strong's reference no. G1577.

describe the assembly of Israel before the entrance of the tent of meeting (cf. *ekklesia* in Acts 7:38; 19:32, 39, 41; Heb 2:12).

However, there is a significant difference between God's assembled people under the old and new covenants. Under the new covenant, God's assembly—the church—has been “purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). In contrast, under the old covenant, which was instituted through the blood of calves and goats, the sins of the people remained (Heb 9:18ff; 10:4).

### 4.3 Nature of the church

The church cannot be compared to any secular or social gathering, for the church, by definition, is fundamentally different due to her calling by God. She belongs to God because He purchased her with His own blood (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 6:19ff; cf. “*My church*” in Mt 16:18). While secular groups have no need to consider God in any of their activities, the church must do all things with Him as her focus. In addition, while secular groups can exclude people on the basis of their own predetermined criteria, the church must comply with God's will to open her doors to everyone (cf. Acts 9–11).

Unlike secular organizations with their organizational hierarchies (cf. Mt 20:20–28), members of the church are not distinguished by position or authority, but rather by service. Therefore, elders, pastors and deacons are appointed as God's servants (cf. “bondservant” in Rom 1:1), who must lead and build up the church through their spiritual example (1 Pet 5:1–4; Eph 4:11–13; 1 Tim 3:1ff).

### 4.4 Origin of the church

Abraham was the first patriarch (Heb 7:4), the father of faith to the Israelites and Jews (Mt 3:9; Acts 13:26) and, in a spiritual sense, the father of faith to all believers in Christ (Rom 4:11; Gal 3:28–29). Before they came to know the one true God, Abraham and his father's household served false gods (Josh 24:2). But Abraham was specially chosen by God and separated out to be the start of a holy nation (Gen 12:1–3).

The Bible gives various descriptions of God's people, the Israelites: holy unto the Lord and separated from the peoples (Lev 20:26); "a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations" (Num 23:9); "a people for [God] Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 14:2). The chosen people of the Old Testament foreshadowed the church in the New Testament, which Jesus would call out of the world and purchase with His own blood.

Jesus' birth into the world marked the beginning of the end for God's covenantal people under the law (Mt 11:13; Jn 4:23; Heb 8:7–13). This did not mean that the church replaced the Israelites; rather, the church became the renewal of God's chosen people, which would include the Israelites (Rom 11).

The Lord Jesus personally called and separated out a core group of twelve apostles to be His followers (Mk 3:13ff; Jn 15:19). Their commission would be to reach out to the world (Mt 28:16ff; Acts 1:16ff). They would work, not through their own efforts, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. This power came through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It enabled Peter to deliver a powerful testimony, which led to the conversion of some 3,000 people and the birth of the early church.

## **4.5 The work of the Holy Spirit in the church**

### **4.5.1 Directs the church ministry**

The Holy Spirit worked actively during the period of the early church. Church activities were initiated, directed and enabled by God's Spirit. Instructions revealed by Him were immediately obeyed, and without question (Acts 8:29–30). When the Holy Spirit prohibited the ministry in a particular region, the apostles did not dare to insist on their own will, but altered their itinerary accordingly (Acts 16:6–8). He set out the rules for the church and gave her the authority to enforce them. The apostles were merely the tools for the Holy Spirit's work (Acts 15:28–29; 16:4–5). Today, in the true church, we need to ensure that we have



this same spirit of submission to the Holy Spirit when we serve God.

Before the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus' disciples at Pentecost, they had argued over who would be the greatest in the new kingdom (Mt 20:20–28), even on the night that Jesus was betrayed (Lk 22:24–27). However, once they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they were totally transformed. The disciples began to understand humility and to appreciate that spiritual power and grace came from God (Acts 10:25–26; 14:8–15; 1 Cor 3:5–7; 1 Cor 4:7; Jas 1:17).

Jesus Christ is the head of the church, and so the church must submit to Him (Eph 4:15; Rom 12:5). This is because the body cannot function independently of the head; rather, it must follow its lead. Today, in the true church, we need to take care to avoid putting human interests above God and falling into a situation where human rule and politics supersede the Holy Spirit's governance; man-made rules and decisions overshadow the Holy Spirit's will; human thinking is valued over faith; and talent takes the place of spiritual gifts. The whole of the church's ministry, including the choosing of church leaders, should be based on spiritual principles.

Revelation chapters 1 to 3 contain John's revelations from the Lord. While on the island of Patmos, he wrote seven letters to the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Rev 1:9–11). At the end of each letter, John concluded, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Today, we need to ponder carefully over the spiritual teachings given to the seven churches.

The True Jesus Church has been established by the Holy Spirit in this end time. She has the mission of restoring the original apostolic church. Therefore, in carrying out her duties, she must act in line with the principles and examples left by the apostles. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit must personally govern her.

#### **4.5.2 Sends out workers**

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20:21–22

If we are to preach the gospel, we must be sent by God (Rom 10:15). Receiving the Holy Spirit qualifies one to preach with His authority and power, for it is the Spirit who equips us to be His witnesses (Lk 24:48–49; Acts 1:8). From the Bible, we can see how the Holy Spirit transformed previously weak and fearful disciples into powerful witnesses for Christ. The Book of Acts describes the disciples as being “filled with the Holy Spirit”, speaking the word of God “with boldness”, and bearing witness with “great power” (Acts 4:31, 33).

Paul once said, “My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4–5). He added, “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:5). Here, we see the fundamental difference between preaching the word of God and imparting worldly knowledge: preaching goes beyond eloquence and intelligence—it is based on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Every church worker should be appointed by the Holy Spirit, not just the overseers/bishops (Acts 13:1–4; 20:28). The Bible records:

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 6:2–6

This passage shows how the Holy Spirit governed the early church completely. Not only were the preachers and elders personally set apart for God’s ministry, but even the seven workers, whose role was to “serve tables”, were required to be full of the Holy Spirit. When a person has the fullness of the Holy Spirit, he can be assured that God has set him apart for His work, and that He will support and guide him.

Today, God’s church requires many workers to shoulder the responsibility of pastoring the members and spreading the gospel of salvation, but this does not mean we can allow simply anyone to serve. The church needs those who are commissioned and empowered by the

Holy Spirit to minister, according to the gifts He has entrusted to them.

Prophet Jeremiah once said to the false prophet, Hananiah, “Hear now, Hananiah, the Lord has not sent you, but you made this people trust in a lie” (Jer 28:15). Prophets are the spokesmen of God (Jer 1:7), whose authority comes from their being sent by God (Rom 10:15). False prophets, issuing false prophecies in the Lord’s name (Jer 29:8–9), can never build up God’s people spiritually. On the contrary, they will make them fall (Ezek 13:1–7). Today, “prophets” who use God’s holy name to preach a false gospel will neither be acknowledged by God, nor have a part in accomplishing His will.

At the start of His ministry, the Lord Jesus pointed out the importance of being sent by God’s Spirit. He said, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Lk 4:18). The resurrected Lord later commissioned His disciples with the words: “ ‘As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ ” (Jn 20:21–22). Just as the heavenly Father had sent the Lord Jesus to preach the gospel of God’s kingdom, Jesus, in turn, sent out His disciples in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit.

A preacher of God’s words should not rely on eloquence or worldly wisdom alone (Acts 4:13; 1 Cor 4:20). Most importantly, he needs to have the authority and power which comes from being sent by God (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4, 5, 8). Today, the church needs ministers and workers who are filled by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:18; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4).

#### **4.6 The Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts**

1 Corinthians 12:1 talks about spiritual gifts and uses the Greek word *pneumatikos*, meaning “pertaining to or proceeding from the Holy Spirit”.<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:4, 9, 28, 30 and 31 speak of *charismata* or “gifts of grace”<sup>3</sup> which are bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G4152

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Plural of Greek *charisma*. Strong’s reference no. G5486.

There are nine gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians chapter 12: 1) the word of wisdom; 2) the word of knowledge; 3) faith; 4) gifts of healings; 5) the working of miracles; 6) prophecy; 7) discerning of spirits; 8) different kinds of tongues; 9) the interpretation of tongues.

The Holy Spirit gives believers different spiritual gifts, but specifically for the purposes of establishing the church and advancing God's work (1 Cor 12:8–11). For example, we learn from the Bible that most of the apostles were “uneducated and untrained men” (Acts 4:13), yet they were able to proclaim Jesus' resurrection story with power and authority (Mt 28:16–17; Mk 16:9–14; Lk 24:9–11; Jn 20:24–27). The writer of Hebrews explains, saying, “God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb 2:4). In other words, the Holy Spirit gave the apostles spiritual gifts which enabled them to witness effectively for Jesus Christ.

Elder James tells us that every good and perfect gift comes from heaven above (Jas 1:17). The church today needs the same spiritual gifts as the early church in order to advance God's work. The church body is not one member, but many members who are joined together in unity (1 Cor 12:14, 17, 19). To bring about this unity, God knits them together, through whatever each one supplies out of love, for the growth of the church (Eph 4:13, 16). He also arranges the “body parts” as He chooses (1 Cor 12:18). Therefore, the Holy Spirit's distribution of spiritual gifts is God's way of realizing the fullness of His body (Eph 4:11–13).

Spiritual gifts are not given so that the members can glorify themselves (1 Cor 3:5–7; 4:7; 12:15–17, 21–24; Lk 17:10). Rather, the Holy Spirit distributes them for the greater good of the church (1 Cor 12:7) and to equip the saints for God's ministry (Eph 4:12). We have to realize that, when we receive spiritual gifts, we are merely unworthy vessels—instruments through whom the Holy Spirit works.

#### **4.6.1 Spiritual gifts that build up the church**

The nine spiritual gifts which the Holy Spirit bestows for the building up of the church are listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. They can be

organized into three groups: 1) gifts of spiritual understanding; 2) gifts that manifest God's supernatural grace and power; 3) gifts that reveal God's will.

## **1. Gifts of spiritual understanding**

### **(i) The word of wisdom (1 Cor 12:8)**

Spiritual wisdom is timeless and God-given (1 Cor 2:6–7). It is a necessary quality for God's servants in the church (Acts 6:3). If God gives us words of wisdom, no one can withstand or contradict our words, for they rest in the truth (Lk 21:15; Acts 6:10).

Apostle Paul said, "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:13–14). The Holy Spirit reveals spiritual truths. An unspiritual person cannot receive or comprehend them; only a spiritual person, with the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom, can explain and expound spiritual truths. Apostle Paul had deep insights into spiritual truths—truths that were hidden from others in ages past, but which were revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, to equip him for God's work (Eph 1:17; 3:3–5).

### **(ii) The word of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)**

Paul gave thanks to God for having blessed the church in Corinth with the word of knowledge (1 Cor 1:4–7). This gift refers to a full knowledge of the faith (Rom 15:14; 2 Pet 3:18) and truth (Tit 1:1). Spiritual knowledge is different from worldly knowledge (Col 2:8). We will only know how to apply spiritual truths if we have spiritual knowledge.

When the Lord Jesus spoke of the Spirit of truth guiding us into all truth (Jn 16:13), He meant that the Holy Spirit would guide us in our knowledge of the truth. The scope of this knowledge includes the richness of spiritual wisdom (Col 3:16); the ability to discern good

from evil (Phil 1:9–10); the ability to stand firm in the faith; and the ability to teach others (Rom 15:14). But spiritual knowledge only benefits us and others when we put it into practice. Paul, for example, used his expansive knowledge of the gospel of Christ to establish his own faith and to instruct others.

### **(iii) Discerning of spirits (1 Cor 12:10)**

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:1

And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.

2 Corinthians 11:14

Aside from the Holy Spirit, the evil spirit can also dwell within people. The indwelling of a demonic spirit is what we commonly refer to as demon-possession. Also, the evil spirit can work through church members to spread deceitful doctrines and cause confusion within the church (1 Tim 4:1).

Without members who have the ability to distinguish between spirits, the church is open to spiritual attacks. Fortunately, in the early church, the apostles had the gift of discerning spirits. Therefore, they could tell when Satan was working against God (Acts 5:3; 13:8–11; 16:16–18).

## **2. Spiritual gifts that manifest God’s supernatural grace and power**

### **(i) Faith (1 Cor 12:9)**

Faith is an indispensable part of the Christian journey. We need it both at the start, when we receive the grace of salvation (Eph 2:8), and thereafter, in order to live lives that are pleasing to God (Heb 11:6). Faith helps us to conquer difficulties (Ps 119:71; Phil 4:11–14) and also to work miracles. Jesus tells us, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into

the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says" (Mk 11:22–23).

In Mark 11:22, Jesus says, "Have faith in God", which literally translates from Greek as "Have the faith of God". God has unwavering faith in Himself, for He knows what He can do. But what does it mean to have God's faith? Jesus teaches us that we do not have to do anything great, as faith as tiny as a grain of mustard seed can grow into "mountain moving" proportions if we truly trust God in our lives (Mt 17:20). We can learn from two workers in the early church:

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Acts 6:5

For he [i.e. Barnabas] was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.

Acts 11:24

Stephen and Barnabas had great faith, which came from their being "full of the Holy Spirit". We should all endeavour to cultivate this spiritual quality with God's help.

## **(ii) Gifts of healings (1 Cor 12:9)**

Apostle Peter revealed the source of Jesus' healing power, saying, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

The Bible shows that the Lord Jesus was not the only person to have the gift of healing. In fact, it records Jesus promising this gift to those who believe in Him and who preach the true gospel (Mk 16:17–20). In the book of John, He says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father" (Jn 14:12). His words came true from the time of Pentecost: the apostles performed many miracles—more than Jesus ever did during His ministry. The apostolic church had many members with the gift of healing. They included Peter (Acts 3:1–8; 5:15–16; 9:32–34), Philip (Acts 8:6–8), Ananias (Acts 9:17–18) and Paul (Acts 14:8–10; 28:8–10). Elders of

local churches also prayed for the sick and anointed them with oil for healing (Jas 5:14–16).

Miraculous healings can help convince unbelievers of the message of the gospel (Acts 8:6; 14:3) and to encourage obedience and respect for the Lord. Paul says, “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient” (Rom 15:18).

The Bible teaches us that faith is a necessary condition for receiving God’s gift of healing (Mt 9:27–30; Mk 9:21–24; Acts 14:8–10), as are the confession of sins and intercessory prayers by the church.

### (iii) **The working of miracles (1 Cor 12:10)**

God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will.

Hebrews 2:4

The working of miracles supports the work of evangelism. When Jesus preached the gospel, He performed many miracles (Mt 11:20). For example, He cast out unclean spirits (Mk 1:23–33), resurrected the dead (Jn 11:39–45), walked on the sea (Mt 14:24–33) and calmed the storm (Mk 4:35–41). In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter proclaimed Jesus as Lord and Christ, attested by God through “miracles, wonders, and signs” (Acts 2:22, 36).

The Book of Acts records how the apostles, such as Peter, Philip and Paul, received the gift to perform mighty miracles. Peter had the power to heal the sick—even with his shadow—cast out demons and bring the dead back to life (Acts 5:12–16; 9:36–42). Philip was able to cast out unclean spirits and heal those who were paralyzed and lame (Acts 8:7). The outcome was such that even a sorcerer converted to Christ: “Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13). During his ministry, Paul also raised the dead (Acts 20:9–12) and cast out unclean spirits (Acts 19:11–12).

Paul considered signs and miracles as proof that one has been sent by God. He told the Corinthian believers, “Truly the signs of an



apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12). Today, there are signs and miracles in the true church which serve to confirm the truth of the gospel that she preaches and to testify of the abidance and work of the Holy Spirit.

### **3. Gifts that reveal God’s will**

#### **(i) Prophecy (1 Cor 12:10)**

We often associate the gift of prophecy with the ability to reveal the future, when, actually, it also reveals God’s will in the present. This gift entails the speaking of messages from God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20–21), to edify, exhort and comfort others (1 Cor 14:3). Apostle Paul considered the gift of prophecy as having a place of particular prominence among the spiritual gifts and encouraged the Corinthian believers to pursue it (1 Cor 14:4–5). He said, “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy” (1 Cor 14:1).

We see that, in the Old Testament, God raised prophets and gave them special authority to speak His words. Today, God can similarly raise prophets to reveal the truth and to encourage the believers in the faith (1 Cor 14:30–31).

#### **(ii) Different kinds of tongues (1 Cor 12:10)**

The gift of different kinds of tongues does not refer to the speaking of worldly languages, such as Spanish, Chinese, French and so forth; rather, it refers to the utterance of spiritual tongues which cannot be understood (1 Cor 14:2), unless God allows them to be interpreted by those with the gift of interpretation. In such cases, the tongues serve to deliver a message from God to the church (1 Cor 14:6ff).

Apostle Paul says, “I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church

may receive edification” (1 Cor 14:5). At first glance, we may think this passage teaches us that the gift of prophecy is more important than the gift of tongues, but we need to understand that apostle Paul is speaking in terms of what is most beneficial for building up the church at large.

Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14 add to his previous messages in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13, about the need for the Corinthian members to work in unity and to build each other up in love. Specifically, he teaches them the importance of exercising spiritual gifts through love, to do things in an orderly manner, and to seek the edification of the members, as opposed to self-glorification (1 Cor 14:12). He therefore tells them to: a) pursue the gift of prophecy, to deliver God’s messages to the congregation in words of understanding (1 Cor 14:1, 5, 19); b) use spiritual tongues to preach to the congregation only when there is someone to interpret, and to take turns when doing so (1 Cor 14:28); c) keep silent in church when there is no interpreter and to use the spiritual tongue to speak to oneself and to God for self-edification (1 Cor 14:28).

In summary, Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians 14 indicate that there are two types of spiritual tongues. We should take care not to confuse them. To reiterate, they are:

- The spiritual tongue that is used by the individual in prayer to God (1 Cor 14:2, 14–15). The purpose of this tongue is for self-edification (1 Cor 14:2,4). Importantly, it is the evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.
- The “different kinds of tongues” that are used for preaching—to deliver messages from God for the edification of the church (1 Cor 12:10; 14:5–6, 26).

When we understand the difference between these two types of tongues, Paul’s teachings become clearer to us. For example, we can better understand why he talks about “different kinds of tongues” alongside the “interpretation of tongues” in 1 Corinthians 12:10. (For further clarification about the speaking of tongues, please refer to Chapter 9).

### (iii) **The interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12:10)**

Spiritual tongues are generally directed at God, and not man. However, as mentioned earlier, in special circumstances, God may wish to give a message to the church through the tongues. In such cases, they will require interpretation (1 Cor 14:5, 12–13, 27) and application in an orderly manner (1 Cor 14:27–31). This prevents confusion within the church. It follows, then, that if there is no interpreter, God does not want the message of the tongue to be revealed. Under such circumstances, Paul encourages the person to remain silent in church, and to simply use the spiritual tongues to speak to God in prayer for self-edification (1 Cor 14:28).

“But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12:11). The Holy Spirit is the one who bestows spiritual gifts. However, Paul adds that we can pursue after gifts, such as prophecy and the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 14:1, 13). Yet, we cannot insist on God giving them to us, for it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to distribute them as He chooses (1 Cor 12:30).

Besides the nine spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, some Bible scholars believe that Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:28 and Ephesians 4:11 also speak of spiritual gifts—those that relate to duties and functions within the church. Since they are bestowed by God’s Spirit, they can also be considered as *charismata* or “gifts of grace”.

#### **4.6.2 Love as the foundation for spiritual gifts**

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 to address a number of issues relating to the application of spiritual gifts within the church in Corinth. In chapter 12, he listed the spiritual gifts and talked about the importance of church unity. In chapter 14, he wrote about the correct way of using spiritual gifts and how to keep order during church services. In chapter 13, he gave the church a special teaching which served to connect all the points raised in chapters 12 and 14.

Chapter 13 is particularly significant, because it is here that Paul presented the key principle behind the application of spiritual gifts—the principle of love.

## A. The failure of the church in Corinth

Having spiritual gifts and having love are two separate matters. We see this truth well illustrated in the situation of the Corinthian church: the members were endowed with all manner of spiritual gifts, but lacked something far more precious, which was love. As a result, the ministry and development of the church were hindered. It was against this background that Paul wrote to admonish them and to encourage them to renew their love in Christ.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians explained the evils of division and dissension. Within the church, members had been taking sides: some claimed to belong to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Cephas, and others to Christ. Because the church was so factious, the members lacked the ability to work together for the common good. So Paul urged them to avoid division and, instead, to have the same mind (1 Cor 1:10–13; 3:1–8). He also presented them with the analogy of one body with many members, teaching them to work together in Christ (1 Cor 12:4–6, 12–16).

Another problem within the church was that some members, who had one particular spiritual gift, despised others who had a different spiritual gift. So Paul reminded them that every member has a useful function to fulfil: just as a person's body needs all of its parts—even those that are weak—to work properly, so it is with the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:17–24, 27–30).

Paul went on to pose a number of rhetorical questions, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Cor 12:29–30). His point was that members will have different spiritual gifts, but when they work together in unison, the outcome will be a vibrant church. Sadly, the church in Corinth did not understand this truth, so members were condescending, arrogant and divisive. In short, the church lacked God's divine and selfless love. Therefore, Paul urged the members to care for one another. He told them that when one member suffers, all the members suffer together; when one member is honoured, all the members should rejoice (1 Cor 12:25–26).

## **B. The role of love**

An unfortunate situation for the church is where members have an abundance of spiritual gifts, but lack the love of Christ. Hence, they may flaunt their gifts, but no one really benefits (cf. Phil 2:3–4). When apostle Paul discovered this to be the problem in Corinth, he quickly wrote a letter in an attempt to prevent the church's further deterioration. In 1 Corinthians 13, he encouraged the church to focus on the best gifts, which include love (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1).

Apostle Paul said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1). Here, the "tongues of men and of angels" refer to the gift of spiritual tongues. In short, in the absence of love, tongues were no longer useful. He added, "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2). Love triumphs over eloquence and other spiritual gifts. Without it, spiritual gifts cannot build up another person's faith or spiritual life. Moreover, without love, a person can misuse God's spiritual gifts to cause dissension in the church and leave room for the devil to work.

Paul expounded further: "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor 13:3). Here, he spoke of the highest forms of altruism: the giving of one's worldly goods to charity and the sacrifice of one's life for another. Paul argued that if these acts are done without love, they would not benefit the person doing them. Worse, they would amount to self-glorification (cf. Mt 6:1–2).

Love is a wonderful truth, and without it, spiritual gifts cannot make the church complete. Therefore, we all need to pursue this virtue as a key agent for the growth of Christ's body and as the foundation of our faith (Eph 4:16).

## C. Divine and natural love

Two Greek words in the New Testament translate into “love”. They are *phileo* and *agape*. *Phileo* means “loved”, “dear” and “friend”.<sup>4</sup> It refers to the natural love which is inherent to humanity, an instinctive feeling for the people who are closest to us. It describes well the affection which we have for our families and friends. This type of love helps to maintain relationships and social order. Anyone, Christian or non-Christian, has the ability to manifest *phileo*.

*Agape* refers to divine love—God’s love.<sup>5</sup> It is the love which comes from the faith of a reborn Christian. This word was rarely used in the popular Hellenistic literature of Paul’s time. In any case, the secular use of the word *agape* could never have adequately expressed the depth and meaning of the word, as used in the Bible. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross conferred this word with the profound meaning known only to Christians (Rom 5:8; 1 Jn 3:16). Paul speaks of *agape* in 1 Corinthians 13, and elder John uses it to describe the true essence of God’s love. The latter writes:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

1 John 4:7–9

## 4.7 The Holy Spirit’s role in uniting the true church

### 4.7.1 Jesus’ prayer for unity

Before He ascended to heaven, the Lord Jesus prayed for the church’s unity:

Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are . . . I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You,

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G5368.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G26.

Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

John 17:11, 20–23

Firstly, we see that Jesus asked the heavenly Father “that they may be one” (v. 11) because He hoped that His apostles would be united, just as the Son was united with the Father. Importantly, He wanted them to be united in the truth, for without the truth, they would be divided. From the Bible, we understand that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). Likewise, John’s gospel teaches us that God is true (Jn 7:28; cf. 1 Jn 5:20). Therefore, the church’s unity in God and in Christ is a unity in the truth because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17).

Secondly, when Jesus spoke of “these alone” in verse 20, He was referring to the apostles. And when He spoke of “those who will believe in Me through their word”, He was referring to those who would later believe in Him, namely the church which was to be established from the day of Pentecost. So Jesus’ earnest hope was for the apostles and the believers to be united as one in the truth. His words teach us that the church must be built on the truth—the foundation of the apostles, prophets and Jesus Christ (Mt 16:18; Eph 2:19–20).

Thirdly, Jesus’ words in verse 23 indicated His wish for the apostles and believers to be united. In this way, they would show the world that He was sent by the heavenly Father, and that God loves the Son and the church.

#### **4.7.2 The Holy Spirit gives unity**

The Holy Spirit is one. God gives unity to the church in the Spirit (Eph 4:3–4; Ezek 11:19). The Bible tells us that the believers are built into a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:21–22). Paul says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

Often, we cannot achieve unity in the Spirit because pride and personal will get in the way. But the Holy Spirit is like a fire which can consume and burn away the impurities, enabling the church to become united as one body.

#### **4.7.3 The Holy Spirit unites the church in the truth**

Paul says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). He also says, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4–6). From these passages, we understand that there is only one Bible and one truth (2 Cor 1:18–19).

The true church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Mt 16:18; Eph 2:19–20). This means that the members can only be united if they have a common faith (Gal 1:6–8; Tit 1:4; Jude 17; Eph 4:13). The apostles preached the commandments and revelations which they received from the Lord Jesus (Mt 28:20; Gal 1:11–12; Eph 3:3–5); and the Bible says that if we choose not to obey God’s apostles and prophets, we are not of God and have not received the Spirit of truth (1 Jn 4:6). From this, we can see how important the Holy Spirit is in helping us to understand the truth.

#### **4.7.4 Striving together for unity**

The oneness of the church is the Lord Jesus’ will, but we cannot compromise the truth for the sake of unity. The Lord Jesus says, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand” (Mt 12:25). Satan’s most lethal weapon against the church is division. If he can make Christians unthinkingly attack one another, the church will inevitably suffer. But if we all strive for spiritual unity in truth and love, the church will become complete and strong and also have the ability to manifest the likeness of Christ (Eph 4:13–16).



#### **4.7.5 The Holy Spirit grants submission**

John says, “We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error” (1 Jn 4:6). The Spirit of truth—the Holy Spirit—gives the believers mutual understanding and knowledge and also helps them to submit to one another. For this reason, the church must have the indwelling and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Significantly, without Him, a church cannot claim to belong to God (Rom 8:9).

#### **4.8 One true church**

Today, there are thousands of Christian denominations and churches. All seem unable to agree on a common faith. For example, one church may believe that baptism is for the remission of sins, while another may claim that it is merely a public declaration of faith, and yet others may preach that the confession of Jesus as Lord is sufficient for salvation.

However, some churches have been attempting to attain at least some degree of commonality, and the trend nowadays seems to be an increasing drive towards an ecumenical approach. Inevitably, it entails churches putting aside differences of doctrine. However, while ecumenism may bring Christians and churches physically together, it does not resolve key issues of faith.

Crucially, the plurality of denominations within Christianity was never the will of God. He only ever intended there to be one church and body of Christ, which rightfully belongs to Him. In fact, when we look into the Bible, we see that it repeatedly affirms the singular nature of His true church.

##### **4.8.1 One temple**

The temple in the Old Testament prefigured the church in the New Testament. As Christians, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Collectively, believers who make up the church are likewise called the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16–17; Eph 2:21–22).

In the Old Testament, the Israelites only built one temple, despite the fact that they had the resources to build more than one. God is one (Deut 32:39), and likewise the temple was one. In the New Testament, all the believers in the church are collectively built into one spiritual house (1 Pet 2:5). Just as there is only one Spirit, so there is only one spiritual house or temple (1 Cor 12:4; Eph 4:4).

#### **4.8.2 One body**

The church is the body of Christ (Col 1:24), and all the believers are members of the one body (Rom 12:5). There may be many members, but the body is still one, just as the indwelling Holy Spirit is one (1 Cor 12:4). The body of Christ cannot be divided (1 Cor 12:20, 25; Eph 4:4).

#### **4.8.3 One bride**

Adam is a type for Jesus Christ (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:45). God only created one wife for Adam, and that wife was Eve. Similarly, Jesus Christ only has one bride, which is the church (2 Cor 11:2; Rev 21:9–10), to whom He will be joined one day (Eph 5:31–32).

Prophet Isaiah prophesied that, in the last days (Isa 2:2), seven women will take hold of one man, saying, “We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach” (Isa 4:1). Seven is a perfect number, which can stand for any number greater than a literal seven. Like the women seeking to be called by one man’s name, many churches today claim to be called by God’s name. They may preach and work for God, but, like these women who eat their own food (cf. Amos 8:11, where food represents God’s word) and wear their own apparel (cf. Rev 19:8, where apparel represents good deeds), these churches act through their own will, while wanting to be called by God’s name.

We need to be aware that if we choose to live and act independently of God, we cannot hope to be called by His name. God’s church needs to preach the complete truth, as revealed by the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we cannot rely on our own righteousness, which is but a

filthy rag in God's sight (Isa 64:6); our righteousness must come from the Lord Jesus. To be the Lord Jesus' one bride, we must accept and obey the truth by relying on God through faith.

#### **4.8.4 One household of God**

The church is God's household (1 Tim 3:15). God is the Father of His people (Eph 4:6) and all spirits (Heb 12:9–10). As believers, we are the children of His household (Eph 2:19). We may be many, but the household is still one, just as God is one (1 Cor 12:6).

#### **4.8.5 One true vine**

The Lord Jesus is the true vine, and the believers are the branches which are attached to the vine (Jn 15:1, 5). A vine may have many branches, but there is still only a single vine. In the same way, there is only one true church which can be considered the body of Christ (Jn 15:4–6).

#### **4.8.6 One ark**

During Noah's generation, the earth was filled with violence and corruption. God resolved to destroy the earth with a worldwide flood (Gen 6:11–13; 7:11–12, 21). Noah, alone, walked with God and was considered righteous and blameless. For this reason, God revealed to him His plan and instructed him to build an ark to save his household (Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:5).

Noah's ark prefigures the one true church of the last days. We understand this from a number of spiritual teachings and parallels in the Bible. Firstly, as in Noah's time, the world in these last days is filled with violence and corruption (Rev 7:1–3; 18:4–5; Acts 2:17–21). Secondly, like Noah's ark, the true church has been built in strict accordance with God's instructions (Gen 6:14–16, 22; Mt 28:20; cf. Gal 1:6–9). Thirdly, like those who entered Noah's ark, those who come into the true church can be

saved through the washing of water and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Gen 6:18–20; 7:23; cf. Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3:20–21; Eph 1:14).

Noah only built one ark, which became humanity’s sole refuge from the great flood (2 Pet 2:5). Likewise, in the last days, before God destroys the world, there is only one true church where people can receive salvation (Eph 4:4; Song 6:9).

#### **4.8.7 Two covenants**

Paul states that Abraham had two sons: one by a bondwoman, who was born according to the flesh; the other by a freewoman, who was born according to the promise of God (Gal 4:22–25). The two women symbolize two types of people or churches. God only accepts His own church and rejects anyone who is not part of it.

People are both diverse and unique, but in God’s eyes, there are only two types. The first type finds life through Adam; however, his lineage leads to death. We are all Adam’s descendants, so we all live under the bondage of death. The second type finds life through Jesus Christ in His church. Only when we are born again in Christ, can we receive eternal life (Jn 3:5; 3:16f; 1 Cor 15:22).

Today, there are many Christian denominations and churches. But in God’s eyes, there are only two types of churches and people: those who live in death, and those who have life. One is of the flesh, the other is of the Spirit (Rom 8:5–11).

#### **4.8.8 One flock led by one shepherd**

Jesus described Himself as “the good shepherd” (Jn 10:11, 14). His words indicate that the believers are His sheep (cf. Jn 10:26). He has many sheep, but only takes care of one flock (Jn 10:16). Jesus also said, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (Jn 10:16). His words tell us that:

- “This flock” refers to the one true church; her “shepherd” is Jesus.

- The “other sheep” refer to people who have yet to believe in Jesus. As their shepherd, Jesus will lead them back to the fold. He will use the truth to guide them to His church.
- The sheep will hear the Lord’s voice (Jn 10:27) and will gather to their true shepherd. Those who do not belong to Jesus will neither hear Him, nor come to His flock (Jn 8:47; 10:26).
- “My voice” refers to the voice of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. We have to learn to listen to Jesus’ voice—the Holy Spirit’s voice—if we are seeking for His fold, which is the true church.

#### **4.9 How can we recognize the true church?**

There are, at present, countless Christian churches, each one proclaiming a different message, or at least a variation of the original apostolic gospel. The situation can be overwhelmingly confusing for anyone looking for the church which rightfully belongs to God and can lead them to salvation. Fortunately, the Bible has revealed to us the identifying characteristics of the true church.

##### **4.9.1 Upholds the name of the Lord**

Many churches today have neglected the importance of Jesus’ name, opting instead to highlight a specific doctrine, such as baptism or the Sabbath, in their names. However, the choice of name is important because it gives a message to people about what the church stands for.

The mission of the true church is to proclaim salvation through the gospel. This salvation comes only through Jesus, as the Bible declares that there is no other name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). A feature of the true church, then, is that she upholds the name of Jesus.

In His parting prayer, the Lord Jesus asked, “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (Jn 17:11). The church is the body of Christ; she should, therefore, bear the name of Jesus. In this way, the believers can be identified by that name and be kept in it.

## 4.9.2 Indwelling of the Holy Spirit

The indwelling of God's Spirit is an essential characteristic of the true church, and serves to distinguish her from other religious gatherings. The Bible says that the church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:23; 4:12; Col 1:24). Therefore, the presence of the Holy Spirit proves that she has the life of Christ (cf. Jas 2:26). Without the Spirit, a gathering will simply be based on human will. Only the indwelling Holy Spirit can turn believers into a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19); a church without His Spirit can never be considered as such (1 Cor 3:16–17). In this vein, Romans 8:9 says, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him."

The Holy Spirit bears witness for the Lord (Jn 15:26). Without His presence, water baptism, for example, is ineffectual for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16; 1 Jn 5:6–8). The power and authority to forgive sins lies with God's Spirit, so His presence is vital for fulfilling God's commission (cf. Jn 20:22–23). All the sacraments performed by the church, water baptism, footwashing and Holy Communion, require the Spirit's working and witnessing to have effect.

## 4.9.3 Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.

Matthew 16:18

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:19–22

Ephesians 2:19–22 talks about the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. This passage refers to the truth on which the true church is built. Paul warns that whoever changes the truth, as preached by the apostles, prophets and Jesus (2 Jn 9–11), will be accursed (Gal 1:6–9).

Jesus speaks of the “Spirit of truth” (Jn 16:13), while John writes, “The Spirit is truth” (1 Jn 5:6). So we come to realize that the Holy Spirit and the truth are inseparable. Because the Holy Spirit dwells within the true church, she is able to uphold the truth.

Paul points out the singular nature of the correct Christian faith and of the true church which embraces it. He says, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4–6).

#### **4.9.4 Testimony of signs and miracles**

Signs and miracles testify to the truth of the gospel that is proclaimed by the true church. Jesus says, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover” (Mk 16:17–18). The power to perform signs and miracles comes from the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:19). They prove that the true church has the abidance of the Holy Spirit, and that the people performing them have been sent by God (cf. Mt 11:2–6; 2 Cor 12:12).

#### **4.10 Finding the true church**

Before we join any church, we should ask ourselves a number of questions: Does the church bear the name of Jesus? Does it have evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Does it preach the complete gospel of salvation, according to the teachings of Jesus, the apostles and prophets? Does it have the testimony of signs and miracles?

The Lord Jesus calls people to His fold. But we need to pray for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that we can hear the Shepherd’s voice (Jn 10:16). Jesus calls to us with a promise: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:37–38).

Elder John also says, “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17).

#### **4.11 Summary**

In summary, the Holy Spirit has a vital role in the affairs of the true church. He governs the church (Acts 15:28; 16:4–5); sends out workers (Acts 6:2–6; 20:28); bestows spiritual gifts, according to His will (1 Cor 12:8–11); and unites the church (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:3–4; Ezek 11:19).

#### **Review questions**

1. What is the definition of the church?
2. How does the church differ from secular gatherings?
3. How was the church established?
4. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church?
6. List the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12. How can they be categorized?
7. What is the basis for the effective use of spiritual gifts within the church? Why?
8. What evidence can we find from the Bible to support the existence of the one true church?
9. What are the characteristics of the true church?



# Chapter 5

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BELIEVERS

### 5.1 Introduction

The church is an assembly of believers. The abidance of the Holy Spirit proves that the church belongs to Christ (Rom 8:9) and has His life. In terms of the individual believers, the Spirit helps them on their faith journey and provides them with an assurance of their salvation. The Bible says, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” (Jn 6:63).

This chapter will look at the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the believers.

### 5.2 The Holy Spirit and justification

#### 5.2.1 What is justification?

The word “justification” refers to God’s reckoning of believers as righteous (Rom 4:3, 6), the forgiveness of sins, and our ability to stand blameless before God’s throne of judgment in the future (Rom 8:33–34). Paul tells us that our justification has been made possible because of Jesus Christ’s righteousness (Rom 5:17–19; 2 Cor 5:21).

There are two aspects to justification. Firstly, God no longer considers us as sinners (Rom 4:6–8; 2 Cor 5:19) because He has placed all our sins upon Jesus (Isa 53:6). Secondly, He imputes Christ’s righteousness to us (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:27), enabling us to be called His sons and daughters (Eph 1:5).

### 5.2.2 Why do we need justification?

The sole purpose of justification is to enable us to be saved from God's wrath so that we can, one day, stand confidently in the heavenly court of judgment (Rom 5:9). However, sinners can never receive eternal life, as God's wrath is upon them (Jn 3:36). It is only those who are justified by God and who are reconciled to Him (Rom 5:1, 10) who can escape condemnation (Rom 8:33–34).

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Death is the result of sin. Where there is sin, there is death; and where there is death, there is judgment. No one can live forever; everyone must face death one day. And God has appointed each of us for judgment after death in order to manifest His righteousness and justice. We cannot argue against His judgment, for He is Lord over all creation.

God's standard of judgment for ancient Israel was the Mosaic law which He delivered to Moses. Any Israelite who kept the law was considered just before God (Rom 2:12–13). However, since no one could keep the law perfectly (Gal 5:3), no person could be justified by the law (Gal 3:11). For this reason, the Bible says that those who relied on the works of the law were under a curse (Gal 3:10).

The Bible refers to those who are not God's chosen people as “Gentiles” or “unbelievers”. God's judgment of them will be based upon their conscience. Apostle Paul explains, saying, “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them” (Rom 2:14–15).

Yet in Christ, the difference between Jews and Gentiles means nothing in terms of justification. A Jew, seeking his righteousness through the law, and a Gentile, seeking his righteousness through an internal sense of morality, will both be sadly disappointed by their attempts to achieve their own righteousness. This is because human beings are beset with weaknesses, so we are not always able to live in the way that we wish. Apostle Paul points out, for example, that we often want to do good, yet evil lies within us. Quoting David's psalm, he says:

There is none righteous, no, not one;  
There is none who understands;  
There is none who seeks after God.  
They have all turned aside;  
They have together become unprofitable;  
There is none who does good, no, not one.  
Romans 3:10–12  
cf. Psalms 14:1–3; 53:1–3

Human beings are subject to two types of sin: personal sin and original sin. The Israelites' inability to keep the law and the Gentiles' inability to follow their conscience can both be considered "personal sins". By personal sin, we mean the sins that we commit on an individual level in our daily lives. In addition, everyone has inherited the sinful nature from our first ancestors. We call this type of sin "original sin" (Rom 5:12). So King David, moved by the Holy Spirit, confessed, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps 51:5).

"The Scripture has confined all under sin" (Gal 3:22). Both Jews and Gentiles are under the bondage of sin (Rom 3:9). The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23), and after death comes judgment. The result of God's righteous judgment of a sinner is everlasting destruction (2 Thess 1:7–9). Sin and punishment are the sad realities that sinners must confront. And because we are all under the condemnation of sin, both on a personal level and from the original sin which we inherited from Adam and Eve, our only hope is to look to Jesus Christ for our justification and righteousness.

The Bible says that God loves the world (Jn 3:16), that He desires all men to be saved (1 Tim 2:4) and wants no one to perish (2 Pet 3:9). Moses' laws of ritual sacrifice prefigured God's love through Christ (Lev 1:1–4; Heb 9:22). Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for the world was the ultimate manifestation of that love (Rom 5:8; 1 Pet 2:24).

### **5.2.3 Relying on the Holy Spirit for justification**

Since we are all under the condemnation of sin, we must receive justification from God. It is not possible to be justified through our own attempts to live a perfect and virtuous life—the inevitable

outcome will be failure and guilt. However, once we recognize our own impotence, we will learn to entrust our righteousness to Jesus Christ. The truth is, we could never find our way back to God's grace without Jesus (Rom 7:23–25; Jn 14:6).

Jesus once said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Lk 5:32). Throughout the long history of humankind, there have been too few righteous and too many self-righteous people. Those who are self-righteous attempt to establish their own righteousness without God (Rom 10:3); however, self-righteousness merely hinders their justification by God. Only the meek and humble—those who seek God's mercy and repent sincerely—will be justified (Lk 18:9–14). The self-righteous do not even see the need for God's grace and mercy.

Justification is by grace and freely given by God (Rom 3:24; 4:2–3). But many Christians mistakenly believe they have no personal role to play. However, the Bible makes it clear that there are steps—including, belief, repentance and baptism—which we all need to go through for our justification in Christ. These steps require us to follow through with our actions, even though they are inspired by God (Acts 2:38; Rom 4:5).

But we need to remember that, ultimately, our justification is only possible because Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification (Rom 4:25; 2 Cor 5:21). Apostle Paul said, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight . . . Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:20, 28).

The way to justification is through faith and water baptism. Many Christians are sceptical about the ability of water baptism to justify a believer and forgive his sins. But we must realize that this power comes from the spiritual presence of Jesus' blood and the witness of the Holy Spirit in the water (Zech 12:10–13:1; Jn 19:33–37; 1 Jn 5:6–12). Jesus was the sinless Lamb of God who was imputed with sin for our sake. Through the eternal Spirit, He sacrificed Himself for us on God's altar (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Cor 5:7; Heb 9:12–15; Jn 10:18). The Holy Spirit, who is God Himself, has the power to authorize the forgiveness of sins through the baptist (Jn 20:22–23). Moreover, the Holy Spirit bears witness because the Spirit is truth (1 Jn 5:6–8). In baptism—through the water, blood and the Spirit—we are buried with Christ and raised

to a newness of life in Christ (Rom 6:3–4) and justification (Mk 16:16; Acts 22:16; 1 Jn 1:7–9). In this way, justification through baptism should not be seen as a result of “work” on our part—it is completely dependent upon God’s grace and the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

From another perspective, it is only through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that a person can confess his sins and acknowledge Jesus Christ as his Saviour (Jn 16:7–8; 1 Cor 12:3). The Spirit’s role in our justification, therefore, also encompasses His preparatory work of convicting us of our sins and guiding us to God.

### **5.3 The Holy Spirit and sanctification**

#### **5.3.1 What is sanctification?**

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). This verse tells us that we put on Jesus Christ the moment we are baptized. It means putting on His nature, which is true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). This is not a theoretical exercise, for we are cleansed by Jesus’ redeeming blood in baptism and put on Christ; thereafter, we strive to avoid becoming tarnished again. Apostle Peter warns us against falling into the latter state, which he likens to “a dog return[ing] to his own vomit” and “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet 2:22).

Therefore, our sanctification in Christ is a continuous process, whereby we strive not to allow ourselves to succumb to our fleshly nature again (Rom 13:14). Holiness is not an abstract state: it is revealed through our actions. Hence, apostle Paul says that, while our outer nature wastes away, our inner nature should be renewed day by day (2 Cor 4:16). To be sanctified in Christ means casting off our old nature and pursuing holiness. It entails manifesting a newness of life in Christ by having His character (Eph 4:22–23; Rom 6:4).

Ultimately, our sanctification in Christ requires us to be crucified to the world and to consider ourselves dead to the world (Gal 6:14). We must present ourselves as living sacrifices, no longer conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our mind (Rom 12:1–2).

### 5.3.2 Why do we need sanctification?

Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

Leviticus 20:7

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God . . . For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

1 Thessalonians 4:3–7

It is God's will that His chosen people be sanctified. This is as true today as it was during the Old Testament times. Through His statutes and ordinances in the Old Testament, God called for the sanctification of the Israelites. However, when Jesus Christ came to the world to accomplish the work of salvation on the cross (Jn 19:30), He fulfilled the righteousness previously required by the law (Mt 5:17–18; Rom 3:31). In this way, the Old Testament foreshadowed the substance of the New Testament (Col 2:17).

Apostle Peter encourages us to be obedient children and not to conform to our former lusts. He tells us to live holy lives because God has commanded, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:14–16). Every believer has a duty to sanctify himself—to be a holy, spiritual person who is distinguished from the world (Jn 15:19). We must live up to God's requirements, for we are His children (Gal 3:26) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:18–20). Moreover, the Bible calls the believers “saints”, so we should live up to our noble status (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2).

The Bible says, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates” (Rev 22:14, RSV). Those who have washed their robes and obtained access to the tree of life do not simply refer to those who have been baptized and justified. Strictly speaking, this verse refers to the saints who have maintained their holiness until death. Those who have washed their sins clean in Jesus' precious blood are clothed in white (Rev 7:13–14); but those who fail to keep holy will have retained their white robes and trampled God's grace (Heb 10:26–29). As believers, we can never obtain the right to the tree of life if we

constantly stain ourselves with sin. Moreover, we must pursue sanctification in order to avoid God's fearful and fiery judgment.

The pursuit of holiness is not just a duty; it is a requirement for whoever hopes to gain eternal life. We must therefore take the matter seriously. During his ministry, apostle Paul pointed out the close relationship between sanctification/holiness and eternal life/salvation to the believers in the early church. He wrote: "You have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Rom 6:22); "... and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32; cf. 26:18); "God chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit" (2 Thess 2:13).

### **5.3.3 Sanctification is a matter of the heart**

The Book of Proverbs teaches, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life" (Prov 4:23). Our sanctification, then, is a matter of the heart. The scribes and Pharisees overlooked this fact and reversed the order—placing undue emphasis on external holiness. Hence, the Lord Jesus rebuked them for their superficiality (Mt 23:25–26; Lk 11:37–41).

After water baptism, our sins are forgiven. However, it does not mean that we are completely freed from fleshly desires (Rom 6:12). Even though God justifies us through baptism, sin can still work inside our hearts. Our fleshly lusts are particular obstacles to our sanctification in Christ, as Paul explains:

For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish ... Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:17–21

It is only through the power and renewal of the Holy Spirit that we are empowered to crucify our lusts day after day. In order to avoid falling back into sin, we have to continually remove the old leaven

within us, which is our sinful nature (1 Cor 5:7). This is a lifelong battle and, sadly, many Christians fall short.

Paul has this to say about his struggle against the fleshly nature:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice... But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Romans 7:18–24

Sometimes, we may feel as if the laws of good and evil are fated to wage an endless battle inside our hearts. Like a wrecked boat caught in the midst of a raging storm, we often resign ourselves to our fleshly nature. What we need is a helper in this spiritual battle—the Holy Spirit.

### **5.3.4 The Holy Spirit's role in our sanctification**

As human beings, we are weak and constrained. Without Christ, we would be unable to live a fruitful and spiritual life (Jn 15:5). The Holy Spirit is our power from above (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8). He alone can empower us to confront our weaknesses (Jn 14:16–17; Rom 8:26) and help us to live a sanctified life (1 Pet 1:2; 2 Thess 2:13; Rom 15:16). The Holy Spirit can also soften our heart—turning a stony heart into flesh (Ezek 36:26–27). Without Him, human effort and determination will only take us so far in transforming our character and freeing us from the law of sin (Rom 8:2).

Even after we have received the Holy Spirit, we may still fall prey to our lusts. Yet, if we yield to the Spirit's guidance, we can enjoy life and peace (Rom 8:5–6). So our sanctification depends on whom we are willing to yield our body to: if we yield our body to sin, we will live according to the flesh; but if we yield our body to God as an instrument for righteousness, there will be no room for sin to work (Rom 6:12–14, 19–20). The Holy Spirit is the key, then, to putting to death our sinful nature (Rom 8:13). Therefore, Paul encourages us, saying, “Walk in the



Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16).

Romans 8:13 and Galatians 5:16 present us with two important lessons in overcoming sin: 1) after receiving the Holy Spirit, God gives us the power and freedom to offer up our body as an instrument of righteousness; 2) when we submit to the Holy Spirit’s guidance and rely on His power, we can victoriously overcome our fleshly nature.

The Bible says that we cannot see God without holiness (Heb 12:14) and that holiness has a direct bearing on our salvation (2 Thess 2:13). Sometimes, we may wonder how much our sanctification depends on our own personal effort and how much depends on God’s work. But it should be clear that we cannot simply rely on ourselves and that we need the Spirit’s help (1 Cor 9:27; Phil 4:13). Just as we must exercise faith in order to be justified by God’s grace, so we must show faith in God, by striving to live a sanctified life with the help of the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:12f).

A true faith is accompanied by actions. We cannot claim to have faith in God if our life does not manifest our belief, or if there is no discernable difference between ourselves and unbelievers. We should not naively think that God alone will take care of our holiness—our holiness and sanctification are matters that we must pursue (2 Cor 7:1).

## **5.4 The Holy Spirit and salvation**

### **5.4.1 Defining salvation**

What does it mean to be saved? From the Bible, we see that salvation can be defined in a number of ways. It refers to the cleansing of our sins through the blood of Jesus (Acts 22:16; Eph 1:7; 1 Jn 1:7–9); being lifted up to be with the Lord in His kingdom in the future (1 Thess 4:17; 2 Tim 4:18); our being considered righteous before God (Rom 8:33); relying on the Holy Spirit to overcome sin (Rom 7:24–25; 8:2); having true freedom (Jn 8:36; 2 Cor 3:17); and enjoying the greatest blessing of all—eternal life (Mt 25:34; Jn 3:16).

### 5.4.2 The Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation

God's kingdom is for righteous people (Mt 13:43); and the church is the "congregation of the righteous" (Ps 1:5). Unless our sins are forgiven, we can never be considered part of God's church. In water baptism, our sins are forgiven through the witness and work of God's Spirit (Jn 20:22–23; 1 Jn 5:6–8). The Spirit works to forgive our sins and justify us (Jn 20:22–3). But these are only the initial steps on the journey to heaven.

Many Christians have the mistaken notion that salvation is a "once for all" event—one that is accomplished in an instant, at the moment they confess Jesus Christ as their Lord. However, the Bible teaches us differently (Acts 5:1–11; 8:13, 20; Mt 7:21; Gal 5:19–21). The confession of Christ does not, in itself, equate to salvation; and salvation by faith does not equate to salvation by confession. Our sanctification, leading to salvation in Christ, is a life-long process—not a one-off event.

A good analogy is the forty-year journey of the Israelites in the wilderness, which served to test and mould their faith in God. Only those who demonstrated a victorious faith were allowed to enter Canaan (Num 32:11–12). Likewise, after our justification through baptism, we, too, must complete our own journeys of faith into victory. It might entail undergoing various trials designed to purify our faith—rather like gold being refined by fire. Whatever the means, the path of sanctification by the Spirit is something which we, as Christians, must all go through (2 Thess 2:13; Acts 14:22).

Jesus teaches us that to enter God's kingdom we must be spiritually reborn. He says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3). While repentance marks the first step leading to rebirth in Christ, it does not equate to being born again. Jesus explains specifically that we need to be born again of water and the Spirit—that is, we need to receive water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5).

In the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus that is recorded in John chapter 3, we can draw a clear and powerful conclusion: the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a fundamental prerequisite for entry into the heavenly kingdom. Those who have not received the Holy Spirit will be as the five virgins in Matthew 25 who did not have oil in their

lamps—that is, they were unprepared. In this parable and in other biblical passages, oil serves as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The moral is, if we do not have the Holy Spirit by the time Jesus comes again, He will say to us, “I do not know you” (Mt 25:8, 11–12). The Holy Spirit attests to our sonship in God and our right to the heavenly inheritance (Jn 1:33; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

The Bible says, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 Jn 5:12). So the life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, must dwell within a person for that person to have life. This can only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit because the Bible tells us that He is the Spirit of God’s Son (Gal 4:6). In short, if we do not have the Holy Spirit, we do not have the life of Jesus in us.

Apostle Paul encourages us to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25) as the Holy Spirit frees us from the law of sin (Rom 8:2) and gives us spiritual life. Prophet Ezekiel, speaking for the Lord, says, “I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live” (Ezek 37:14). We should remember that God’s kingdom is a kingdom for the living, not for the dead.

We can see the importance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit from the accounts of the apostles’ ministries. We learn, for example, that Peter and John travelled a long distance, from Jerusalem to Samaria, just to lay hands on the believers to help them receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17). Likewise, apostle Paul’s first concern upon meeting the Ephesian disciples was whether they had received the Holy Spirit. Upon learning that they had not, he laid his hands on them (Acts 19:1–2, 6). From these and other biblical accounts, we understand that the Holy Spirit is vital for salvation.

## **5.5 The Holy Spirit restores our status as God’s children**

God created Adam and Eve in His image to be His children (Lk 3:38). However, when they disobeyed His commandment, He cast them out of the garden of Eden. At this point, Adam and Eve lost their status as God’s children (Gen 3:24). It was only later, when God chose Israel from all the nations of the earth to be His holy people, that He called them His children (Deut 14:1–2). Sadly, they failed to live up to their status when they rejected Jesus Christ (Jn 1:11; cf. 8:41).

Fortunately, the Bible reveals the way in which people can become God's children once again. It records that after Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan, the Holy Spirit came upon Him and the heavenly Father acknowledged Him as His beloved Son (Mt 3:16–17). John the Baptist saw the vision of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus as a dove and testified to His status as God's Son (Jn 1:32–34). This event tells us that, in order to restore our sonship status with God, we, too, must receive the Holy Spirit.

Even though Jesus was God manifested in the flesh, He received both water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to fulfil all righteousness. In this way, He revealed how we can restore our status as God's children (Gal 4:4–5). The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of God's Son” and the “Spirit of sonship”. Apostle Paul says, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ ” (Gal 4:6). He adds, “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:15–16). From Paul's words, we see that the Holy Spirit testifies that we are God's children.

## **5.6 The Holy Spirit guarantees our heavenly inheritance**

An inheritance refers to the property set aside by parents for their children. In times past, a child's inheritance was deemed a right (cf. Lk 15:12). As God's children, we have a future inheritance from God, as long as we have the Holy Spirit. He serves to witness with our spirit that we are God's children, and that we have the right to inherit (Rom 8:16–17; Gal 4:6–7).

Our inheritance has been prepared for us by God since the creation of the world (Mt 25:34). It is everlasting (1 Pet 1:4) and truly worth forfeiting everything in the world to obtain (Mt 16:26; Phil 3:7–8). In contrast, our worldly inheritance is limited, consisting of material things that we can see with our eyes. The Bible reminds us that the things which we can see are transient, whereas the things which we cannot see are eternal (2 Cor 4:18). Even if we spend an entire lifetime reaping in the world, when we breathe our last, we will leave

empty-handed (Eccl 5:15–16). This is what the wise King Solomon meant when he said that life is vanity. Moreover, no matter how glorious our earthly inheritance might be, when Jesus comes again, it will be destroyed by fire (2 Pet 3:10–11). But the inheritance which God has prepared for us far outweighs all the treasures of the world.

Paul says, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor 15:50). Jesus says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:6). God’s kingdom is spiritual; flesh and blood cannot enter in. In the flesh, we are limited and suffer bondage, just as all creation suffers bondage (Rom 8:18ff). But once we have received the Holy Spirit, we are born again. The Spirit gives us life and enables us to inherit what is spiritual.

Apostle Paul says that the Holy Spirit is “the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14). The Greek word for “guarantee” is *arrabon*, which can also be translated as “surety” or “assurance”. Generally, the word was used to denote “a pledge”.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit, then, is our pledge from God that we will receive our heavenly inheritance.

## 5.7 The Holy Spirit gives us a living hope

As Christians, our hope is to receive the inheritance that has been reserved for us in heaven (1 Pet 1:4). Yet many times, we lose sight of this hope. After Jesus’ arrest, the disciples lost their hope and hid themselves through fear. Even Peter, who had once boldly declared that he was willing to die for Jesus, denied Jesus three times (Lk 22:33, 54–62). The reason why the disciples lost courage was because they no longer kept the hope of Jesus’ promise in their hearts.

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples needed the Holy Spirit to rekindle their hope. When the promised Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost, they received great spiritual power which served to renew that hope (Acts 2:1–4). From the history of the early church, we know that they remained steadfast thereafter, even in the face of persecution and death (Acts 4:19–20; 7:55–60; 12:1–2).

<sup>1</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G728.

Today, it can be quite a challenge for people to believe in the gospel. They may question how one can be sure that the message of the Bible is true, or that the kingdom of heaven is real; human logic and rationalism can persuade them otherwise. But God, in His wisdom, has removed all reason to doubt. He has allowed the church to see and experience His power and grace. Through signs, miracles and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have proof that the Bible's promises are true.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit is particularly significant. Jesus told His disciples, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (Jn 16:7). "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn 14:3).

Although nearly 2,000 years have passed since the Holy Spirit's first downpour at Pentecost, those of us who have received the Holy Spirit in this period of the latter rain can appreciate and relate to the events recorded in Acts. And with the Holy Spirit living within us, we, too, can have the same living hope that Jesus' disciples possessed.

## **5.8 The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth**

The truth frees us and sanctifies us (Jn 8:32; 17:17). It is deeply connected to our spiritual journey. If we want to be filled with the hope of salvation, we need to understand the truth. For this reason, the truth is the first piece of armour which apostle Paul mentions in Ephesians chapter 6. We must gird ourselves with this truth so that we can resist the devil (Eph 6:13–14).

What is the truth? The truth consists of the words issuing from the mouth of God (Ps 119:43; Jn 17:17). It is the standard by which He will judge humanity (Rom 2:2). For Christians, the truth is a lamp to their feet and a light to their path (Ps 119:105). By relying on the truth, we can better understand which path to take in our lives and never feel hopelessly lost (Ps 25:4–5; cf. Prov 14:12).

Prophet Isaiah once commented on the chosen people's inability to understand the truth, saying, "The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who

is literate, saying, 'Read this, please.' And he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed' " (Isa 29:11). These words indicate that only God can reveal the truth through the Holy Spirit, for God is Spirit and His words are spirit (Jn 4:24; 6:63). Without revelation from the Holy Spirit, deep spiritual truths will be concealed from our eyes (Gal 1:11–12; Eph 3:3–5).

To better appreciate the importance of God's Spirit in helping us to understand the truth, we can examine part of John's vision from the Book of Revelation. In his vision, it was revealed to him that God's truth—His word—was like "a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (Rev 5:1). This tells us that the deep mysteries of the Bible are not located on the surface, but, rather, are revealed in the spirit. The Bible says that the word of God is spirit and life (Jn 6:63; 2 Cor 3:6). Hence, beyond the literal meaning, there is always a meaning in the spirit which is important for our spiritual life. We could study and memorize the entire Bible, but if the words do not take root in our spirit through the work of God's Spirit, they cannot give us life.

Concerning the scroll in Revelation 5, we see that it was sealed by seven seals (5:1). The meaning is that God's revelation was completely sealed up—no one could understand it. Reading on, we see that the Lamb (Jesus) had the authority to open the scroll and reveal its contents (5:5). Revelation 5:6 describes Jesus as having the seven Spirits of God, which symbolize the fullness of the Holy Spirit (as represented by the number seven). So this passage vividly illustrates how deep spiritual meanings can only be revealed when we look past the literal meaning of the text. More importantly, it teaches us that the fullness of God's Spirit is required to break open the sealed scroll—that is, to fully receive God's revelation of the truth.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus taught His disciples the importance of the Holy Spirit in understanding the truth. He said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (Jn 14:26). He also said, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (Jn 16:12–13).

Many verses in the Bible teach us about the Holy Spirit's role in understanding spiritual truths. Some important ones include:

But the anointing [i.e. the Holy Spirit] which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

1 John 2:27

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20–21

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

From these verses, we understand that it is the Holy Spirit alone who leads us into the truth, for only God's Spirit possesses the fullness of truth (1 Cor 2:10–11). Today, there are countless churches searching for the truth in the Bible, yet all seem to find different interpretations of that truth. No two churches appear to share exactly the same perspective, proving that man's understanding is less than adequate.

The fact is, the message of the Bible has never changed, but we need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see it. It is therefore vital that we find the true church which has the abidance of God's Spirit, as only He can guide us fully into the knowledge of the truth. The Holy Spirit has the power to take us beyond our worldly wisdom and superficial understanding.

## **5.9 The Holy Spirit empowers us**

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His disciples, "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Lk 24:49). The Holy Spirit empowers us, strengthens us in times of weakness, and enables us to endure the trials of life.



### 5.9.1 Power to bear witness

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Acts 1:8

From the Bible, we see a dramatic difference in the apostles before and after Pentecost. Before receiving the Holy Spirit, they had fled from the Lord Jesus when He was being arrested (Mk 14:50–52); were afraid to witness or confess the Lord Jesus before others (Mt 26:69–75); and did not dare to meet in public (Jn 20:19). After receiving the Holy Spirit, they were able to preach the word of God fearlessly and to testify about the resurrection of Jesus' (Acts 2:24–36; 3:15, 26; 4:10–13, 31); have courage in the face of persecution and to rejoice that they were found worthy to suffer for the Lord (Acts 4:18–20; 5:17–32, 40–41).

The church today needs workers with the heart and attitude of the apostles—to be willing to suffer for the Lord and to have courage to witness for Him. The fullness of God's Spirit can make this possible. The Bible reminds us, "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (1 Pet 4:14; cf. Mt 5:10–12).

From Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8, we understand that the power of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for effective evangelism. Apostle Paul says, "For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (1 Cor 4:20). Today, we may often have the determination to witness for the Lord, but find ourselves lacking spiritual power. The reason may be that we fail to rely on the Lord sufficiently, or that we simply trust in our own knowledge and abilities. The outcome will be an inability to lead others to Jesus Christ and to true repentance. Apostle Paul was well aware of the need for spiritual power in his ministry. He declared, "And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:4–5).

## 5.9.2 Power to confront sin

Jesus teaches us the correct approach to take when a brother or sister in Christ sins:

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Matthew 18:15–17

It is unfortunate that we often fail to confront sin in the appropriate way: we can be quick to judge others and to lack mercy. We may also find it easier to talk about other people’s sins than to confront our own. But we cannot ignore or cover up sin—especially our own. Instead, we must deal with it with the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

God’s prophets and many Old Testament saints had the courage to confront people’s sins through the inspiration of God’s Spirit. A case in point is Micah who said, “But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Mic 3:8). Similarly, Elihu was moved in the spirit to point out Job’s wrong, saying:

I also will answer my part,  
I too will declare my opinion.  
For I am full of words;  
The spirit within me compels me.  
Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent;  
It is ready to burst like new wineskins.  
I will speak, that I may find relief;  
I must open my lips and answer.  
Let me not, I pray, show partiality to anyone;  
Nor let me flatter any man.

Job 32:17–21

Likewise, the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Spirit, had the courage to rebuke the Jews for delivering Jesus to Pilate and for bringing about His crucifixion (Acts 3:13). Hearing their powerful testimony, many of the Jews who had previously rejected Jesus were cut to the heart, repented and received baptism (Acts 2:22–41;

3:13–19; 4:4). Apostle Paul was likewise empowered to confront Peter when he discriminated against the Gentile members (Gal 2:11–14). Today, we also need God’s Spirit to give us the wisdom and power to confront sin.

### **5.9.3 Power to perform miracles**

During His ministry, Jesus performed many miracles, amazing people with His power. He restored the sight of the blind, healed the lame, cleansed the lepers, restored hearing to the deaf, and resurrected the dead (Mt 11:5). Jesus also stilled a raging storm (Mt 8:24–27), cast out demons (Mk 5:2–20), and walked on water (Mt 14:24–27). Luke recorded, “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit” (Lk 4:14). Also, Peter said, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). This leads us to understand that Jesus had the power to perform miracles because He was filled with the Holy Spirit.

However, Jesus did not say that He alone would have the Holy Spirit’s power to perform miracles. Rather, before ascending to heaven, He told the disciples, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mk 16:17–18). After these words, Jesus commanded them not to leave Jerusalem until they had received power from above (Acts 1:4–5; Lk 24:49). They duly obeyed by waiting and praying in the city. When they finally received the Holy Spirit, they were able to perform many miracles (Acts 3:2–8; 5:1–12; 8:6–8; 9:32–42; 13:9–12; 16:16–18; 28:3–6). This power was also found in apostle Paul, who declared, “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient” (Rom 15:18). These miracles served as a powerful witness to the truth of the gospel (Mk 16:20; Acts 14:3; Heb 2:4).

Today, the church needs the same mighty power to witness to the truth. Therefore, we should pray for the Holy Spirit’s empowerment.

#### 5.9.4 Power to be spiritually renewed

Sin lives within a person's heart (Rom 7:17), and it is here that we often see a spiritual battle waged between the laws of good and evil (Gal 5:17). Even after we believe in the Lord and our sins are washed away by His blood, sin and evil can lie in wait for the opportunity to strike. Therefore, after water baptism, we need to continually rely on the Holy Spirit to become spiritually renewed (Tit 3:5), to be a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel to tell us:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit [i.e. the Holy Spirit] within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Ezekiel 36:26–27

Whether or not we can put to death our old self and live a new life for Christ is determined in the small space of our hearts. The Bible says that out of the heart flows the issues of life (Prov 4:23). In the New Testament, God's law is no longer written with ink or on tablets of stone; it is written into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:3).

We often have the impression that apostle Paul was a perfect Christian. But when we read his letters, we see that he, like us, had to struggle with the sinful nature within:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Romans 7:18–20

However, Paul found the solution: “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). The solution, then, was the power of the Holy Spirit: it enabled him to live a new life in Christ. It is for this reason that we must pursue the fullness of the Holy Spirit: the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24), can only be manifested when we are filled by the Spirit. Therefore, apostle

Paul offered up this prayer for the believers: “That [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16).

Isaiah prophesies about the time when the harmony and beauty of Eden will be restored:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,  
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze;  
Their young ones shall lie down together;  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,  
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.  
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
As the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:6–9

The wolf, leopard, lion, bear and cobra are all wild beasts; they represent people who are strong or aggressive by nature. In contrast, the young goat, calf, little child, nursing child and weaned child represent those who are gentle. This prophecy tells us that, in God's church, those who were once wild can live in peace and harmony with those who are gentle. The spiritual power, which works to transform the hearts of the believers and to bring about their peaceful co-existence, comes from the Holy Spirit.

### **5.10 The Holy Spirit intercedes for us**

Prayer is our lifeline to God, allowing for spiritual communion. It is the secret to a rich spiritual life. A life without prayer can be likened to a river without a bridge—there is no means to reach the other side. Just like branches of a vine which will wither and die if they are separated from the main vine, so our spiritual life will eventually die if we forsake our communion with the Lord (Jn 15:5–6). Our life is founded on Jesus, so we must never separate ourselves from Him.

Apostle Paul encourages us to speak “to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart

to the Lord” (Eph 5:19). He also advises, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6). The more blessings that we receive from God, the more we ought to thank Him; the more we understand His wondrous power, the more we should praise Him; the more we recall our sinful past, the harder we ought to strive to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit. Prayer is not something complicated: the only thing we need to do is to come before God in sincerity and humility, and to pour out our hearts to Him (Ps 62:8).

The Bible describes two types of prayer: prayers of understanding and prayers in the Spirit offered up in spiritual tongues. Apostle Paul, who could pray in both these ways, describes these two modes of prayer: “For if I pray in a tongue [i.e. prayer in the Spirit], my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the result then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Cor 14:14–15).

The prayer of understanding has its rightful place in Christian worship. However, it has limitations: we cannot always adequately express through words what is inside our hearts, and sometimes we simply do not know how to pray or what to pray for. But God, in His wisdom, has given us a better way to pray, which is in the Spirit.

Paul explains what it means to pray in the Spirit:

Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26–27

Here, Paul’s use of the word “weaknesses” refers to the believers’ ignorance or imperfect understanding of God’s will, especially in times of suffering (cf. Rom 8:17ff). The Greek word for “help” in the original biblical text is *sunantilambano*, which literally means “to take hold with at the side for assistance” or “to help in general”.<sup>2</sup> The Greek verb for “intercession” is *huperentunchano*, which means “to make a petition” or

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G4878.

“intercede on behalf of another.”<sup>3</sup> So we see that Paul is describing the Holy Spirit’s work of intercession.

Paul uses the word “likewise” at the beginning of Romans 8:26–27 to indicate a connection with Romans 8:19–25. He also creates another link between these two passages through the use of the verb “groan”. For example, he says, “Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves *groan* within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23, emphasis added). Similarly, verses 19 to 22 speak of the *groaning of creation*; verses 23 to 25 speak of the *groaning of believers*; while verses 26 to 27 speak of the *Holy Spirit’s intercessory groaning*. His words highlight the fact that people have much cause for spiritual suffering. The root of the problem can be traced back to Adam and Eve’s sin and God’s subsequent curse on humankind (Gen 3:17).

Christians have long been reaping the consequences of their early ancestors’ sin, which include labour and sorrow. Aside from the hardships of everyday life, Christians are also prone to sufferings on the spiritual journey: persecution on account of believing in Christ (Rom 8:17–18); the constant battle between the spirit and the flesh (Gal 5:17; Rom 7:15ff); the sinful attractions of the world (1 Jn 2:16); trials from God (Job 23:10); and so on. Because of these difficulties, we look forward to the day when Jesus Christ will come again to deliver us from bondage—to transform and renew us into spiritual beings (Rom 8:21; 1 Cor 15:42–54; 1 Thess 4:16–17). Our hope is to enter God’s kingdom of eternal glory in the spirit, where there will be no more pain or sorrow, and where God will wipe away every tear (Rev 7:17; 21:4).

During our individual spiritual journeys, we will all have experienced times of spiritual despondency. We may sometimes feel weighed down by our weaknesses, or find that we are unable to free ourselves from the bondage of our sinful and fleshly nature. At other times, we may not know how to pray, or else we pray for the wrong things, such as money, fame and power. Fortunately, we can take heart from the encouragement of apostle Paul to rely on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our Counsellor who intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words and helps us to pray for what we really need. God

3 Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G5241.

accepts the Spirit's intercession because it is done according to His will. So when we pray in the Spirit, we should pray deeply to allow God to search into the depths of our hearts.

For those of us who have not yet received the Holy Spirit, we can still communicate with God through prayers of understanding. However, we should also endeavour to ask God for His promised Holy Spirit, so that He can come into our hearts to intercede for us and help us pray according to His will.

### 5.11 Summary

To summarize, the Holy Spirit has a vital role to play in the faith journey and salvation of believers:

- The Holy Spirit **justifies us** (1 Cor 6:11)
- The Holy Spirit **helps us to be sanctified in Christ** (Rom 15:16; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2)
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an **essential requirement for entry into God's kingdom** (Jn 3:5)
- The Holy Spirit **bears witness to our status as God's children** (Rom 8:15–16; Gal 4:6)
- The Holy Spirit **guarantees our heavenly inheritance** (Eph 1:14) and resurrection to eternal life (Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 5:1–5)
- The Holy Spirit is the **power behind every Christian's living hope** (1 Pet 1:4; Jn 16:7; 2 Cor 5:1–5; Rom 15:13; Gal 5:5)
- The Holy Spirit **guides us into all truth** (Jn 14:26; 16:12–13; 1 Cor 2:10–11; 1 Jn 2:27)
- The Holy Spirit **empowers us** (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8; 4:31; Rom 15:18; Eph 3:16)
- The Holy Spirit **intercedes for us in prayer** (Rom 8:26–27; 1 Cor 14:14–15; Eph 6:18; Jude 20)



### **Review questions**

1. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our justification?
2. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification?
3. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our salvation?
4. How is the Holy Spirit related to our status as the children of God?
5. How is the Holy Spirit related to our heavenly inheritance?
6. How is the Holy Spirit related to our Christian hope?
7. How does the Holy Spirit help us to understand the truth?
8. How does the Holy Spirit empower us?
9. How does the Holy Spirit intercede for us?

# Chapter 6

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 6.1 Introduction

An underpinning theme of the Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit. From the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation, it documents the Spirit's work from the time of creation to the end of the world, showing how extensive His work has been throughout the history of humankind.

In this chapter, we will look at the different ways in which the Holy Spirit has been working during the Old Testament and New Testament periods. While there are aspects of His work that span both periods, some feature more in a particular period:

During the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit's ministry included:

- Creating the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:2; Ps 104:30; Job 26:13; 33:4)
- Giving teachings and instructions (Neh 9:20)
- Bestowing wisdom (Gen 41:38–39; Ex 31:2–6; Deut 34:9; Dan 4:8–18; 5:11–16)
- Empowering workers for specific tasks (Judg 14:6; 15:14–15)
- Giving prophecies (2 Chr 20:14–17; Ezek 11:24–25; Lk 2:25–35)

- Giving encouragement (2 Chr 15:1–7; 24:20–22; Neh 9:30; Mic 3:8; Zech 7:12)
- Coming upon prophets, kings, priests and specially chosen people (1 Sam 16:13)

In the New Testament period, the Holy Spirit's ministry has included, or will include:

- Bearing witness for Jesus (Jn 15:26; Acts 5:32)
- Glorifying Jesus (Jn 16:14)
- Leading people to know Jesus (1 Cor 12:3)
- Effecting spiritual rebirth (Jn 3:5)
- Bestowing grace upon believers (Heb 10:29)
- Warning believers when they stray from the faith (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)
- Imparting spiritual joy (Lk 10:21; Acts 13:52; Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6)
- Lifting Philip away (Acts 8:39–40)
- Giving dreams and visions (Acts 2:17; 7:55; Rev 4:2; 17:3; 21:10)
- Giving prophecies (Acts 2:18; 11:27–28; 20:23; 21:4, 10–14)
- Comforting believers (Acts 9:31)
- Raising the dead on the last day (Rom 8:11)

The Holy Spirit's work in creation, in the church, and in every believer's life is truly amazing. He is continually working, and the scope of His work is immeasurable. At best, we can only describe some elements of the Spirit's work.

## 6.2 The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin

### 6.2.1 The Holy Spirit continues the work of Jesus

Nevertheless I [i.e. Jesus] tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

John 16:7–8

The word “convict” in John 16:8 comes from the Greek *elencho*—a root word meaning “to convict” and “to refute”.<sup>1</sup> It conveys the sense of making a person aware of his sin and putting him to shame. Jesus uses the same word in John 3:20, where He says that the light “exposes” or “convicts” evil people of their actions, and also in John 8:46, where He asks the religious authorities which of them accuses or “convicts” Him of sin.

Sin, righteousness and judgment are central themes in most religious faiths. But how a religion explains and deals with them determines its fundamental character. Before the Holy Spirit was poured out (cf. Jn 7:39; 16:7), people could not fully understand sin, righteousness and judgment. So what did Jesus mean when He said that the Holy Spirit would “convict” the world of sin, righteousness and judgment?

Spiritually speaking, the Holy Spirit’s convicting work continues Jesus’ earthly ministry. Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light” (Jn 3:19). He also said, “I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent me is true” (Jn 8:26). During His ministry, Jesus convicted many people of their sins, of righteousness and of judgment. And after He ascended, He continued His convicting work through the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit not only serves as our defence counsel—advocating our rights before God—He also serves as the lead prosecutor of our conscience, to make each of us conscious of our sins.

<sup>1</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G1651.

While there are distinctions in terms of their work, we know from the Bible that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one (Jn 14:17f, 23; cf. “dwelt among us” in Jn 1:14). For this reason, Jesus often spoke in place of the Holy Spirit and the Father. For example, He indicated to the disciples that the Holy Spirit would soon come to live in peoples’ hearts through the words: “I will come to you” (Jn 14:18), and “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and *We* will come to him and make *Our* home with him” (Jn 14:23, emphases added).

### 6.2.2 Convicting people of sin

He [i.e. the Holy Spirit] will convict the world ...because they do not believe in Me.

John 16:8-9

The failure to believe in Jesus is the root of many sins (Rom 1:28–32). In fact, it can be considered the greatest of sins (Jn 8:24; 15:22, 24) for a number of reasons:

Firstly, Jesus came to the world to witness to the truth. Therefore, we have no excuse for not believing. If we harden our hearts and reject His grace when we hear His words, we will have no defence on the day of judgment (Jn 15:22; 12:48; cf. Jn 9:39–41; Rom 3:20; 4:15).

Secondly, during His ministry, Jesus performed many signs and miracles. These have served to convict the world of sin (Jn 15:24) as they testify to His divine authority as One sent by God. Therefore, Jesus rebuked the people who saw His mighty works but refused to believe and repent, telling them that they would not be able to stand on the day of judgment (Mt 11:20–24).

Thirdly, God has poured out His Holy Spirit. The Bible says that the evidence, which is the speaking of tongues, acts as a sign to unbelievers (Acts 10:45f; 1 Cor 14:22). It testifies to the fact that God exists and is ever present. This was a truth upheld by the apostles from the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4; 10:44–46; 11:15). The Holy Spirit also bears witness to the fact that Jesus resurrected from death, ascended into heaven, and will come again to receive us to our heavenly home (Jn 16:7; 14:1–3). Whoever is privy to the Holy Spirit’s grace and testimony, yet hardens their heart and refuses to believe, will be

convicted by the Spirit of neglecting Jesus' great and wondrous salvation (Heb 2:3–4).

The gospel of God's kingdom, Jesus' signs and miracles and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit all testify to the fact that Jesus is the Christ—the Saviour of God's people. Whoever believes in Him will never perish, but have eternal life; but whoever does not believe is already condemned (Jn 3:16–19).

This present age is not too different from the apostolic times: just as there were people who refused to believe in Jesus then, so there are people who refuse to believe now. Most people today would not even consider that disbelieving Jesus is a sin. On the contrary, any attempt to preach Jesus Christ tends to provoke a negative reaction. We live in an increasingly secular society where people have little or no notion of sin. At best, they may only consider certain matters as “wrong” if they contravene their personal sense of morality. Righteousness, then, has become an individual and subjective matter. But what the human conscience fails to reveal is that simply failing to believe in Jesus is a sin—and the greatest of sins at that.

The work of the Holy Spirit is significant in that He enables a person to become aware of the sin of not believing. We see this illustrated at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out: Peter stood up, not to convict the Jews of leading morally corrupt lives, but, rather, to convict them of failing to believe in Jesus Christ. He warned them of the danger of rejecting Him in the face of the Holy Spirit's witness (Acts 2:22–24, 32–36). The Holy Spirit duly convicted the listeners, cutting them to the heart and compelling them to ask how they could be saved (Acts 2:37). The dramatic outcome was that 3,000 souls were added to God's community that very day (Acts 2:41).

### **6.2.3 Convicting people of righteousness**

He [i.e. the Holy Spirit] will convict the world...of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more.

John 16:8, 10

Isaiah 53 portrays Jesus as God's suffering servant. It prophesied how there would be nothing in His countenance to command people's respect. In fact, He would be despised and rejected (Isa 53:1–3; 2 Cor

5:16). Indeed, it transpired that Jesus' opponents—mainly the Jewish religious authorities—accused Him of all sorts of unrighteousness: blasphemy (Mk 2:7; Mt 26:63–66); breaking the Sabbath (Jn 5:18); being demon-possessed (Jn 8:48, 52); stirring up the people (Lk 23:2, 5); and being a sinner (Jn 9:24). They ultimately conspired to betray Jesus to the Roman authorities, to be crucified on a cross (Isa 53:4).

What is righteousness? To some, it is a relative sense of morality, where a person perceives something to be “right”. Others base their righteousness on an external standard. For example, those who levied accusations against Jesus did so on the basis of their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. They felt that they knew what righteousness was from the law (Lk 18:9–14; Phil 3:4–6). But the law inclined Jesus' opponents to be self-righteous; all the while, however, their righteousness was merely an external show (Mt 6:1–2, 5, 16).

Jesus' enemies did not realize that true righteousness meant more than simply following a set of rules and regulations. Jesus taught that God's righteous requirements far exceeds simply practising the letter of the law, especially if one allows the heart to be full of evil at the same time (Mt 5:20). Our righteousness in Christ is from God, not from ourselves (Rom 10:3).

To manifest God's righteousness, Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross (Rom 3:25). This act, coupled with our faith in Jesus for our salvation, is the basic message of the gospel (Rom 1:17). Jesus died, resurrected and ascended to heaven to prove that He alone is righteous, and that He came to bring righteousness to us (Acts 3:14–15; 1 Jn 2:1; Rom 4:25; 8:33–34). Had Jesus been born of sin, through the will of the flesh, He would never have been qualified to take our sins upon Himself, for He would have been no different from the rest of humankind. However, Jesus was born of a virgin and conceived by the Holy Spirit; He was therefore sinless and worthy to die for our sins. For this reason, only Jesus can serve as our righteous Mediator and Saviour, to reconcile us to God (2 Cor 5:21).

Jesus' righteousness differs from righteousness through the law. His righteousness is based on His own authority and approval from God. This is because He fully submitted His whole body and being to God, to do with as He pleased (Heb 10:5ff). Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension showed how God could not condemn a righteous person who willingly laid down His life for sinners (Phil 2:6–8; 1 Pet 3:18).

The righteousness found in the Mosaic Law came from upholding the laws therein, the oral traditions, and so forth (Mt 15:1–6). But true righteousness cannot be found according to the flesh; it must be found in the Spirit (Rom 8:4).

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost. Today, we can no longer see His physical form, but by the Spirit's revelation, we can recognize Jesus as God's righteous One and the fount of our righteousness. Significantly, through Him we have a new standard of righteousness. People once thought that they could obtain righteousness by keeping the law, whereas, in reality, no one was able to keep the law perfectly. Righteousness simply could not be found in the law (Rom 3:12, 28; Gal 2:16, 21). We now know that true righteousness comes from the grace of God and through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22–26). This realization is only possible because the Holy Spirit works to convict people of righteousness.

#### **6.2.4 Convicting people of judgment**

He [i.e. the Holy Spirit] will convict the world...of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

John 16:8, 11

Satan once had the power to bind the world in sin (Jn 8:34; 1 Jn 3:8; 5:19) and in the power of death which comes from sin (Rom 5:12–14; 6:23). Moreover, he had good grounds for accusing people of unrighteousness. However, his work was thwarted when Jesus came to the world to reconcile people to God (1 Jn 3:8b; Rom 8:33–34). Jesus died on the cross, carrying the sins of humankind, and resurrected (Isa 53:4–6; Jn 19:30; Col 2:15; Acts 2:23–24). By resurrecting from the dead, He triumphed over the devil who had the power of death (Heb 2:14–15; Rom 6:4–7, 14, 17–18). Jesus achieved this through obedience and submission to God (Lk 4:1–12; Mt 16:21–23; 26:39). Today, whoever abides in Him will have the power to live a victorious life—to be dead to sin and alive to God (Rom 6:8–11). Through Jesus, we have been freed from the judgment which comes with sin, which is death (Rom 8:2; 8:36).

The majority of Jews believe that there will be a great judgment on the last day, but their views about the nature of this judgment differ



from what is found in the Christian Bible. They believe that salvation comes through observance of the law, and that God rewards those who follow the righteousness in the law. In line with this belief, the Jews in Christ's time felt justified when they delivered Jesus to death for disobeying the ceremonial laws and, supposedly, blaspheming against God (Isa 53:4; Jn 19:6–7). However, Jesus' righteousness in the sight of God was divinely confirmed by His resurrection and ascension.

Today, we know that Jesus Christ resurrected because the Holy Spirit has been poured out on humankind (Acts 2:29–33). We need to believe in Him and to accept His gospel; otherwise, we will be judged one day (Acts 17:31).

### **6.3 The Holy Spirit brings sinners to God**

The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, righteousness and judgment. However, His purpose is not just to do this; rather, it is to lead sinners to the path of salvation and to God's presence. The Bible tells us that God is a jealous God, and His name is Jealous (Ex 34:14). On judgment day, His wrath will be manifested so clearly that the ungodly and wicked will not be able to stand before Him (Rom 1:18; Rev 6:12–17). Although that day has yet to come, God has forewarned us that evil will be repaid with evil; this is the nature of justice. We should therefore be concerned about the judgment that comes after death (Heb 9:27). As sinful humans, we can never escape the condemnation of death. However, God has prepared a way of escape—a way that is effected through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). The way out of God's righteous judgment was made possible through Jesus' death on the cross. At His moment of greatest agony, Jesus had cried out: "Eli, Eli lama sabachthani?," meaning "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" As He hung on the cross, darkness came over the land (Mt 27:45–46). The law of justice demands that the greater the crime, the greater the punishment; and Jesus' agonizing death was testimony to the severity of the world's sins. He suffered God's righteous judgment because He loved the world and was willing to fulfil God's justice on our behalf. The scene of Jesus' crucifixion is a cause for humankind to tremble, for it hints at the grave punishment

awaiting sinners in hell. However, we also need to remember that His love can save us from God's righteous judgment, spiritual death and hell's everlasting fire (Mt 25:41, 46).

It is hard for us to fully comprehend God's love and mercy—that He came to the world to die on our behalf and provide a way of escape on the day of judgment. In truth, it was not the first time He had saved humankind. In the time of Noah, the world was similarly filled with evil and violence. Because of the sins of that generation, God's wrath was poured out in the form of a worldwide flood (Gen 6:11–13, 17). However, before the onset of the flood, He prepared an escape route for the righteous, having instructed Noah to build an ark so that all who entered it could be saved (Gen 6:18–20; 7:23). Likewise, in the last days, before the world's destruction by fire and everlasting punishment (2 Pet 3:10; 2 Thess 1:7–9), God has prepared an escape route: all who believe in Jesus Christ will be able to avoid everlasting destruction and enter into everlasting life (Jn 3:16).

As sinful flesh, we will all reap the punishment of physical death, because, as the Bible points out, the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Yet God made Jesus Christ, who was without sin, to take on our sins. In doing so, Jesus took upon Himself the wrath of God (2 Cor 5:21; Isa 53:5–6). Therefore, whoever seeks refuge in the shadow of the cross and relies on Him will escape God's wrath (Rom 5:9).

The Holy Spirit reveals to us the path of salvation and freedom from sin. But more than that, He leads us to repent of our sins (Acts 11:18) and moves us to understand God's present judgment. Through the Holy Spirit, we can better grasp the reality of sin and its consequences now—before we sin in the future. In this way, the Holy Spirit is indispensable in leading sinners to the presence of God (Acts 2:37–41).

#### **6.4 The Holy Spirit forgives sins**

The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.  
He will not always strive with us,  
Nor will He keep His anger forever.  
He has not dealt with us according to our sins,  
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.  
For as the heavens are high above the earth,

So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;  
As far as the east is from the west,  
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.  
As a father pities his children,  
So the LORD pities those who fear Him.

Psalm 103:8–13

[Jesus] whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

Romans 3:25

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, sinners can repent and turn back to God. Like a loving Father, God will forgive the transgressions of His children. After sinning against God, King David wrote, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Ps 51:17). The Old Testament is filled with stories of God’s grace, mercy and patience towards sinners (Neh 9:26–31).

In the New Testament, God revealed Himself in the flesh as Jesus Christ, coming to dwell among man (Jn 1:1, 14). The purpose of His appearance was to call sinners to repentance (Mt 9:13). The Bible says, “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned” (Jn 3:17–18). Today, the Holy Spirit continues Jesus’ earthly ministry through the church, which is the body of Christ, whom He fills with His presence.

While in the world, Jesus forgave peoples’ sins, healed the sick and gave peace (Mt 9:2; Lk 7:48). Even when He was dying on the cross, He did not consider His own sufferings a priority; instead, He prayed for His enemies’ forgiveness (Lk 23:34; Isa 53:12). Jesus’ magnanimity is something we should learn from: we need to forgive others, just as He forgave us.

After Jesus’ resurrection, He gave the apostles, the successors of His earthly ministry, the power to forgive sins. He breathed on them, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:22–23). Here, we see that the power to forgive sins came hand in hand with the promised Holy Spirit.

Entrusted with the ministry of forgiveness, the apostles started to preach after receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The forgiveness of sins was effected in water baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus' precious blood. In his Pentecostal sermon, apostle Peter proclaimed, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Similarly, Ananias told Paul, God's chosen apostle, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment—piercing our darkened conscience. He brings us to God's presence so that He can forgive and justify us. God's forgiveness is only effective through Jesus' precious blood which was shed for many (Eph 1:7). Under the law, almost everything was purified by blood; and without the shedding of blood, there was no forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22). Therefore, our forgiveness is made possible through water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ—the Spirit bearing witness that Jesus' precious blood is present in the water (1 Jn 5:6–8; Jn 19:34–35). In fact, the Holy Spirit is both the witness and the administrator of the forgiveness of sins during water baptism, as He is the one who holds this power and authority (Jn 20:22–23).

When the Holy Spirit guides sinners to come into the church, to accept God's word and to repent of their sins, the Spirit's work of forgiving sins is being accomplished (Acts 2:38). In the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11ff), Jesus illustrates how the heavenly Father forgives even the greatest of sinners, as long as they turn back and repent. He tells us that God is a loving and merciful Father, eagerly awaiting the return of His wayward son.

## **6.5 The Holy Spirit delivers people from sin**

Sinners are under the power of Satan and so are slaves to sin (1 Jn 5:19; Jn 8:34). As sinners, we have no power over sin: we may wish to do good, but we inadvertently commit sin instead (Rom 7:15, 19). This is because the power of sin is in the law of sin. As a result, we may often feel remorse over the frustrating fact that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful nature (Rom 7:17–18, 20) and the constant tug-of-war between

the good and evil inclinations within our heart (Rom 7:21–23). In desperation, we may find ourselves crying out in a similar way to apostle Paul: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom 7:24).

Sometimes, it seems we need to cry out before we can receive God’s saving grace. Perhaps, it is because we need to realize how hopeless we are against the power of sin before the Holy Spirit can help us. To overcome the law of sin, we need a law that can triumph over its power: we need the law of the Holy Spirit. Apostle Paul declares, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2).

Romans 8:2 is a continuation of Romans 7. Romans 7:25 points out that only Jesus Christ can deliver us from the bondage of sin. But in Romans 8:2, Paul says that it is the law of the Spirit of life which sets us free from the law of sin and death. Does he contradict himself? Not at all. These two verses fit together to illustrate how Jesus Christ has given the authority and power to forgive sins to the Holy Spirit. So, after the Holy Spirit leads us to be baptized into Christ, we become free from the law of sin. It is through the Spirit that we are able to find spiritual freedom in Christ (2 Cor 3:17). Hence, we are led through a process of miraculous transformation from Romans 7 to Romans 8—a transformation from hopeless bondage to unmerited freedom.

Unfortunately, the majority of Christians have yet to escape from the pitiful condition described in Romans 7. In the meantime, they continue to live without hope and to be weighed down by the bondage of sin. They have yet to discover the freedom that apostle Paul describes in Romans 8. The secret to spiritual freedom, then, is to set our minds on the things of the Spirit, and to submit ourselves to the guidance of the Spirit (Rom 5:13; 8:4ff) and to His renewing power (Tit 3:5).

## **6.6 The Holy Spirit gives life**

The Bible tells us that death comes through sin (Rom 5:12), and that the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). It is very clear about the relationship between sin and death: sin is the cause, while death is the effect. Death refers to the inevitable physical death which awaits every person; but it also refers to spiritual death.

The Bible records prophet Ezekiel's vision of dry bones in a valley, where the latter symbolizes the world, while the dry bones symbolize God's people living in the world. The people are lost and devoid of hope (Ezek 37:11). Physically, they are alive, but spiritually they are dead (Ezek 37:1–2; Mt 8:22). It is only when God's Spirit enters the dry bones, that the people are revived and made to stand up to become an exceedingly great army (Ezek 37:4–5, 9–10, 14). Today, more than ever, we need the Holy Spirit's life-giving power in our lives and in our church.

People generally tend to focus more on the needs and comforts of everyday life, while neglecting the importance of their spiritual lives. But Jesus teaches us, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mt 16:26). Clearly, the Lord values a person's spiritual life—his soul—far more than the whole world put together, for man is His greatest creation. That is why God came to the world in the flesh to die on the cross, to redeem humankind with His own blood. He has given us the gifts of life and salvation which come through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:2). It is the Holy Spirit alone who can raise the dead (Rom 8:11) and give abundant life to those in whom He dwells (Gal 5:25; Jn 10:10).

## 6.7 The Holy Spirit condemns sin

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:18

Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.

John 8:24

Left alone, sinners would never be able to free themselves from the grip of sin. However, through faith and God's grace, the Holy Spirit forgives us of our sins and delivers us from its power. In contrast, He condemns those who do not have faith. The reality is that unbelievers will remain slaves to sin throughout their lives, and they will die in sin and face eternal condemnation. For these reasons, Christians owe a debt of love

to people who do not yet believe: they must share the gospel by the power of God's Spirit.

Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Matthew 18:18

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John 20:22–23

To "bind" in Matthew 18:18 means to "condemn of sin". To "retain sins" in John 20:22–23 is similar to the condemnation of sins mentioned in Matthew 18:18. According to Jesus' promise, the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples with the authority to condemn sins. However, this authority lay with the Holy Spirit; the apostles (and the church) were only the tools through which He worked. It was the Spirit who brought sinners before God, forgave their sins, granted spiritual freedom and gave life.

When we preach the gospel, the Holy Spirit can bring either grace or condemnation to the recipients. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved by grace (Mk 16:16); those who do not believe will be condemned in their sin (Jn 3:16–18; 2 Thess 1:7–9; Heb 6:4–8; 10:26–29). Acts 5:1–11 gives us an example of how the Holy Spirit works when carrying out the condemnation of sin. We must therefore take the Holy Spirit's work seriously.

## 6.8 The Holy Spirit commissions workers

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed.

Luke 4:18

Jesus was commissioned to undertake His earthly ministry by the Holy Spirit. When the time approached for Him to ascend to heaven, He

entrusted the work to His disciples (Jn 20:21). He breathed on them to signify the promise of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22), saying, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you . . . Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:21–22). He then instructed them to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (Lk 24:49)—which duly took place on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff).

The Acts of the Apostles may more accurately be titled “The Acts of the Holy Spirit”. After the descent of the Holy Spirit, the apostles became powerful vessels for the Lord, with the Holy Spirit personally guiding them in their ministries (Acts 16:6–8). Examples of the Holy Spirit’s work included:

- Instructing Philip to preach to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29–35)
- Commanding Peter to go to Caesarea to preach to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:19–43)
- Setting apart Barnabas and Saul for God’s work (Acts 13:2–4)

Today, the workers of God must not allow human will and values to control the work and direction of the church; rather, they must be guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. And, as in the case of the early church, the Spirit must guide the commissioning of workers.

The work of the church is not only the responsibility of ordained ministers, such as elders, pastors and deacons. All the members are part of Christ’s body, and so the work of the church should be the responsibility of every one of us. The Holy Spirit does not just dwell in the ministers—He abides in, and directs, any worker who willingly surrenders his life to the Lord.



## **Review questions**

1. Give three examples of the Holy Spirit's work in the Old Testament, citing the appropriate Bible verses.
2. Give seven examples of the Holy Spirit's work in the New Testament, citing the appropriate Bible verses.
3. How does the Holy Spirit convict people of sin?
4. How does the Holy Spirit convict people of righteousness?
5. How does the Holy Spirit convict people of judgment?
6. How does the Holy Spirit bring sinners to God?
7. How does the Holy Spirit forgive sins?
8. How does the Holy Spirit deliver people from sin?
9. How does the Holy Spirit give spiritual life?
10. How does the Holy Spirit condemn sin?
11. How does the Holy Spirit commission workers?

# Chapter 7

## THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 7.1 Introduction

The Bible details extensively the promise of the Holy Spirit through the messages of God's prophets in the Old and New Testaments, and through the teachings of Jesus Christ.

### 7.2 The promise of the Holy Spirit in prophecy

God promised the outpouring of His Spirit from ancient times through His prophets and made good that promise when the time was ripe. Sometimes, we have to be patient to see God's prophecies fulfilled: it may not happen for thousands of years. Yet, we must hold fast to the belief that all of His words will come to pass.

In this section, we shall look at the prophecies that were made by a number of prophets at different periods in biblical history.

#### 7.2.1 Moses' prophecy

I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain.

Deuteronomy 11:14

God promised to shower the land of the chosen people with rain—a land of hills and valleys, which needed His providential care in the form of the early and latter rains, which referred to the autumn and spring rains respectively. The latter came just before the harvest (Lev 26:4).

The only condition for their bestowal was that the people took care to keep God's commandments (Deut 11:10–11).

From this reference to the rains, we can learn many spiritual lessons. The hardness and dryness of the soil before their arrival can be likened to the condition of the human heart. It is only through the downpour of the Holy Spirit that it can be moistened and softened to allow the seeds of the truth to germinate, grow (Ezek 36:26–27) and bring forth spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22–23). The early or autumn rain, which preceded the sowing season, is symbolic of the Holy Spirit's downpour to establish the apostolic church (Acts 2:1–4, 41). The latter or spring rain, which preceded the harvest, is symbolic of the Holy Spirit's downpour to establish the true church of the end time. We are now in that end time, and the Holy Spirit is sealing God's people in preparation for Jesus' second coming (Rev 7:2ff; Eph 1:13; Mal 4:5f).

### 7.2.2 David's prophecy

They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,  
And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures.  
Psalm 36:8

This verse alludes to a feast in the house of the Lord—a feast of truth. The Bible tells us that those who seek after the truth shall never go hungry (Amos 8:11; Jer 15:16). The reference to the river of God's pleasures relates to the Holy Spirit, and is one of many examples where the Bible uses the symbolism of water to describe Him. For example, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will become a fountain of water springing up into eternal life, so that those who drink of it shall never thirst (Jn 4:13–14). He adds that, out of the hearts of those who believe, the Holy Spirit shall flow like rivers of living water to satisfy them (Jn 7:37–39).

In Psalm 36:8, “they” refers to the “children of men” who are mentioned in the previous verse (36:7). Therefore, the Holy Spirit's descent is a matter that concerns the whole of humankind. This has been confirmed through the Spirit's downpour on both Jews and Gentiles during the time of the early church and likewise today (cf. Acts 11:15–18; Acts 10:34–35; Rom 3:20).

### 7.2.3 Solomon's prophecy

Turn at my rebuke;  
Surely I will pour out my spirit on you;  
I will make my words known to you.

Proverbs 1:23

Although King Solomon was the author of Proverbs, there are a number of reasons to believe that the “I” in this prophecy refers not to himself, but to Jesus Christ. Firstly, Solomon could not realistically speak about pouring out his own spirit on others; the human spirit cannot be given to another person. Secondly, verse 20 makes it clear that the “I” refers to wisdom personified. Thirdly, Proverbs 8:12, 22 and 23 also speak about wisdom personified, which is generally accepted as a reference to Jesus Christ. So Proverbs 1:23 alludes to those who will listen to Christ’s rebuke, repent and receive the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, Acts 5:32 reinforces this point, by teaching us that those who obey God will receive His Holy Spirit.

### 7.2.4 Isaiah's prophecies

And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem. When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning.

Isaiah 4:3–4

In this verse, the “spirit of judgment” and the “spirit of burning” are titles of the Holy Spirit. The “filth of the daughters of Zion” refers to the flaws of God’s people, while “everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem” refers to those among God’s people who are worthy to enter into eternal life.

Today, we may wonder how God’s church can ever become a fully sanctified and holy community. However, when the time is ripe, the sanctification of the church and the salvation of the believers will be complete. This will only happen after God pours out the Holy Spirit (that is, the “spirit of judgment” and the “spirit of burning”)

to accomplish His sanctification work (2 Thess 2:13; cf. Isa 1:25). (For a further explanation of this verse, please refer to Chapter 3 which discusses the symbolism of fire).

Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,  
And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field,  
And the fruitful field is counted as a forest.

Isaiah 32:15

In the above verse, both the “wilderness” and the “fruitful field” represent the human heart. The wilderness is an uncultivated wasteland, which can be likened to the barren condition of man’s spirit. In contrast, the fruitful field is productive and is symbolic of a spirit which is full of life. The fact that the wilderness can become a fruitful field testifies to the power of God’s Spirit as a catalyst for our spiritual transformation. When He enters our hearts, He turns what was once a barren life into a dynamic life.

The poor and needy seek water, but there is none,  
Their tongues fail for thirst.  
I, the LORD, will hear them;  
I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.  
I will open rivers in desolate heights,  
And fountains in the midst of the valleys;  
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,  
And the dry land springs of water.

Isaiah 41:17–18

During the rainy seasons in Palestine, the land experienced plentiful rain. But the porous limestone would have caused it to drain away, leaving the land dry and parched at certain times of the year. There is some indication that water was sometimes so scarce that the Israelites had to pay for it (cf. Lam 5:4).<sup>1</sup> To those who were thirsty, water was as precious as life itself.

However, the prophecy in verse 17 tells us that the poor and needy shall not have to thirst forever, as God will have mercy on them. It reminds us of Jesus’ words: “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). If we feel a spiritual thirst in our hearts—a thirst that comes from not having

<sup>1</sup> Unger, Merrill F., *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, ed. Harrison, R.K. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988).

God—we should earnestly seek Him. In this way, the Holy Spirit will become a fountain of life in us, to quench our thirst.

In Isaiah 41:18, both the “wilderness” and the “dry land” represent the human heart. The “rivers”, “fountains” and “pool of water” all represent the Holy Spirit. Human hearts are often filled with anxiety, misery and hopelessness. But God’s promise is that the outpouring of the Spirit can change all that into hope and life.

Behold, I will do a new thing,  
Now it shall spring forth;  
Shall you not know it?  
I will even make a road in the wilderness  
And rivers in the desert...  
Because I give waters in the wilderness  
And rivers in the desert,  
To give drink to My people, My chosen.  
Isaiah 43:19–20

Rivers are not normally found in deserts, yet God promised that this extraordinary thing would become a reality. If we look at the passage carefully, the rivers will supply water exclusively to God’s chosen people. Those who do not belong to God will have no share in this grace. In the same way, Jesus told His disciples that they would receive the Holy Spirit, whom the world cannot receive (Jn 14:16–17).

For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,  
And floods on the dry ground;  
I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,  
And My blessing on your offspring.  
Isaiah 44:3

This passage can be divided into two parts: the part first speaks of God’s bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon those who yearn for Him; the second speaks of how He will pour out His Spirit on the house of Jacob (Israel) so that they may be blessed. From this, we learn that not only must we belong to God, as in the case of Israel, we must also earnestly desire His Spirit.

Ho! Everyone who thirsts,  
Come to the waters;  
And you who have no money,  
Come, buy and eat.

Yes, come, buy wine and milk  
Without money and without price.  
Isaiah 55:1

God's grace is great, and best of all, it is free to all. If we truly thirst, we can come humbly before the Lord so that He can satisfy us with the water of life. In the Book of Revelation, we read: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev 22:17).

### 7.2.5 Ezekiel's prophecies

Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them.

Ezekiel 11:19–20

According to Ezekiel's prophecy, the Holy Spirit's descent accomplishes two things. Firstly, He unites God's people—the church (Eph 4:3). In the Lord's eyes, unity among His people is extremely important (Josh 7:1–26; Jn 10:16). Secondly, the Spirit imbues God's people with a gentle and submissive spirit, enabling them to be obedient to God's laws and statutes, so that they can receive His joy and blessings.

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Ezekiel 36:26–27

We note that the prophet uses both "new spirit" and "My Spirit" to refer to God's Spirit.

I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live.  
Ezekiel 37:14

Ezekiel 37:1–14 describes how the prophet saw a vision of dry bones in a valley. When we read from verse 11 onwards, we learn that the bones symbolize the house of Israel. Ezekiel's vision, then, is a

prophecy prefiguring the salvation of Israel—a spiritual truth which was also later revealed to apostle Paul (Rom 11:25–27).

Throughout Israel's history, the people's hearts were often hardened against God's will. In the New Testament, this attitude revealed itself in the rejection of Jesus Christ as Saviour, and led to His crucifixion (Acts 2:22–24; 3:13–15). The people also rejected the apostles' gospel, which resulted in it being given to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; 28:16–29). However, God is faithful and steadfast: He will not forget the covenant which He made with Abraham. When the "fullness of the Gentiles" is complete, He will save Israel—restoring them spiritually and giving them new life (Rom 11:25–27).

"And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," says the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 39:29

From chapter 39, verse 28 onwards, Ezekiel's prophecy concerns the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which must be understood in the context of God's promised restoration of the nation of Israel. This promise refers to the coming of the latter (spring) rain, not the former (autumn) rain. God's true church—His restored people—has since been established by this period of rain. Therefore, those of us who make up the true church today should feel a sense of obligation to proclaim the gospel to Israel. Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (Ezek 37:1–14) and Paul's prophecy about the restoration of Israel (Rom 11:25–27) will be fulfilled in due time. And when the time arrives, there will be an immeasurable outpouring of God's Spirit.

### 7.2.6 Hosea's prophecy

Let us know,  
Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.  
His going forth is established as the morning;  
He will come to us like the rain,  
Like the latter and former rain to the earth.

Hosea 6:3

Before dawn, the darkness of the night covers the land like a shroud.  
When the sun's rays finally pierce through the darkness, it is as if the



light is awakening the world. As light symbolizes the Holy Spirit, when we seek God wholeheartedly, His Spirit will enter into us to waken our hearts and dispel the darkness.

In order to receive a good harvest, the fields in Palestine required a liberal downpour of the spring rains. In the Bible, “showers” and “spring rains” are symbols of the Holy Spirit and allude to His bestowal of grace. The spring rain symbolizes the Holy Spirit’s downpour in the end time, when God will pour out His Spirit on His people, to enable them to bear spiritual fruit.

### 7.2.7 Joel’s prophecies

Be glad then, you children of Zion,  
And rejoice in the LORD your God;  
For He has given you the former rain faithfully,  
And He will cause the rain to come down for you—  
The former rain,  
And the latter rain in the first month.

Joel 2:23

“The children of Zion” in Joel 2:23 refers to God’s chosen people in both the Old and the New Testament periods. Joel calls the people to repentance so that God can give them rain. Israel had sinned and caused physical droughts throughout Palestine; yet Joel prophesied that God would send rain once more, as evidence of His forgiveness.

Biblically speaking, a physical drought is symbolic of the nation’s spiritual drought, when God’s Spirit no longer descends. Spiritual droughts entail a cutting off of God’s grace on account of man’s disobedience or rebellion. History indicates that the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church sometime after the apostolic period, because the truth of the gospel became corrupted by human tradition, idolatry and politics (cf. Mt 13:33). The departure of the Holy Spirit manifested itself in the absence of spiritual tongues within the church, which had been the evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:4; 10:45ff; 11:15; 15:8; 19:2, 6; 1 Cor 14:21f).

However, Joel’s prophecy offers hope that God will not be angry forever. He indicates that the promised Holy Spirit shall be poured out liberally upon His chosen people once again. In the same way that the coming of rain signifies the passing of God’s wrath, so the outpouring

of God's Spirit, after a long period of absence, signals a time of grace and rejoicing.

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,  
Your young men shall see visions.  
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

Joel 2:28–29

This part of Joel's prophecy describes the downpour of the promised Holy Spirit. It is this prophecy which Peter refers to in his Pentecostal sermon, immediately after the Holy Spirit's first outpouring on God's church (Acts 2:16–21; cf. Joel 2:28–32).

There are two key points for us to note. Firstly, the Spirit of God is to be poured out on all humanity. God places no limitations on who can receive the Holy Spirit with regards to race, gender, age or social status. The only conditions are that people accept the truth and seek after the Holy Spirit. Secondly, prophecies, dreams and visions are ways in which God can reveal Himself to people, and those who have received the Holy Spirit can experience these wonderful revelations.

### 7.2.8 Zechariah's prophecies

"This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:  
'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'  
says the LORD of hosts."

Zechariah 4:6

Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah (Hag 1:1), who lived during the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, circa 536 BC. In fulfilment of past prophecies concerning the rebuilding of Solomon's temple (Isa 44:28; Ezra 1:1–6), Zerubbabel was given permission by King Cyrus to lead 50,000 men back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple (Ezra 2:2, 64–65). However, because of opposition to the temple rebuilding from Judah's enemies during the reign of King Ahasuerus of Persia (Xerxes I), the work ground to a halt. The Jews felt truly disheartened (Ezra 4:4–5, 7, 23),

until prophet Zechariah spoke powerfully to them and reignited their hearts to carry on the work (Ezra 5:1–2).

Zechariah 4:6 speaks of reliance on the Holy Spirit’s power. Just as God’s people had to rely on the Holy Spirit to overcome the disruption to the rebuilding of the temple, so we, today, must rely on Him to overcome any obstacles in our lives. Human effort, talent and hard work do not always bring success—we also need God’s Spirit.

The temple of the Old Testament prefigures the church of the New Testament. The destruction of Solomon’s temple prefigures the downfall of the early church, which was established by the Holy Spirit in the early (autumn) rain period. The rebuilding of Solomon’s temple prefigures the re-establishment and re-gathering of God’s people (the church) in the latter (spring) rain period. As mentioned earlier, the early and latter rain periods typify two periods in history, when God’s grace and Spirit would be poured out abundantly upon His people.

During his time, Zerubbabel relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome opposition to the rebuilding of Solomon’s temple. Today, the Holy Spirit has a similarly crucial role in helping the true church to triumph over any obstacles that might prevent her from manifesting the faith, truth and power found in the original apostolic church.

For the seed shall be prosperous,  
The vine shall give its fruit,  
The ground shall give her increase,  
And the heavens shall give their dew—  
I will cause the remnant of this people  
To possess all these.

Zechariah 8:12

Dew is a biblical symbol for the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit comes upon the uncultivated wilderness, which is the human heart, He will transform it into a fruitful field. This imagery describes the newness of life that believers will have in the Lord. Prophetically, “the remnant of this people” speaks of God’s people who will remain after the great tribulation: those who will have a part in His salvation in the last days (Rom 9:27, 29; 11:5, 25–27).

Zechariah 8:12 prophesies concerning the Holy Spirit in the latter rain period. This is when the true church, which is established by the Holy Spirit, will proclaim the gospel of Christ to God’s chosen people,

Israel. God will not forget them, and they, too, will enjoy the blessings of His promises in Christ.

Ask the LORD for rain  
In the time of the latter rain.  
The LORD will make flashing clouds;  
He will give them showers of rain,  
Grass in the field for everyone.

Zechariah 10:1

Rainfall is seasonal, coming when the time is right. Zechariah said that when the latter rain comes, it will come with might, with “flashing clouds” which bring “showers of rain”. This prophecy indicates that, when this rain arrives, those who ask God sincerely will receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

Zechariah 12:10

In this verse, Zechariah prophesies concerning the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ. The term “Spirit of grace and supplication” reveals two of the Holy Spirit’s characteristics. Although Israel repeatedly rebelled against God and rejected Jesus as the Christ, God still promised to shower the Holy Spirit on Israel. From Zechariah’s prophecy, we know that when the time is fulfilled, Israel shall know that they must place their hope in the Saviour whom they have pierced, and they will weep on account of their sin.

### 7.2.9 Malachi’s prophecy

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet  
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.  
And he will turn  
The hearts of the fathers to the children,  
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,  
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Malachi 4:5–6

Malachi's prophecy points to the descent of the Holy Spirit during the last days, in the period of the latter rain. It gives us three important teachings:

Firstly, we learn of the "the great and dreadful day of the LORD", which refers to the last day. On that day, God will destroy the world with fire because of His wrath and judgment upon its sin (Zeph 1:18; 2 Pet 3:10–12). The Bible repeatedly states that the last day will be a great and terrible day (Isa 13:6–16; Joel 2:31; Zeph 1:14–17; Rev 6:12–17). Jesus says that it will be like the day when Lot fled the city of Sodom, which was burned with fiery brimstone. The last day will come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly. Therefore, we should not be lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that the world is safe and at peace (Lk 17:28–30).

Secondly, before the great and terrible day of the Lord, God will send the prophet Elijah into the world to carry out His mission of salvation. The coming of Elijah refers to the work of two prophets during different historical periods:

- (1) The first period is marked by the proclamation of the gospel of salvation. The Lord Jesus started His earthly ministry by proclaiming, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:14–15). He spoke of John the Baptist as the "Elijah who is to come" (Mt 11:14; 17:10–13). The appearance of John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which indicated that a person would come to prepare the way of the Lord (Isa 40:3; Mt 3:3).

Obviously, John the Baptist was not the reincarnated Elijah; Malachi described him as he did because John the Baptist would possess the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17). His work, like Elijah's, would be to turn people back to God. John the Baptist proclaimed God's salvation and urged people to repentance. In doing so, he fulfilled his mission as the forerunner of Christ (Mt 3:3).

- (2) The second period marks the completion of God's salvation plan. If we recall, Elijah was the prophet who prayed for rain following three and a half years of drought (Jas 5:17–18). His role is now needed again in this period of the end-time church as there is spiritual drought throughout the world. This is the

period of the latter rain, in which God's true church undertakes the work of Elijah, acting as the forerunner of the Lord before His second coming. Her mission is to lead people back to God and so complete His plan of salvation (Rev 7:1–3; 21:2).

Thirdly, Malachi's prophecy talks of a father-child relationship, where the "fathers" represent God (Eph 4:6) and the "children" represent humankind. His words make a veiled reference to the curse which came upon the earth as a result of Adam's sin. When our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God, He cursed the ground and expelled them from the garden of Eden (Gen 3:17, 22–24). As a result, God's life and Spirit departed from humankind. It was not until Jesus Christ died for us that we were reconciled to God (Col 1:20–22; Eph 2:20–22).

Sin alienates people from God, and even those in the church are not exempt. Indeed, when the early church went astray, the harmonious relationship between God and His people was broken, and a spiritual drought ensued. The Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, could not remain with the church when she had lost the truth.

Prophet Elijah prefigures the appearance of the true church in the last days. The true church, which witnesses to the truth in word and spirit, can restore and reconcile the broken relationship between God and man—turning the heart of the Father to His children, and the hearts of the children to their Father. The true church has the spirit and power of Elijah: she has the courage to do battle against evil and the power to overcome false prophets (1 Kgs 18:19–40; cf. Gal 1:7–9; Jude 3). Through the Holy Spirit, God's church can transform sinful hearts, so that people can truly observe and submit to God's laws and ordinances (Ezek 36:26–27).

### **7.2.10 John the Baptist's prophecy**

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Matthew 3:11

During the ministry of John the Baptist, there were many Jews who mistakenly thought he was the Christ. However, he always refuted this, making it clear that he was sent merely to prepare the way for the Christ (Jn 1:19–20; 3:28). He also pointed out that, whilst he baptized people with a baptism of repentance (Acts 19:3–4), the one coming after him would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11). From this, we understand that God’s plan was for Jesus Christ to come to the world first, before He poured out His Holy Spirit.

And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’”

John 1:32–33

At first, John the Baptist did not know that Jesus was the Christ. However, the heavenly Father revealed Jesus’ identity to him through a vision of the Holy Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. He then understood that Jesus was the one who would baptize God’s people with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:16). This event served to fulfil Isaiah’s prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah—Jesus was the Anointed One of God (Isa 11:1–2; 42:1; 61:1).

John the Baptist was the last of the prophets in the Old Testament, for with the coming of Jesus, a new covenant was created between God and His people (Mt 11:3, 13). The Old Testament prophecies concerning the Holy Spirit would find new significance through the work and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **7.3 The promises of the Lord Jesus**

God did not only speak about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit through the prophets of old, He also came to the world as Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel of salvation and to promise the Holy Spirit personally. There are many passages in the Bible which record Jesus’ promises regarding the Holy Spirit. In this section, they have been divided into two categories: those made in the period before His crucifixion, and those made after His resurrection.

### 7.3.1 Promises made before Jesus' crucifixion

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Luke 11:13

To encourage us to persevere when praying for the Holy Spirit, Jesus related two important parables which are recorded in the gospel of Luke (Lk 11:5–12). In the first parable, a person asked to borrow bread from his friend at midnight. The friend was already in bed, as were his children (vv. 5–8). It was only the man's persistence which finally convinced the friend to relent and to give him all the bread that he needed. The second parable compares an earthly father's instinct to give good things to his children, with God's greater willingness to bestow the Holy Spirit (vv. 11–12). After Jesus spoke these two parables, He concluded that all sincere and earnest prayers for the Holy Spirit will be answered in due time, for it is God's promise (v. 13). So God is not only our closest friend (Prov 18:24; Jn 15:15), He is also our heavenly Father who loves us dearly and will never withhold any good thing from us (Eph 4:6; 1 Jn 4:8; Ps 103:13).

Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Luke 12:11–12

Jesus prophesied that His disciples would later be brought before the synagogues and rulers to be judged, but comforted them by telling them not to be anxious about what they should say, for the Holy Spirit Himself would teach them. From these words, we understand that the Holy Spirit, who is our ever-present help, will intercede for us. In the original New Testament Greek text, the Holy Spirit is the *parakletos*, that is, a strong advocate and defender for the believers. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would counsel us and advocate for us on our behalf.

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

John 4:10



This verse records a conversation between Jesus and a Samaritan woman. He tells her about the “gift of God”, which is the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19; Acts 10:44–45; 11:15–17). His words, “You would have asked Him [i.e. Jesus], and He would have given you living water”, indicate how important it is for us to actively seek after the Holy Spirit. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “living water” and “fountain of water” to convey His ability to satisfy a person’s inner thirst.

Many people during Jesus’ ministry chose not to draw near to Him because they did not realize that He was the Christ—the Saviour of His people. If the Samaritan woman had known who Jesus was, she would undoubtedly have reacted differently from the start. But Jesus knew exactly what she needed and graciously opened up her heart—revealing her spiritual thirst and advising her where to find the living water. His actions show His love for humankind: He wants to satisfy our hearts and pour out His grace in our lives.

Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”

John 4:13–14

Here, Jesus talks about the living water, whose properties are markedly different from those of the water the Samaritan woman was drawing. He says that all who drink from the well will thirst again, but those who drink His living water will never thirst. The water that He provides will become a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life. Jesus’ words give us an important spiritual lesson today: all the things of the world, such as wealth, status and recognition, are transient (1 Pet 1:24), and their ability to satisfy is temporary. Like a person drinking from a man-made well, the water can only satisfy for a short time. In contrast, the Holy Spirit whom Jesus gives is boundless: He can satisfy our spiritual thirst on a deeper level—to eternal life (Isa 49:10; Jn 6:35; Rev 7:16; cf. Isa 58:11).

Initially, the Samaritan woman’s perception was limited by her understanding of the physical. She wondered what manner of water could satisfy her thirst in the way that Jesus described. But Jesus enabled her to see that what He offered could satisfy her spiritual

thirst; and when she understood this, she left her water pot to follow Him (Jn 4:28).

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 7:37–39

In the above passage from John's gospel, "the last day, that great day of the feast", most likely, refers to the day following the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was when the Jews held their last ceremonies, prior to returning home from Jerusalem (Lev 23:33–39). This eighth day was a holy sabbath, a holy convocation, when no laborious work was to be done. The fact that "Jesus stood and cried out" reveals His conviction: He was compelled by the Spirit to speak out the truth. When He proclaimed, "As the Scripture has said...", He was not quoting from a particular verse from the Scriptures; rather, He was most likely referring to the overall message of the Old Testament prophecies (Isa 12:3; 44:3; 55:1; Ezek 47:9; Zech 14:8; cf. Rev 7:17; 22:1, 17).

The Feast of Tabernacles took place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. It was a feast which commemorated the lives of the Jewish forefathers in the wilderness (Lev 23:41–43). During the feast, at daybreak, priests would carry a golden pitcher with about two and a half pints of water to the pool of Siloam, accompanied by a procession of people and a music band. They would sing as they went along: "Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (Isa 12:3). As they sang, they would draw water and take it back to the holy temple, to be sprinkled on the west side of the altar. They did this by pouring the water from the golden pitcher into a silver basin full of holes. The people would gather, rejoicing and celebrating, as they commemorated God's providential waters for their forefathers at Rephidim—waters which flowed from a rock (Ex 17:1–6; Ps 78:15–16). As they reflected upon this event, we can imagine that they would have heard in their minds the shouts of joy from their forefathers when they witnessed God's miraculous provision of living water.

Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, Paul explained that the rock represented Christ, while the fountain of living water, which issued from the rock, symbolized the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 10:4). Today, we must drink from the same Spirit, for we are one body in Christ. Jesus shouted and cried out during the last day of the feast to teach us this important truth: if we are thirsty, we must draw near to Him for living water. This living water is our life and blessing (Rev 22:1ff).

To “thirst”, as recorded in John 7:37–39, does not refer to physical thirsting, but rather, to spiritual thirsting (Amos 8:11). Jesus offers the remedy, saying, “Let him come to Me and drink”, for He Himself is our fountain of living water. Those who are spiritually thirsty can go to Him, and He will give them the Holy Spirit who will quench their thirst.

The conditional phrase “If anyone thirsts...” alludes to the fact that there may be people who do not thirst. It brings to mind the church in Laodicea, mentioned in the Book of Revelation, whose members were spiritually complacent (Rev 3:17). More and more, there are Christians today who are spiritually thirsty, yet do not realize it, or else, do nothing about it.

To “thirst”, to “come”, and to “drink” are three steps set out in John 7:37–39 which lead to the quenching of our spiritual thirst. They reveal the way to receive the Holy Spirit. A person who has not yet received the Holy Spirit must: firstly, be aware of his spiritual thirst; secondly, draw near to Jesus through earnest prayer; and thirdly, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

John 7:37–39 explains a very important truth regarding the timing of the Holy Spirit’s descent. It states that He was not yet given because “Jesus was not yet glorified.” Here, Jesus’ glorification refers to His death, resurrection and ascension (Jn 12:16, 23; 13:32; 17:1). Therefore, it was only when all of these things were accomplished that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit began (Acts 2:1–4, 33). So John 7:37–39 is really a promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even 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. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.

John 14:16–18, RSV

The word “Counsellor” is one of the titles of the Holy Spirit (see John 14–16). It indicates His role as teacher, helper, one who empowers, comforts, and advocates on our behalf (see Chapter 2 for more information). Jesus told His disciples, “[God] will give you another Counsellor,” which indicates that Jesus Himself was a counsellor. 1 John 2:1 uses similar language in describing Jesus as an “Advocate”. Just as Jesus was a counsellor during His time on earth, so the Holy Spirit would continue His work. Jesus comforted His disciples by telling them that the Holy Spirit would “be with [them] forever”. Though He had to depart from them physically, the Holy Spirit would never depart.

The “Spirit of truth” is another title of the Holy Spirit, revealing an important characteristic of God’s Spirit (1 Jn 5:7; Jn 1:14). He bears witness to the truth (Jn 15:26; 14:6) and leads us to understand the truth (Jn 16:13).

The reference to the “world” in John 14:17 does not signify everybody in the world, but only those who refuse to believe. People who do not believe cannot receive the Holy Spirit because they can never be God’s children and be reborn of the Spirit (Jn 1:12).

Jesus told His disciples, “For He [i.e. the Holy Spirit] dwells with you, and will be in you”. He also said, “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you” (Jn 14:17–18). There are two points of particular significance here. Firstly, His statement to His disciples: “I will come to you”, should not be confused with His second coming. Secondly, we come to understand from His two statements that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Jesus spoke these words when He was physically present and living among His disciples; yet, He was explaining to them that, after His ascension, He would come and dwell with them in Spirit. Had the disciples fully understood His words at the time, they would undoubtedly have been greatly comforted.

So Jesus forewarned His disciples that, in a little while, He would leave them (Jn 13:31–33; 16:16ff). He explained that He was going to prepare a place for them and would come back to take them to where He was going (Jn 14:1–3). Nevertheless, the disciples were still sorrowful. Perhaps, they feared for what life would be like without their Lord, for Jesus had spent so much time with them over the past few years. Maybe they wondered, *Who is going to teach us? Who is going to guide us? Who will be there to strengthen us when we feel weak?* Jesus

understood their fears and promised not to leave them all alone: He would send a Counsellor to be with them, who would continue the work that He was leaving behind.

But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 14:26, RSV

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

John 16:13

Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would enable them to remember His teachings (Jn 14:26). From His words, we can gain a number of insights:

- Although Jesus taught the disciples many things during His time on earth, they did not record everything. But Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came, He would enable them to recall all His teachings so that they could use them to testify for Him.
- The teachings of Jesus contained profound spiritual meanings that the disciples did not always comprehend at the time (Jn 16:12). But after receiving the Holy Spirit, they would remember the teachings and also their spiritual significance.
- Jesus sometimes prophesied about future events which, again, the disciples could not always grasp. However, the Holy Spirit would bring His words and their meanings to mind once the prophecies were fulfilled (Lk 24:6–9; Jn 2:19–22).

It is evident that the Holy Spirit is the believers' personal guide to the truth. The Lord Jesus teaches us that His words are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). The prophet Isaiah describes the Scriptures as the words of a sealed book (Isa 29:11). And Elder John says, "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you

will abide in Him” (1 Jn 2:27). All these words indicate that the work of the Holy Spirit is to teach and to reveal the word of God; without Him, no one can understand God’s wisdom (1 Cor 2:10–11).

The Holy Spirit reveals many spiritual truths. For example, in the apostles’ letters, there are many records of Jesus’ prophecies regarding future events—prophecies which, according to the biblical records, Jesus never revealed to His disciples while He was with them on earth. So how did the apostles come to understand these revelations? We can only conclude that they were able to do so because God’s Spirit taught and revealed their meanings to them, after they had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

For example, the Holy Spirit revealed to the apostles that:

- Gentiles would become fellow heirs in the promise of salvation (Eph 3:3–6; Rom 9:24–26).
- When the fullness of the Gentiles comes in—that is, when the Gentile church becomes perfect and complete—Israel will be saved (Rom 11:25–27; Rom 11:12f; Eph 4:13f).
- Before Jesus’ second coming, the church will face rebellion and heresy from within. The man of lawlessness, the son of perdition, will appear (2 Thess 2:3–4; 2 Tim 3:1–5). Some believers will depart from the faith by following heresies and the doctrines of demons, such as forbidding marriage and abstaining from food which God permits (1 Tim 4:1–3; 2 Pet 2:1).
- When Christ comes again, some believers will not have to go through physical death: they will be instantaneously transformed into spiritual beings (1 Cor 15:51–55; 1 Thess 4:15–17). Also, on that day, the heavens and all the earthly elements will be consumed by fire (2 Pet 3:10).

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

John 15:26

Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would bear witness for Him through the work and message of the apostles. For example, the Spirit would witness that:

- Jesus resurrected, ascended to heaven and will come again (Jn 16:7; 14:3).
- The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and there is no distinction between the two (Jn 14:8).
- During baptism, the precious blood of the Lord Jesus is in the water to wash away our sins—this is a spiritual mystery (1 Jn 5:6–8; Jn 19:34; Eph 1:7; Acts 22:16).
- The believers are God’s children (Rom 8:16).
- Jesus is both the Son of man and the Son of God (Rom 1:3–4).
- Jesus is the Prince of life whom God raised from the dead (Acts 3:15).
- Jesus has ascended to heaven to be the King, Saviour and Lord of Judgment (Acts 5:30–32; 10:42–43).
- In the future, Jesus will be revealed in flaming fire, along with His mighty angels (2 Thess 1:7–10).

Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.

John 16:7

The disciples were sorrowful when Jesus told them that He was going to leave (Jn 16:5–6). But He explained that it was to their advantage because:

- If He did not ascend to heaven, the Holy Spirit would not come.
- The Holy Spirit would greatly empower them and benefit their faith and work for God (Lk 24:49).
- In the flesh, He was limited in the amount of work that He could do. But once the Holy Spirit came, He would

empower the disciples to do greater works than He had done (Jn 14:12).

- Physically speaking, Jesus was human and would have had to depart from His disciples at some point. In contrast, the Holy Spirit would never leave them.
- While on earth, Jesus could only teach, help, strengthen, comfort, intercede and advocate for His disciples “externally”. When the Holy Spirit came—His own Spirit—He would do the same work, but this time from within their hearts, and to greater effect.

A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.

John 16:16

This verse can be divided into two parts. The first part is Jesus’ prophecy about His death—the time when the disciples would no longer see Him. The second part concerns His resurrection and the subsequent descent of the Holy Spirit. Focusing on the second part, we can gain some important insights:

- Jesus spoke of His death as a temporary parting from His disciples. Indeed, on the third day, after His death, He resurrected and re-appeared to His disciples (Jn 13:31–33; 16:17–22).
- Looking at John 16:16 closely, we understand that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus promised the disciples that they would see Him again because He went to the Father in heaven. This “seeing” would occur when they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

A reading of John 16:16 alongside John 16:23 can seem somewhat confusing, until we realize that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. Jesus told His disciples that, “in that day” (i.e. the period after Jesus’ ascension), they would no longer need to ask Him anything because the Holy Spirit would teach them personally (Jn 16:23; cf. Jn 16:13; 1 Jn 2:20, 27).



### 7.3.2 Promises made by Jesus after His resurrection

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

John 20:21–23

This biblical passage presents three key points. Firstly, Jesus reminded the disciples that He was sent by the Father to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom—to reconcile God's children with their heavenly Father. Now, Jesus would likewise send forth His disciples in the power and authority of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

Secondly, Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." His words do not indicate the bestowal of the Holy Spirit there and then; it was merely a promise of what was to come. We know this to be the case because Jesus had not yet been fully glorified at that point ("glorification" referring to His exaltation after ascending to heaven; see Jn 7:39; Acts 1:4, 6–9; 2:1ff; 5:31; Phil 2:9–10). Moreover, He had earlier indicated that if He did not go away, the Counsellor would not come (Jn 16:7).

Thirdly, Jesus promised the disciples that they would receive the authority to forgive and retain sins through the Holy Spirit. Man can never forgive sins, for human authority does not account for much in God's eyes. The authority to forgive and retain sins is vested in the Holy Spirit. However, He entrusts this great authority upon the church, in which He dwells.

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.

Luke 24:49

In this verse, the use of the word "until" teaches us that those who pray earnestly and patiently for the Holy Spirit will receive God's Spirit eventually. The phrase "power from on high" shows that the Holy Spirit is the giver of power: He empowers a person's spiritual life and also empowers him for God's work. When Jesus ascended back to heaven, the "Promise of the Father", which was made through the prophets and Jesus, was finally fulfilled.

Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:20

In this verse, the first “I” refers to Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh (Jn 1:14); “them” refers to the church, which would be built upon the apostles’ doctrine (Eph 2:20); while the second “I” refers to the Lord Jesus’ Spirit—the Holy Spirit, whom He would send after His ascension to heaven.

The workers of God must preach the gospel faithfully and in accordance with the Bible. The Spirit of truth will abide in the church that preaches the true and complete gospel to the end of the age, as promised by Jesus in Matthew 28:20. Those churches that preach an erroneous gospel, blindly leading others to their spiritual death (Mt 23:15–16), are condemned by the Bible in no uncertain terms (Gal 1:6–9).

Many present-day churches and denominations, including those with long histories and traditions, have neglected the perfect gospel of salvation, as set out in the Bible. It is unfortunate that the truth is sometimes compromised for different reasons, including the ecumenical cause. Christians certainly have a duty to show love and acceptance of others; however, one must never compromise the truth in the process. True love cannot rejoice in the absence of truth (1 Cor 13:6).

A church that does not have the indwelling and guidance of the Holy Spirit will not have the truth or the ability to lead others to salvation. We must therefore remember Jesus’ encouragement to uphold the truth: “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (Jn 14:15–16).

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Acts 1:4–5

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.

Luke 24:49

Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4–5 were both written by Luke to give an account of Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1). He records Jesus telling His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come “not many days from now”. His words encouraged them to be patient and to trust that the heavenly Father would fulfil His promise.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as the “power from on high” (Lk 24:49). Therefore, everyone who receives the outpouring of the Holy Spirit can be filled with spiritual power. He has an indispensable role in the Christian’s individual faith journey and also in the church’s ministry. The Holy Spirit undertakes a number of important functions:

- He sends out workers to carry out the work of evangelism (Rom 10:14f).
- He imparts ability and power for the church ministry. For this reason, apostle Paul boasted in the Spirit’s power, as opposed to his own ability (Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4f).
- He gives the church authority to forgive or retain sins (Jn 20:23). The workers should not misuse this authority, lest they overstep God’s authority and will. Only God can forgive sins; human authority, without God’s authority, cannot accomplish this. Therefore, the church can only forgive sins, in so far as she is authorized to do so by the Holy Spirit, and then she must do so in accordance with the principles set out in the Bible.
- He enables the church to understand the truth and to explain it accurately to others (1 Cor 2:11f).

Once we understand the importance of the Holy Spirit in our life of faith and service, we will realize why Jesus commanded His disciples to first receive the power from on high, before they went out to witness for Him. In the same way, if we are to spread the gospel to the furthest corners of the earth, we must first be empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is a truth that we must all heed, if we are to be successful for God.

### **Review questions**

1. List five prophecies spoken by the Old Testament prophets that relate to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Cite the relevant Bible verses.
2. List five of Jesus' promises concerning the Holy Spirit. Cite the relevant Bible verses.

# Chapter 8

## THE HOLY SPIRIT'S DESCENT

### 8.1 Introduction

The Bible says that God is faithful and keeps covenant with His people (Deut 7:9). If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13).

God made a promise through the Old Testament prophets to pour out His Holy Spirit on humankind and indicated when He would do so. When the time for its fulfilment approached, He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to confirm His words.

### 8.2 The descent of the early rain

John the Baptist introduced Jesus Christ to the people after God revealed His identity. He proclaimed that, while he baptized them with water for repentance (Mt 3:11), Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:32–33). Through Jesus, the ancient prophecies spoken by God's prophets were ready to be fulfilled.

#### 8.2.1 Prophecies concerning the early rain

I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain.

Deuteronomy 11:14

Let us now fear the LORD our God,  
Who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season.

Jeremiah 5:24

The Bible uses metaphors to describe two periods of the Holy Spirit's descent. The New King James Version speaks of the "early" and the "latter" rains, while the New International Version speaks of the "autumn" and "spring" rains (Jer 5:24; Jas 5:7). To clear up any confusion over the two translations, we need only to be aware that the "early" rain falls during the autumn season, just prior to the sowing of seeds, while the "latter" rain falls during the spring season, prior to the harvest. Putting these two periods into context, we come to understand that the Holy Spirit's descent on Jesus' disciples was the early rain. This Pentecostal outpouring (see Acts 2) occurred just before the early church began to sow the seeds of the gospel to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

For I will pour water on him who is thirsty,  
And floods on the dry ground;  
I will pour My Spirit on your descendants,  
And My blessing on your offspring.

Isaiah 44:3

In Isaiah 44:3, "your descendants" is a reference to Jacob's (Israel's) descendants, as indicated by Isaiah 44:1, where God is recorded as saying, "Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen."

Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them.

Ezekiel 11:19–20

The reference to "them" in Ezekiel 11:19–20 is to the house of Israel because, in Ezekiel 11:15, God says, "Son of man, your brethren, your relatives, your countrymen, and all the house of Israel in its entirety, are those about whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said."

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Ezekiel 36:26–27

The “you” in Ezekiel 36:26, again, refers to the house of Israel, as indicated by Ezekiel 36:22: “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel.’””

I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live.  
Ezekiel 37:14

The “you” in Ezekiel 37:14 refers to the house of Israel, because in Ezekiel 37:11, God says, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.”

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Matthew 3:11

In Matthew 3:11, the reference to “you” is to the Jews, as indicated by Matthew 3:5, which records: “Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him [i.e. John the Baptist].”

All the above prophecies concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were directed at the people of Israel (the Jews). They pointed to the period of the early rain which started at Pentecost, as opposed to the period of the latter rain (cf. Ezek 39:29; Zech 12:10).

### **8.2.2 An account of the early rain’s descent**

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:1–4

Acts 2 describes the first descent of the promised Holy Spirit, as evidenced by spiritual tongues, and accompanied by a vision of tongues of fire and the sound of a mighty rushing wind. The 120 disciples experienced the spiritual wind which “blows where it wishes” (Jn 3:8). This wind could not be seen, but it could be felt and heard. John 3:8 reveals that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience

which can be perceived, both by the recipient and by those around him (cf. Acts 4:31; Rev 19:6).

The Holy Spirit is also referred to as “the spirit of burning” (Isa 4:3–4). He has the power to reignite cold and hardened hearts—making them shine like the bright morning sun. Like fire, the Holy Spirit produces heat and light, and unifies elements. He purifies the believers of their sins and binds their hearts as one.

The Pentecostal vision teaches us some important spiritual lessons. The “tongues of fire” symbolize the spiritual tongues spoken by the disciples (Acts 2:3–4). They serve as evidence that one has been born of the Spirit (Acts 2:33) and act as a powerful sign to unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22). From another perspective, those who have been born of the Holy Spirit are empowered to speak God’s words to an unbelieving world. In this sense, the Spirit makes us eloquent and powerful witnesses for the gospel of Christ (Acts 1:8).

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples obeyed His command to stay in Jerusalem to wait for the power from above (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 12–15). On the day of Pentecost, God heard the disciples’ prayers and filled them with His Holy Spirit, so that they spoke with spiritual tongues. At the time, there were many emigrant Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. They were amazed and perplexed, for they heard the disciples speaking about the wonderful works of God in their own native languages. God had miraculously opened their ears to understand the mysteries spoken in the Spirit (Acts 2:8–12; cf. 1 Cor 14:2). Other not-so-devout Jews (the “others” in Acts 2:13) could not understand the spiritual tongues and accused the disciples of being drunk (Acts 2:13).

However, apostle Peter cleared up the confusion by quoting prophet Joel—making the people realize that they had just witnessed the outpouring of God’s Spirit, in fulfillment of the ancient prophecy (Acts 2:16–21; Joel 2:28–32). Furthermore, he urged them to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, and assured them that they, too, would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37–39). As a result, some 3,000 souls responded to Peter’s sermon by receiving water baptism. They subsequently devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings by continually gathering in fellowship (Acts 2:40–42). These events marked the birth of the early



church. From then on, the Holy Spirit was poured out wherever the apostles preached (Acts 8:17; 10:44; 19:6).

### **8.3 The Holy Spirit stopped descending**

As mentioned earlier, the two main rainy seasons in Israel were: 1) the early rain, which fell prior to the sowing season; 2) the latter rain, which fell before the harvest. They signify the two periods in which the Holy Spirit would descend on humankind. The first period occurred 2,000 years ago, on the day of Pentecost, and marked the establishment of the apostolic church. The second period is this current period of the latter rain: the Holy Spirit has revived God's true church and is now preparing the harvest.

In Palestine, there is a winter period between the early and latter rains. It is marked by occasional rain and snow. This climatic feature symbolizes the spiritual condition of the early church shortly after the apostles died, when the Holy Spirit stopped descending because the church had strayed from God and His truth. However, like the occasional winter rain and snow, the Holy Spirit continued to work in other ways (Jn 5:17). We see, for example, the Holy Spirit inspiring people to translate the Bible, to keep the scriptural texts intact, and to canonize the Bible.

#### **8.3.1 Prophecies concerning the cessation of the Holy Spirit**

I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.

Leviticus 26:19–20

In this passage, the phrase “heavens like iron” describes how heaven would shut her doors. The “earth like bronze” refers to a land which would be dry and hardened from the lack of rain. Leviticus 26:14–16 had revealed that God would cause this to happen in the event that the chosen people disobeyed or rebelled against Him:

But if you [i.e. Israel] do not obey Me [i.e. God], and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors

My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you.

Leviticus 26:14–16

In a spiritual sense, God's nation of Israel is a prefiguration of God's church (*ekklesia* in Greek). *Ekklesia* means a "public assembly", but many important texts, including the Greek version of the Old Testament, use *ekklesia* to translate the Hebrew *qahal*, which refers to the assembly of God's covenantal people in the Old Testament (e.g. Deut 23:2–9; cf. "synagogue" in Jas 2:2). The shutting of the heavens on Israel, therefore, signifies how the Holy Spirit would cease to descend on the post-apostolic church.

The spiritual decline of the church after the apostles died caused the Holy Spirit to depart from the church. Looking through historical records, we discover, not surprisingly, that the phenomenon of spiritual tongues disappeared altogether. Like a body without the spirit, the church died a spiritual death (Jas 2:26). Moreover, without God's Spirit, the church was unable to produce spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22–23). Though believers attempted to live disciplined lives—with some even practising asceticism and monasticism—they were unable to bear the fruit that God desired. Worse, some of the leaders became pre-occupied with power and politics and neglected the spiritual condition of their congregations.

Today, Christians are reaping the consequences of thousands of years of church history. We must learn the lessons, both good and bad. Crucially, we need to understand the reasons behind the spiritual decline of the post-apostolic church. The reformer Martin Luther realized that church tradition and history had to make way for a higher purpose—the pursuit of the truth. This remains a key issue for the Christian community today: it has to address the false teachings that made their way into the church after the apostles died.

The question is, can we ever recover the original apostolic faith? While some Christians may feel that it is an impossible task, we know that we can rely on the Holy Spirit to make it possible. Only He has the power to revive and gather the dead bones of God's people (Ezek 37:1ff). Reviving something long dead is a real challenge, yet Jesus teaches us, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.

Deuteronomy 11:16–17

Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see:  
Where have you not lain with men?  
By the road you have sat for them  
Like an Arabian in the wilderness;  
And you have polluted the land  
With your harlotries and your wickedness.  
Therefore the showers have been withheld,  
And there has been no latter rain.  
You have had a harlot's forehead;  
You refuse to be ashamed.

Jeremiah 3:2–3

Deuteronomy 11:16–17 issues a warning from God: He will bring drought upon His people should they ever turn away from Him to serve foreign gods. Sadly, we see from history that the Israelites did not heed this warning, and God had to remind them of their rebellious behaviour. For example, when King Ahab led the people to worship idols, God withheld the dew and the rain for three and a half years (1 Kgs 17:1, 7; 16:30–33; Jas 5:17). It is unfortunate that the people did not learn from their mistakes because later, the prophet Jeremiah had to rebuke them yet again for spiritual harlotry, for turning away from the true God to seek after false gods (Jer 2:20–25; 3:6–14).

From history, we see that the early church began in the power of the Holy Spirit, but she eventually lost her vision and love for the truth. It got to the point where the Roman Catholic pope even began to address himself as the “Vicar of Christ on earth” and openly received bows on bended knees from believers. The church also began permitting the iconic worship of Jesus, the apostles, the saints and Mary. Because of this, the Holy Spirit of truth could no longer abide with the church, and so there were no more reports of spiritual tongues. The period when the Holy Spirit ceased to descend spanned from the time shortly after the death of the apostles to the beginning of the twentieth century, when the True Jesus Church was established.

The Christian community today needs to recapture her vision and love for the truth, and to pursue the Holy Spirit. Although Christians may not knowingly practise outright idolatry, they may still fall into the trap of idolizing theologians, scholars, evangelists and church leaders. Some denominations even name their churches after the people who “founded” them—effectively placing the focus on man, rather than on God. Yet Jesus tells us that the church is His church, and not man’s (Mt 16:18).

God is a jealous God, and so all glory and respect must be directed towards Him. The early apostles, such as Peter and Paul, were gifted with spiritual gifts, yet the Lord Jesus only used them as vessels to manifest God’s glory. Unfortunately, human beings, in their weakness, tend to focus on the person who performs the miraculous deed, rather than on God who gives the power. The apostles, in their wisdom, took care never to accept even the slightest hint of praise or worship from others (Acts 10:25–26; 14:11–15). We would do well to follow their example.

[God] turns rivers into a wilderness,  
And the watersprings into dry ground;  
A fruitful land into barrenness,  
For the wickedness of those who dwell in it.

Psalm 107:33–34

The Holy Spirit’s descent was meant to turn the wilderness of the human heart into springs of water (Jn 4:14). But because the hearts of those who dwelt in the wilderness were inclined towards evil (i.e. the church in the post-apostolic period), God turned the springs into deserts (i.e. the Holy Spirit stopped descending). Moreover, the word of God could no longer be sown among them because, without the Holy Spirit, the seeds of God’s kingdom could not take root, sprout or grow. In effect, the post-apostolic church slid into decline to become a barren land.

And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard:  
I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;  
And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

Isaiah 5:5

God used the vineyard as a symbol for Israel during Isaiah's time. It also symbolized the post-apostolic church. In the above passage, God spoke of the hope that His people would bear good fruits, such as peace and righteousness; but they bore wild grapes instead. So He turned the vineyard into a wasteland, where briars and thorns grew, and made the clouds to withhold their rain (Isa 5:3–7).

Judah mourns,  
And her gates languish;  
They mourn for the land,  
And the cry of Jerusalem has gone up.  
Their nobles have sent their lads for water;  
They went to the cisterns and found no water.  
They returned with their vessels empty;  
They were ashamed and confounded  
And covered their heads.  
Because the ground is parched,  
For there was no rain in the land,  
The plowmen were ashamed;  
They covered their heads.

Jeremiah 14:2–4

During the time of Jeremiah, the Israelites repeatedly rebelled against God, provoking Him to wrath, and causing Him to ignore their cries and to reject their offerings. Furthermore, He declared that they would meet with the sword, famine and pestilence (Jer 14:7–12). These words highlighted the situation faced by the post-apostolic church, when the members disobeyed God's will and commandments and strayed from the truth. It was on account of these sins that the Holy Spirit stopped descending.

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go out to the nations. He said, “[Teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). Here, He assured them that He would never leave them; but there was one condition: the disciples had to teach the people to keep all the things which He had commanded. In other words, His continual abidance with the church was dependent upon their keeping His word. Unfortunately, the post-apostolic church gradually departed from the Lord's teachings, and so the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, was no longer able to abide with her.

Whilst Jesus was still ministering in the world, He said:

If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

John 14:15–17, 21, 23

There is also a proverb which teaches, “Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you” (Prov 1:23). We must realize the importance of abiding in the truth and in the commandments of the Lord Jesus.

Many present-day churches have strayed from the teachings of the Bible. Basic doctrinal truths relating to the Holy Spirit, water baptism, footwashing, the Sabbath and Holy Communion have been neglected or dismissed for the sake of ease or compromise. However, a return to the truth is essential in these last days, as is a recognition of the need to come into the one true fold, whose head is Jesus Christ (Jn 10:16).

### **8.3.2 A prefiguration relating to the cessation of the Holy Spirit**

“But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land” (Lk 4:25). During Elijah’s time, the heavens were closed because King Ahab had forsaken God and led the children of Israel to worship Baal (1 Kgs 16:30–33; 18:17–18).

Rain symbolizes the Holy Spirit. In light of this, the closed heavens prefigured how the Holy Spirit would cease to descend upon God’s people. As the heavens were closed for three and a half years, the cessation of the Holy Spirit would only be for a fixed period of time (cf. Rev 11:2). Just as God withheld rain on account of King Ahab and Israel’s spiritual rebellion, so the Holy Spirit would stop descending for a period between the autumn and spring rains, due to the post-apostolic church’s rebellion against God.

### 8.3.3 The history relating to the cessation of the Holy Spirit

To give a detailed history relating to the cessation of the Holy Spirit is a difficult task for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Bible often speaks prophetically and prefiguratively, and we do not have the luxury of being able to ask the prophets exactly what God meant concerning all aspects of the prophecies. Even if we could ask, it is likely that the prophets themselves did not fully understand their messages. Secondly, we have no accurate historical accounts detailing when exactly the Holy Spirit left the church, or the specific circumstances. This is because historical records—documented by the Roman Catholic Church, Reformed churches and non-denominational evangelical churches—all reflect the view that the Holy Spirit never departed from the Christian community at any point from the time of Pentecost.

We know that when John wrote the Book of Revelation, which is often considered the last book to be written in the New Testament Canon (circa AD 90–100), the Holy Spirit had not yet departed from the early church. However, we know that the church was already dealing with troubling issues and false teachings (see Revelation 2 to 3). Finally, with the continual digression from the truth, the Holy Spirit departed. Most likely, this did not happen suddenly, but rather, over a period of time, as the church slid gradually into a state of spiritual decline.

During the second and third centuries, it appears that the post-apostolic church attempted to curb what she saw as excessive charismatic activities in local church gatherings. However, what the church did in good faith may have swung the pendulum to the opposite extreme, thereby quenching the Holy Spirit's work. The result was a decline in spiritual experiences—experiences that could otherwise have helped to deepen the faith of the believers. It illustrates how the church failed to be led by the Spirit, and how it came to be that the Holy Spirit departed completely. Sadly, many Christians today continue to look down on spiritual experiences, or are sceptical of them. In light of this, we need to recall apostle Paul's warning to never "quench the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19).

When apostle John wrote his letters, a heresy called Gnosticism was beginning to spread through the church. Those who were deceived

by its teachings departed from the church (1 Jn 2:19). Proponents of Gnosticism believed that knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek) was the means to salvation, and that it was more important than Christian virtue. They also believed that the divine could not associate with the physical and, as a result, denied the incarnation of Jesus Christ (a heresy known as Docetism). Particularly damaging was the view that the actions of believers bore no relation to their salvation (a belief which, incidentally, many present-day Christians still uphold, when they emphasize to the extreme that salvation is by God's grace). The result of this heresy was that many believers led unholy and ungodly lives, using their "knowledge" as a cover for sin.

The *Nelson's Illustrated Dictionary* offers a glimpse into the views and practices of Gnostics during the era of the early church:

The Gnostics also taught that man is composed of body, soul, and spirit. Since the body and the soul are part of man's earthly existence, they are evil. Enclosed in the soul, however, is the spirit, the only divine substance of man. This "spirit" is asleep and ignorant; it needs to be awakened and liberated by knowledge.

According to the Gnostics, the aim of salvation is for the spirit to be awakened by knowledge so the inner man can be released from his earthly dungeon and return to the realm of light where the soul becomes reunited with God. As the soul ascends, however, it needs to penetrate the cosmic spheres which separate it from its heavenly destiny. This, too, is accomplished by knowledge. One must understand certain formulas which are revealed only to the initiated.

Ethical behavior among the Gnostics varied considerably. Some sought to separate themselves from all evil matter in order to avoid contamination. Paul may be opposing such a view in 1 Tim 4:1-5. For other Gnostics, ethical life took the form of libertinism. For them knowledge meant freedom to participate in all sorts of indulgences. Many reasoned that since they had received divine knowledge and were truly informed as to their divine nature, it didn't matter how they lived.

The Gnostic heresy made inroads into many local churches, infecting them like a contagious virus. Although apostles, such as John, attacked the teaching, the church was unable to thoroughly remove its pervasive influence. Prior to the Council of Nicaea, many Gnostic supporters were even welcomed in Constantinople and Rome—political power points of the early church. It was only after the conclusion of the Council of Nicaea that Gnostic teachings were gradually, though not entirely, removed from the church.



Most Bible scholars believe that John wrote the book of Revelation sometime between AD 95 to 96, near the end of the first century. He had received God's revelation while he was in exile on the island of Patmos. After receiving the revelation, he sent out letters to seven different churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Rev 1:9–11). These letters contained powerful messages of the Lord to His people: He praised some churches, but rebuked others for their lack of love and for straying from the faith. By the time the last of the apostles passed away (near the beginning of the second century), the church had lost the core of her spiritual leadership. She failed to be led by the Holy Spirit and became increasingly secular and political. Her most serious mistake was to depart from the truth which had been laid down by Jesus and the apostles. It was therefore inevitable that the Holy Spirit departed from the church. From what we know of events, we can infer that the Holy Spirit stopped descending altogether sometime after the third century AD.

#### **8.4 The descent of the latter rain**

If the clouds are full of rain,  
They empty themselves upon the earth.  
Ecclesiastes 11:3

In a spiritual sense, when “the clouds are full of rain”, it indicates that the descent of the Holy Spirit is drawing near. Since there was an appointed season for the outpouring of the early rain, it follows that there must also be an appointed season for the latter rain.

The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us:

To everything there is a season,  
A time for every purpose under heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
A time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones;  
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to gain, and a time to lose;  
A time to keep, and a time to throw away;  
A time to tear, and a time to sew;  
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
A time of war, and a time of peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–8

God is loving and merciful. Even though the post-apostolic church transgressed in her faith towards Him, causing Him to withdraw the Holy Spirit, His wrath would not last forever. At the appointed time, God would once again pour out His Spirit on those who believe in Him. The Bible says:

Who is a God like You,  
Pardoning iniquity  
And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?  
He does not retain His anger forever,  
Because He delights in mercy.  
He will again have compassion on us,  
And will subdue our iniquities.  
You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.  
You will give truth to Jacob  
And mercy to Abraham,  
Which You have sworn to our fathers  
From days of old.

Micah 7:18–20

#### **8.4.1 Prophecies concerning the latter rain**

It shall come to pass in that day  
That the LORD shall set His hand again the second time  
To recover the remnant of His people who are left.

Isaiah 11:11

During the Old Testament period, God's chosen people often rebelled and were eventually exiled among the Gentile nations. However, God promised that He would, one day, extend His hand to gather and restore His people.

God later bestowed the grace of salvation through a new covenant made with the blood of Jesus. He sent Jesus to bring back

the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 10:5f) and to save the rest of humankind (Mt 28:19). The Holy Spirit's descent during the latter rain period is history repeating itself on a spiritual level: God's plan of salvation and the gathering of His people—matters prophesied long before the renewal of God's church—would also occur for God's scattered people in the New Testament period.

Abraham has two types of descendants: the fleshly and the spiritual (Gen 20:17). The chosen people of Israel are Abraham's fleshly descendants, while the chosen people of the New Testament—the true church—are Abraham's spiritual descendants (Gal 3:29). All of God's promises to Abraham will be fulfilled in due course. Just as the Israelites saw the fulfilment of the divine prophecies, so shall the true church.

Prophet Isaiah prophesied, "The Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest" (Isa 32:15). Despite the fact that the Israelites rebelled against God and became like a spiritual wasteland, God promised restoration. Likewise, the post-apostolic church, which had lost the abidance of the Holy Spirit when she strayed from the truth, would one day receive the latter downpour of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual wasteland would become a fruitful field once more. Hence, Isaiah prophesied, "For the LORD will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in it, thanksgiving and the voice of melody" (Isa 51:3).

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,  
Your young men shall see visions.  
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.  
And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.  
The sun shall be turned into darkness,  
And the moon into blood,  
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.  
Joel 2:28–31

The apostle Peter quoted Joel's prophecy after the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which marked the beginning

of the early rain period (Acts 2:17–21). However, the last two verses of the prophecy concern cosmological events yet to take place in the last days, before Jesus' second coming.

Ask the LORD for rain  
In the time of the latter rain.  
The LORD will make flashing clouds;  
He will give them showers of rain,  
Grass in the field for everyone.

Zechariah 10:1

The latter rain symbolizes the Holy Spirit who will establish the true church of the end time. The above verse is the clearest biblical prophecy revealing God's outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the latter rain period: whoever comes to the true church and prays for the Holy Spirit will receive Him.

Other than the prophecies mentioned above, there are a number of others which also describe the outpouring of the latter rain (see Deut 11:14; Ezek 39:29; Hos 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zech 4:6; 8:12). (Please refer to Chapter 7 for more information.)

#### **8.4.2 Prefigurations and types relating to the latter rain**

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

James 5:17–18

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet  
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.  
And he will turn  
The hearts of the fathers to the children,  
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,  
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Malachi 4:5–6

The prophet Elijah, who prayed for rain on behalf of the chosen people, typifies the church of the latter rain period. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, Elijah's work entailed leading the chosen people away from idolatry and back to God's law. In doing so, he secured God's forgiveness and the return of rain upon the land (1 Kgs 18:17–21,

39–45). His work parallels that of the true church in the last days: contending for the truth, guiding believers away from heresy, and praying for believers to receive the Holy Spirit. Secondly, Elijah typifies John the Baptist: both had the same spirit and power to turn the chosen people back to God (Mt 17:10–13; Lk 1:15–17). Just as John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, leading God’s people to repentance and preparing them to accept the Lord (Isa 40:3–5), so the true church leads people to repentance and prepares them for the Lord’s second coming (Rev 21:2, 9–10).

And they shall rebuild the old ruins,  
They shall raise up the former desolations,  
And they shall repair the ruined cities,  
The desolations of many generations.

Isaiah 61:4

For indeed I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited and the ruins rebuilt.

Ezekiel 36:9–10

Thus says the Lord GOD: “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken it, and I will do it.”

Ezekiel 36:33–36

During the Old Testament period, when the chosen people in Judah and their kings kept disobeying God, Solomon’s temple was destroyed, and the people were exiled to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:8–12). When seventy years of exile were completed, God moved the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to help accomplish what He had spoken of earlier through His prophets: the Jews would return to their homeland to rebuild the temple (2 Chr 36:17–23; Isa 44:28; Jer 25:11–12). The events which befell the physical temple prefigured what would similarly befall the future spiritual temple, which is God’s church (1 Cor 3:16–17; 1 Pet 2:5): the church would be built, destroyed and rebuilt.

So he [i.e. the angel] answered and said to me:  
“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:  
‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’  
Says the LORD of hosts.”

Zechariah 4:6

In 538 BC, King Cyrus of Persia permitted the Jews to return to their homeland to start rebuilding. The foundation of the temple was laid in 536 BC. Not long after the decree, the Jews faced opposition from adversaries, which forced the rebuilding work to stop. This continued until the second year of King Darius of Persia (Ezra 4:1–24). During King Darius’ reign, God spoke to Zerubbabel (a civil leader) through the prophet Zechariah to declare that the rebuilding of the temple had to be led by the Holy Spirit, and in this way, the obstacles would be overcome.

The message revealed to Zerubbabel is something which the true church of the last days should take note of. She must rely on the Holy Spirit to overcome any obstacles and to rebuild God’s church.

Those from among you  
Shall build the old waste places;  
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,  
The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

Isaiah 58:12

On that day I will raise up  
The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down,  
And repair its damages;  
I will raise up its ruins,  
And rebuild it as in the days of old.

Amos 9:11

And he said to him, “Take these articles; go, carry them to the temple site that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its former site.”

Ezra 5:15

From a spiritual perspective, “build[ing] the old waste places” prefigures how the present-day true church must rebuild the fallen post-apostolic church. Hence, the reappearance of the Holy Spirit in the early twentieth century marked God’s intention to restore His church,

which had fallen away from the truth for so long. The prophecies about “rebuild[ing] it as in the days of old” and “let[ting] the house of God be rebuilt on its former site” prefigure how the true church of the last days must be built on the same foundation as the uncorrupted early church, i.e. “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19–20; cf. Acts 2:42). The restoration of the true church goes hand in hand with the restoration of the apostolic faith.

When Zerubbabel was leading God’s people back to their homeland to rebuild the temple, God had instructed him, through prophet Zechariah, that the temple restoration could only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit (Zech 4:6). This brings to mind the words of the Lord Jesus: “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (Jn 16:13). This teaches us that the Holy Spirit’s help and guidance are indispensable for accomplishing the mission of restoring the church to its original foundation.

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.

Ezekiel 47:1

Here, the holy temple typifies the Lord Jesus (Jn 2:21), while the water which issued from below the threshold of the temple typifies the Holy Spirit sent from Jesus (Jn 7:37–39; 17:7). Ezekiel 47:3–5 describes the rising level of the waters, which started at ankle height, but became a river which could not be crossed. The rising waters signify the increasing power and vigour of the latter downpour of the Holy Spirit. As we have learnt, the work of the Holy Spirit during the period of the early rain began in a great way, but gradually declined and finally diminished. In contrast, the Holy Spirit’s work in the latter rain period begins in a small way, but will crescendo until the second coming, when Jesus will receive His bride—the church (Rev 21:2, 9–10). As the Bible prophesies, “The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former” (Hag 2:9).

### 8.4.3 Where the latter rain will descend

During the period of the early rain, the Holy Spirit first descended in Judea, the birthplace of Jesus Christ. Judea sits at the crossroads of three major continents: Asia, Europe and Africa. From here, the Holy Spirit started to descend in a westerly direction, following the course of the gospel. This east to west pattern has since been repeated in the period of the latter rain.

The Bible records a number of prophecies, prefigurations and types which all indicate that the Holy Spirit will first descend on humankind from the east.

#### A. The coming of the Son of man

Through the tender mercy of our God,  
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;  
To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:78–79

“Those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death” refers to unrepentant sinners living in spiritual darkness—such people need light, life and the way of peace. The “Dayspring” is from the Greek word *anatole*, which translates as “a rising up” and is used to mean the east (cf. Mt 2:1) or the rising of the sun.<sup>1</sup> It depicts well the mission of the Lord Jesus, which was to bring light to all those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death. Significantly, just as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, the people in the east will see the light of day first.

For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Matthew 24:27

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the “Son of Man”. Here, the “lightning” can signify both the Holy Spirit and the truth. Just as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so the Holy

<sup>1</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G395.



Spirit moves in tandem with the truth of the gospel, which historically spread from east to west. Following on, “the coming of the Son of Man” refers to Jesus’ coming as the Holy Spirit (Mt 16:28; cf. Jn 14:16ff).

## **B. The blessing of Shem**

Blessed be the LORD,  
The God of Shem.  
May God enlarge Japheth,  
And may he dwell in the tents of Shem.

Genesis 9:26–27

Traditionally, the sons of Noah have been associated with the lands and people which are divided into three main lines, and which meet in the region of Palestine: Shem in the east; Japheth in the north and west; and Ham in Egypt and Africa.<sup>2</sup> The phrase “God of Shem” hints at how Shem’s descendants would, one day, receive God’s special blessings through their worship of the Lord; and from this, we can deduce that the ancient Israelites and Jews were from his line (cf. Gen 11:10–27; Lk 3:23–36).

In the early rain period, the Holy Spirit initially descended in Jerusalem on Shem’s descendants (the Jews), enabling them to receive God’s special blessings first. However, God’s grace and truth were not limited to Shem’s descendants: they were subsequently given to people of all nations, including Ham and Japheth’s descendants.

The Bible records, “May God enlarge Japheth”, which is a prophetic statement about Japheth’s descendants. We can only speculate as to the meaning behind this prophecy, which may refer to the technological progress and territorial expansion bestowed on Japheth’s descendants. The history of Japheth’s descendants is the history of western civilization—marked by great advancements in technology and imperialism. But the prophecy, “May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem”, most likely refers to a spiritual, rather than a physical prophecy. There is an indication that Japheth’s descendants, despite their own long religious history and traditions, would one day come and worship together with the people of Shem and receive the blessings which Noah had prophesied.

<sup>2</sup> Aharoni, Yohanan et al., *The Macmillan Bible Atlas. Completely Revised Third Edition* (New York, Toronto: Macmillan, 1993).

### C. The garden of Eden

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.

Genesis 2:8

The garden of Eden prefigures the true church established by the Holy Spirit. There are a number of indications for this:

- God gave every plant for food to the animals, insects and birds (Gen 1:30). The garden of Eden was a place of peace and harmony, free from predators. These conditions can, once again, be found in the true church, where the Holy Spirit renews our hearts (cf. Isa 11:6–9; Tit 3:5).
- God created man, male and female, in His image—holy and sinless—and placed them in the garden (Gen 1:27). In the true church, a man who is reborn becomes a new creation—holy, without sin and righteous (2 Cor 5:17; Tit 3:5; Acts 22:16; Rom 8:2; Eph 4:24).
- There was a tree of life in the garden (Gen 2:9) whose fruit could give man eternal life (Gen 3:22). Likewise, in the true church, there is a tree of life (Rev 22:2, 14) that gives eternal life to those who enter her gates (Jn 3:5, 16; Gal 5:25).
- There were many fruit trees in the garden which bore fruits that were pleasant and good to eat (Gen 2:9). In the true church, believers who are filled with the Holy Spirit have the ability to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Jn 15:5; Gal 5:22–23; Songs 4:12–14).
- There were an abundance of gold and precious gems in the garden (Gen 2:11–12). In the same way, believers in the true church who have undergone fiery trials of faith are able to manifest a faith that can be likened to fine gold and precious stones (1 Pet 1:6–7; Rev 21:18–21; Job 23:10).
- There were four rivers that flowed through and watered the garden (Gen 2:10–14). The Holy Spirit in the true church is like an overflowing river, causing those who drink of it to never thirst again (Jn 4:13–14; 7:37–39; Rev 22:1ff).

- God frequently communicated with man in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:8). In the true church, the Spirit of God enables the believers to have a close communion with God (Rev 21:3; Jn 14:16–17; 1 Jn 3:24).

The garden of Eden was established in the east (Gen 2:8), and the apostolic church was established in the east. Likewise, the latter downpour of the Holy Spirit has established the true church of the last days in the east (Rev 7:2).

So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:24

When Adam and Eve were driven out of the garden of Eden, God placed cherubim with a flaming sword, which turned in all directions, to guard the way to the tree of life in the east of the garden. From the biblical text, we understand that the entrance to the garden of Eden was on the east side. The east is associated with the rising of the sun, and the prophecies relating to the east are biblical types—showing that salvation will initially arise from the east. In fact, the Bible is clear that God’s glory—and even the Son of man Himself—will move from the east to the west (Mt 24:27). Moreover, we see from Acts 1:8 that the spread of the gospel in the apostolic times was from the east to the west, finally ending at Rome (cf. Acts 28:14ff).

#### **D. Ezekiel’s visions of the temple**

God showed the prophet Ezekiel a number of visions of the new temple. In chapter 43 of Ezekiel, he was brought to the gate which faced east:

Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory.

Ezekiel 43:1–2

Ezekiel heard God's voice which was like the "sound of many waters". This description brings to mind the sound of the spiritual tongues which can be heard in the true church today (cf. Rev 19:1, 6). The prophet describes the east-facing temple gate and the coming of God's glory from the east. The latter entered through the gate and filled the temple (Ezek 43:4). This prefiguration tallies with what we know about the course of the Holy Spirit's historical descent in both the early and latter rain periods: the Spirit came down first in the east and continued to the west.

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.

Ezekiel 47:1

In this vision, Ezekiel saw water issuing from below the threshold of the temple, which became a great river. This vision symbolizes the increasing presence of God's Spirit (please refer to Chapter 3 for more information). The water flowed towards the east, where the front of the temple was.

## **E. Elder John's vision**

Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

Revelation 7:2-3

Elder John saw a vision of God's messenger, who was an angel bearing a seal. This seal was "the seal of the living God", a symbolic reference to the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 4:30). From this, we realize that God's messenger, who carried the Holy Spirit, ascended from the east to seal God's people for the day of redemption.

## **F. Isaiah’s prophecy**

Therefore glorify the LORD in the dawning light,  
The name of the LORD God of Israel in the coastlands of the sea.  
Isaiah 24:15

Isaiah’s prophecy speaks of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who will appear in the dawning light of the east—as will the Holy Spirit. Just as the light of the sun shines from the east to the west, so will the gospel be preached to all nations so that the world may glorify the Lord’s holy name.

### **8.4.4 History relating to the descent of the latter rain**

The latter rain period began in the early 1900s and was marked by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, together with the revelation of the truth and the establishment of the true church. These occurred in the east, in China—in fulfilment of the Bible’s prophecies. This section presents an overview of how the events unfolded. It gives a brief history of the establishment of the True Jesus Church and the events leading up to it. The latter includes the role of the Pentecostal movement, which started in the USA and became a worldwide phenomenon.

#### **A. The start of the Pentecostal movement**

The Acts of the Apostles is often referred to as the “Acts of the Holy Spirit”, for the apostolic era was an age when the Holy Spirit worked powerfully within the early church. All the activities of the church centred on His will and guidance. However, as we have already noted, by the second and third centuries, the post-apostolic church went into decline, and the Holy Spirit departed. From historical records, we understand that the Holy Spirit left the church because she deviated from the truth and became increasingly secular and corrupt. Whilst we cannot pinpoint exactly when the Holy Spirit left, we know from the absence of the truth in the church that the departure lasted for a

prolonged period. From the Bible, we know that a church without the truth cannot be graced with the abidance of the Holy Spirit.

It is unsurprising then, that in the period leading up to the early 1900s, many Christians had become disenchanted with organized worship. However, some people still held fast to the Bible's exhortation not to forsake assembling together in the name of Jesus (Heb 10:25). And so, it was with this attitude that, at the beginning of the early twentieth century, many Americans gathered in homes and in small groups to worship and to search the Bible for the truth. These small gatherings were precursors for revival movements that would soon occur throughout America. It was at this time that reports of tongue-speaking were heard from places such as Kansas, Texas and Oklahoma. As more and more reports emerged, so did a call for Christians to return to the apostolic faith. As a result of their evangelistic activities, new churches began springing up all over America, along with missionary training programmes and overseas missions.

## **B. The start of the worldwide Pentecostal movement from America**

In April 1906, a group of African-American Christians from Los Angeles, USA, led by William J. Seymour, began organizing prayer meetings in a house to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. On the night of 9 April, they reported receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. Within a short time, the news spread far and wide, and many people started to join the meetings. Before long, the house could no longer accommodate the increasing numbers of people, and the gathering moved to a building on Azusa Street. For the next three years, the Azusa Street "Apostolic Faith Mission", as they were called, conducted three services a day, seven days a week. During this time, thousands of Christians claimed to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

At Azusa Street, the believers also reported miracles—the healing of diseases and the casting out of evil spirits. In September 1906, the Apostolic Faith Mission distributed a free paper, *The Apostolic Faith*, all over the world to proclaim the news of the faith revival on Azusa Street and the importance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by

the speaking of tongues. Christians from all over the world responded to the news by visiting Azusa Street for themselves. Many of these later returned to their own countries to proclaim the Pentecostal message, with some subsequently dedicating their lives to become overseas missionaries. These events marked the beginnings of the global Pentecostal movement.

### **C. The spread of the Pentecostal movement to Europe**

In 1906, Thomas Ball Barratt of Norway returned from America to conduct the first of many Pentecostal services in Europe. From Norway, Barratt travelled to Sweden, England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Germany, Denmark, Holland and Italy. Later, he went further afield to countries such as Australia, Russia, Palestine, Syria, India and China, where he continued to lead Pentecostal movements.

### **D. The Pentecostal movement in India and South Africa**

In 1905, reports of hundreds of children receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues emerged from the Mukti Mission of Pandita Ramabai in Pune, India. They included reports of the bestowal of spiritual gifts, such as the interpretation of tongues and the gift of healing, through the laying of hands. Similar events were reported at a boys' school in Na Ton, where about sixty-five pupils were believed to have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

In 1909, George Berg preached in Kottarakara and Adoor, two large towns in India. Thomas Ball Barratt went to Coonoor soon after, and Pentecostalism began to spread throughout the southern region of India. As a result, several Pentecostal congregations were formed in Kerala that year.

The missionary work in South Africa was led by John Graham Lake, who gave up his business to preach there. In April 1908, he led a large missionary party to Johannesburg, where he began to spread the Pentecostal message. Reports of many people receiving the Holy Spirit ensued, along with testimonies relating to signs and miracles.

### **E. The establishment of co-ordinating missionary bodies**

Prior to 1910, missionaries who went overseas often left their careers behind on account of their dedication to God. Other believers, who shared the missionaries' vision, would support their work financially. However, there was, as yet, no overarching organizational network to support this type of work. It was only later that co-ordinating bodies, such as the General Council, the Assemblies of God and the Fellowship, were established. In addition, theological seminaries were set up in North and South America to provide training. According to the 1937 Annual Report of the Pentecostal Assembly, the number of missionaries whom the seminaries sent out to mission fields numbered 3,086. The organisations responsible included the Apostolic Faith Union, the Assemblies of God, the Pentecostal Assemblies, and the Church of God. In mainland China, these Pentecostal missionary organizations were called the "tongue-speaking group" because they preached speaking in tongues as the sole evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Initially, the goal of these Pentecostal missionary organizations was to create a structure for uniting all the Pentecostal churches and to promote evangelism. However, power struggles started to make their way into the movement. Before long, some Pentecostal churches started preaching that the speaking of tongues is only an initial manifestation of the baptism in the Spirit, and that there is no need to speak in tongues thereafter. Other churches went even further to forbid the speaking of tongues altogether during public worship.

### **F. The Pentecostal movement in China**

The Pentecostal movement reached China around 1907. The Pentecostal Assembly joined forces with the Apostolic Faith Union, and together they established the Apostolic Faith Union in Shanghai. In 1908, an American pastor by the name of Morris published *The Hong Kong Pentecostal Truth Journal* which proclaimed that the speaking of tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Around 1911, an American minister named Wendelson was preaching actively in the Shanxi province of northern China. He



published a newsletter called the *Herald of the Gospel Truth* and established the Apostolic Faith Union in Shanxi. In his newsletter, Wendelson preached the need to pray for the Holy Spirit. Later, he went to Beijing and changed the name of the Apostolic Faith Union to the “Assembly of God”, which later became the “Church of God”. Some time afterwards, the publication of the newsletter stopped, and gospel tracts were published instead. But, over time, the Pentecostal churches which he established in China faded from history.

History tells us that many Christian churches have a tendency to divide. From the time of Martin Luther’s Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, the church began splintering off into thousands of denominations. Within the Pentecostal movement itself, there are now hundreds of churches and groups, each differing on some point of doctrine. The division and confusion within Christendom will no doubt continue without the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

However, a number of important outcomes emerged from the events in America and the ensuing worldwide Pentecostal movement. One outcome was a mass departure of Christians from churches and assemblies which had been corrupted by worldly influences and traditions. A second was a revival of the Christian faith of global proportions. A third was a new-found awareness of the Bible’s teaching that the speaking of tongues is the necessary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit (at least for a time). A fourth was the paving of the way for the establishment of the True Jesus Church in China through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (latter rain), along with the revelation of the complete and perfect gospel, according to the Bible.

## **8.5 The early history of the True Jesus Church**

Compared to other churches, the True Jesus Church is far from well known. However, she is blessed to have been entrusted with the truth of the Bible, which encompasses the way of salvation. The establishment of the True Jesus Church differs in many respects from the rise of better known denominations. She should be distinguished from the Pentecostal churches, in the sense that she was personally established by the Holy Spirit (latter rain), and the truth of the Bible was directly revealed to her by the Holy Spirit—the truth which, up

until now, churches had failed to uphold fully and consistently.

The True Jesus Church has the conviction that it is her commission to share the perfect gospel with everyone and to lead people to God (1 Jn 4:6; 2 Jn 9). Her doctrines are the teachings of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ's teachings at the core (Eph 2:19–22; Acts 2:42; Mt 28:20; Jn 8:31). By way of testimony to the truth which she preaches, there are also signs and miracles (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:4).

The True Jesus Church does not have any human founders, as the Holy Spirit was the one who established her. However, there have been a number of important workers in her early history. Three of these were: Lingsheng Zhang, Barnabas Zhang and Paul Wei. The following is an outline of their ministries.

### **8.5.1 The ministry of Lingsheng Zhang**

Lingsheng Zhang's original name was Bin Zhang. He came from Wei County in the Shandong province of China. In 1900, at the age of thirty-seven, he joined the Presbyterian Church and was a member there for ten years, including three years as a deacon.

Lingsheng Zhang's eldest son, Puquan, taught German at a public school in Shanghai. In 1909, Pastor Ding from the Apostolic Faith Union brought Puquan to his church, where he received the Holy Spirit. Upon returning to Shandong during the school holidays, Puquan testified to his father about the Holy Spirit and the gospel that he had heard. Lingsheng Zhang believed on account of his son's testimony.

In September 1909, Lingsheng Zhang travelled to the Apostolic Faith Union in Shanghai, where he confessed and repented of his sins. At the same time, he started to pray fervently for the Holy Spirit. He remained at the Apostolic Faith Union for more than twenty days. However, despite the laying of hands by the ministers, he did not receive the Holy Spirit.

Lingsheng Zhang returned to Shandong and continued to pray earnestly for the Holy Spirit for more than fifty days. Finally, on the morning of 31 January 1910, he received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. It was at this time that the Holy Spirit told him to change his name from Bin Zhang to Lingsheng Zhang, which means "born of

the Spirit". At the same time, the Holy Spirit instructed him to observe Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as the holy Sabbath.

That same year, Lingsheng Zhang went to Suzhou and received water baptism. It was conducted in a lake by pastors of the Apostolic Faith Union. From that time on, he resolved to dedicate his life to God. When he returned to Shandong, he established the "Jesus True Church" in Xizhuangtou village in Wei County. The Lord showered His blessings on the ministry of the church, leading many people to receive water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Many members were also blessed with spiritual gifts; among them was Barnabas Zhang.

In 1914, Lingsheng Zhang travelled to Beijing. Here, he received the laying of hands from Pastor Wendelson and Elder Kui from the Apostolic Faith Union. He was also ordained as an elder in the Apostolic Faith Union.

In 1916, he proposed to Pastor Wendelson that the Apostolic Faith Union in Beijing should observe Saturday as its Sabbath day. Pastor Wendelson agreed, and the Apostolic Faith Union began keeping the Sabbath from 1 July of that year. This significant change was publicized in the thirteenth issue of the *Herald of the Gospel Truth*.

In the spring of 1918, Lingsheng Zhang attended the True Jesus Church in Tianjin. Whilst there, he became acquainted with Paul Wei, and together they observed the Sabbath. They were evidently of one mind and heart. Paul Wei laid his hands on Lingsheng Zhang and sent him out in the power of the Spirit to preach to the other Christian churches, to guide them into the truth. From this point on, Lingsheng Zhang became Paul Wei's faithful co-worker.

In February 1919, Lingsheng Zhang and Barnabas Zhang went to Tangjiazhuang—approximately 200 kilometres from Xizhuangtou village in Wei County. There, many people received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, even prior to water baptism. On 27 February 1919, some thirty people requested water baptism. At this point, Lingsheng Zhang and Barnabas Zhang decided to baptize each other with their heads bowed, before proceeding to baptize the others. This mode of baptism, with the head bowed, had earlier been revealed to Paul Wei by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 6:5; Jn 19:30).

In March 1919, Paul Wei went to Shandong and began to minister alongside Lingsheng Zhang. Together, they published the second issue of a newsletter called *Correct the Truth of All Nations Times*. In October

1919, Lingsheng Zhang and Barnabas Zhang went to Beijing again. Whilst there, they met two other men, Xiaofeng Li and Qinming Liang. With their help, they began to publish the newsletter on a regular basis.

By 29 October 1919, Elder Paul Wei was dying. At his bedside were Lingsheng Zhang and Qinming Liang. Before he passed away, Paul Wei laid hands on both men and ordained them as church elders to continue the ministry.

Lingsheng Zhang went on to evangelize in Nanjing, Changsha and many other places in China. The name which he gave to the church was: “True Jesus Church—the Church Which Corrects The Faith Of All Nations.” In the spring of 1920, he went to Beijing to resign from his duties as an elder of the Apostolic Faith Union. Afterwards, he returned to Shandong to undertake pastoral work there.

### **8.5.2 The ministry of Barnabas Zhang**

Barnabas Zhang was originally named Dianju Zhang. He came from Xizhuangtou of Wei County in the Shandong province of China and was a farmer and an antiques dealer. In 1910, Lingsheng Zhang came to his village and preached a gospel of repentance, remission of sins and baptism of the Holy Spirit. Barnabas Zhang’s wife was deeply moved by the message and believed. She also began testifying for the Lord. Barnabas Zhang initially opposed the gospel message. However, he later came to believe, repented of his sins and began praying for spiritual grace.

On the morning of 14 April 1911, Barnabas Zhang retreated to a remote area. Whilst he was there, he heard a voice from heaven saying, “The grace of salvation for all people in the last days will arise from the east to the west.” On hearing this, he quickly knelt down to pray. Not long after, he received the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues.

Lingsheng Zhang baptized Barnabas Zhang and his family in the name of the Lord Jesus. He then taught Barnabas Zhang personally for some three to four years. Later, following much fasting and prayer, Barnabas Zhang was ordained as an elder.

In March 1916, Barnabas Zhang was walking along the road when, suddenly, he heard the Lord say to him, “You must preach in the South. I will give you great power.”

In April 1916, the Lord told him to change his name from Dianju Zhang to Barnabas Zhang. In August 1917, the Holy Spirit led him to preach in various Chinese counties in the southern region of Shandong, where many churches would be established.

In February 1919, Barnabas Zhang and Lingsheng Zhang evangelized in Tangjiazhuang. The Holy Spirit worked mightily: many people received water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. On 27 February 1919, Barnabas Zhang and Lingsheng Zhang baptized each other with their heads bowed, before proceeding to baptize some thirty people.

In March 1919, Paul Wei evangelized in various counties throughout Shandong, with Lingsheng Zhang working alongside him. On 3 May 1919, at the end of a two-day spiritual convocation in Xizhuangtou, Wei County, twenty-one people were baptized into the Lord. At this time, Barnabas Zhang resolved to become a preacher. He also made a white rectangular banner, on which he wrote the name of the church: “True Jesus Church—The Church Which Corrects The Faith Of All Nations.” He would often fast and pray for several days at a time, before going out to preach.

Barnabas Zhang resolved to follow the example of Paul Wei, to travel the world in order to share the truth of the Bible with different denominations. In the autumn of 1919, he, together with Changkai Guo and Qinming Liang, started a nine-month evangelical journey through eight provinces in China. Together, they established churches in forty-two places and baptized more than 2,000 people.

On 30 October 1923, Barnabas Zhang’s evangelical work brought him to Fuzhou. By the middle of November, he was preaching to members of a Seventh Day Adventist Church. Later, at Kegong village, he went to Thomas Guo’s house, where members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church met for services. As a result of hearing the truth, some twelve people—Thomas Guo, Abel Qian, Fusheng Jin, and others—believed and were baptized. That night, they partook of the Holy Communion, and many people received the Holy Spirit. Together, they decided to hold a three-day evangelical service to give thanks for God’s grace. During the service, twenty-two people received the Holy Spirit. On the third day, ninety-three people were baptized. Later, they rented a house to use as a place of worship. This marked the establishment of the church in Fuzhou. Three members were later

ordained as elders, and seven members as deacons.

From July to August 1925, Barnabas Zhang preached for a week in Wenzhou. The Lord worked powerfully, healing many sick people. Altogether, 131 people were baptized, and more than fifty people received the Holy Spirit. Barnabas Zhang returned to Fuzhou during September and October. While he was there, he attended a Provincial Delegates' Conference organized by various local churches. (During that two-year period, more than sixty churches had been established in Fujian province alone. As a result, this conference was organized to enable delegates from each local church to meet and discuss the church ministry.)

On 3 March 1926, Barnabas Zhang boarded a Japanese ship at Xiamen to leave for Taiwan. His intention was to preach the gospel in Taiwan. His co-workers included Thomas Guo, Luke Gao and Yuanqian Chen. Accompanying the missionary group were several Taiwanese converts from Zhangzhou and Xiamen. They included Chengcong Huang, Daoyuan Wu, Qinglong Wang and Xingming Huang. On 6 March 1926, the missionary group reached Xianxi village in Zhanghua—the village where Chengcong Huang was born and raised. Here, a significant number of Presbyterian Church members accepted the truth. In the autumn of 1925, Chengcong's father, Xiuliang Huang, began to evangelize on a return trip to Taiwan. Many of his relatives converted to Christ. On 11 March 1926, sixty-two believers were baptized in Xianxi. Two elders and two deaconesses were also ordained. These events marked the establishment of the church in Xianxi.

On 16 March 1926, the missionary group proceeded to Niutiaowan in Jiayi, where a three-day spiritual convocation was being held. More than thirty people were baptized, all from the Presbyterian Church. This event marked the establishment of the church in Niutiaowan.

On 3 April 1926, a three-day evangelical service was held in Qingshui, Taichung. Most of the people who attended were, again, from the Presbyterian Church. On 6 April 1926, eleven people were baptized, marking the establishment of the church in Qingshui.

On 12 April 1926, Barnabas Zhang returned to China from Jilong on a ship called "Kaicheng". During the short forty day missionary trip in Taiwan, more than 100 people had been baptized, and three

churches had been established. Through God's blessing, the True Jesus Church had expanded to Taiwan.

The Fifth Special National Delegates Conference was held in China from 1 to 12 September 1929. Barnabas Zhang was elected as a committee member of the church's head office. During the conference, a resolution was passed to review the history of the True Jesus Church. Barnabas Zhang was, however, dissatisfied with the outcome. In October 1929, the head office assigned him to minister in Guangzhou. Not long after, he personally established his own splinter church, with headquarters in Hong Kong. He called his church the "True Jesus Church of China" and appointed himself as the chief overseer. He also started publishing a newsletter, *The Trumpet Times*.

From then onwards, Barnabas Zhang zealously sought to oppose the work of the church. On several occasions, representatives from the head office were sent to advise him to repent and to return to the church. However, he firmly claimed to be the founder and head of the True Jesus Church and refused to repent. As a result, when the Sixth Special National Delegates Conference convened from 1 to 9 May 1930, the True Jesus Church excommunicated Barnabas Zhang.

### **8.5.3 The ministry of Paul Wei**

Paul Wei was originally called Enbo Wei. He came from Rongcheng County in the Baoding region of Hebei. He was a textile dealer by trade and the proprietor of a shop called *Enxinyong* (which means "Eternal Grace and Faith"). He also owned a second shop called *Enzhenhua* (meaning "Grace upon the Chinese").

In 1902, Paul Wei's family of four moved to Beijing to run a textile business. It was at this time that Deshun Wang, a believer from the London Assembly, led Paul Wei to seek the truth in Ciqikou. Paul Wei attended church services there for about a year. In the autumn of 1904, he and his family were baptized by Pastor Zhiwen Mi at the London Assembly in Shuangqigan. The mode of baptism was the sprinkling of water. After their baptism, Paul Wei and his family would take time off from their business to attend services at the London Assembly every Sunday. They showed great love to others, often donating money to help impoverished fellow believers.

As the winter of 1904 approached, Paul Wei rented a shop at Dongchashihu, just outside of Chongwenmen, where he sold wool and imported goods. In the summer of 1905, he opened another shop, which he named “Enxinyong.” As was his custom, he would close the doors of his shop every Sunday to lead his entire circle of family, friends, workers and apprentices to attend church services.

At the end of 1904, after settling all his bills, Paul Wei found that he had in his possession thousands of dollars worth of textiles. He suggested to Pastor Mi of the London Assembly that the money, along with other donations, be used to establish an independent Chinese church. Pastor Mi agreed and, together, they worked to establish the church. Paul Wei began to sell off some of his property and offered the proceeds to the church—a total of \$3,000. At the same time, he encouraged others to donate to the church building fund. The church that he helped to establish became one of the earliest independent Chinese churches in northern China.

In 1915, Lieming Shi and Dianqing Wei, both residents of Shanghai, and members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, travelled to Beijing. There, they entered into a lengthy discussion with Paul Wei about the Sabbath day. As a result, Paul Wei understood the need to observe Saturday as the Sabbath.

In June 1916, Paul Wei became seriously ill with chest pains, a cough and asthma. Despite three months of medical treatment from both Chinese and Western doctors, his health did not improve. On 14 September, Elder Shengming Xin from the Apostolic Faith Union visited him at his shop. He said, “You must resolve not to rely on medication. Instead, I will anoint you with oil, lay hands on you and pray for you, and you shall be healed.”

When Paul Wei heard these words, he believed that Jesus would heal him. Both men went to the upper floor of the shop to pray. The next day, Elder Xin took his friend to the Apostolic Faith Union at Dongcheng to meet Pastor Wendelson, an American missionary. Although he did not know it then, they would become good friends. A few days after the meeting, Paul Wei recovered completely from his illness. Both he and his wife were later baptized by Pastor Wendelson.

Paul Wei was deeply moved by the Holy Spirit after his meeting with Wendelson. The latter had enabled him to have a better understanding of the Bible. Paul Wei also began keeping the Sabbath,



as was the practice of the Apostolic Faith Union at that time. Thereafter, church services were often held on the upper floor of his shop, “Enxinyong”. On many occasions, the Holy Spirit was poured out on those who attended. One day, during a prayer, Paul Wei also received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. God was evidently blessing him for opening up his shop as a place of worship. Three months later, he set up another branch of his business in Qianmenwai, Damochang.

Paul Wei witnessed many miracles from God. In April 1917, his daughter, Huiying, was sick and dying. As he prayed for her, he heard a voice which said, “Your daughter is healed.” Sure enough, his daughter recovered soon after that prayer. On another occasion, he was getting ready for bed, when he saw a demon leading a horde of smaller demons to stand in front of him. Paul Wei cast out the demons in the name of Jesus Christ and saw them scattering as he did so. Through these experiences, which occurred within a short time of each other, he knew that God had given him the power and authority to heal the sick and to cast out demons.

On 23 May 1917, God spoke to Paul Wei, saying, “You must fast for thirty-nine days. You will not die of hunger.” Believing these words, he began to fast, using the time to pray and to write. He also preached by the roadside and performed water baptism in the River Tuan, which was about seven kilometres away. During this time, he would often only sleep for about three hours a day.

On 25 May, Paul Wei left Beijing to preach in Huangcun. On 28 May, in the middle of a prayer, he heard a voice from heaven, saying, “You must receive the baptism of Jesus!” Led by the Holy Spirit, Paul Wei went towards the Dahongmen River, just outside of Yongdingmen. He knelt in the water and prayed. Once again, a loud voice said, “You must be baptized with your head bowed down!” Paul Wei obeyed the divine instructions and received water baptism with his head bowed. In this way, he was baptized personally by the Holy Spirit. Upon lifting up his head after water baptism, he saw a vision of the Lord standing in glory before him. He felt that his whole body and soul were now holy. After he got out of the water, he went into the woods where, again, he saw a vision of the Lord Jesus. It was at this time that Jesus told him to change his name from Enbo to Paul. He also instructed Paul Wei to correct the teachings of the other denominations. From this point on,

he resolved to dedicate his life to the Lord and to complete the mission entrusted to him.

On 30 May 1917, the Holy Spirit revealed the following doctrines to Paul Wei:

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is required for entry into the kingdom of heaven.
- Water baptism must be performed by complete immersion, in the same manner that the Lord Jesus was baptized.
- Water baptism must be performed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”.
- The Sabbath day is the seventh day of the week, which is Saturday—not Sunday.
- The Chinese words “Shangdi” (meaning “heavenly emperor”) and “Tianzhu” (meaning “lord of heaven”) should not be used to refer to God. Only “Shen” (“God”) or “Zhenshen” (“True God”) should be used.

On 14 June, he mailed the above doctrines to some forty-eight churches.

On 1 July, Paul Wei became empowered by the Holy Spirit at the end of a thirty-nine day period of fasting. Whilst in a remote area, the Lord Jesus, appeared to him again, this time with Moses and Elijah at His side. On 2 July, the Holy Spirit instructed him to leave Huangcun and return to Beijing via Nanyuan; work with Deli Zhao to preach the truth; and rely on the power of the Lord Jesus to correct the doctrinal errors of the other churches.

On 6 July, Paul Wei went to the Apostolic Faith Union at Xinglongjie to talk to Pastor Wendelson. He urged Pastor Wendelson to listen to the revelation of the Holy Spirit, and to receive water baptism with his head bowed and in full immersion.

On 18 July, Deshun Wang, the man who had previously led Paul Wei to the Apostolic Faith Union, received water baptism in the Dahongmen River. Deshun later became Paul Wei’s co-worker. By 10 August 1917, the church had been established in three places: Huangcun, Nanyuan and Beijing.

During August to September, Paul Wei performed a number of miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit:

- On 19 August, the husband of an old woman from Xigu, Tianjin, came for help because his wife had been possessed by a snake demon for thirty-eight years. Paul Wei and John Li went to her to cast out the demon in the name of the Lord Jesus. Later, he baptized the three family members.
- On 2 September, Paul Wei was preaching in a temple in Weishanzhuang, when he came across a man who was blind. Moved by the Holy Spirit, Paul Wei asked him, “Do you believe that Jesus can give you sight?” The blind man replied, “I believe.” He then prayed for him, laying his hands upon his head, whereupon the Holy Spirit told him, “He is healed.” Immediately, the blind man recovered his sight and was able to see.
- In September and October, Paul Wei set out from Beijing to many other cities and towns, healing the sick and casting out demons. He proclaimed the gospel far and wide.
- On 5 October, a mute man from Dazhongfuhu in Xingbujie, Beijing by the name of Zizhen Sun, came to Paul Wei for water baptism. Paul Wei cast out the mute spirit in the name of the Lord Jesus, at which point Zizhen Sun began to spit out saliva and to speak. After water baptism, the man received the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues and sang spiritual songs. That same day, they publicized the miracle in the local newspaper, *The Capital Daily*. The news spread far and wide to glorify the Lord’s name. Zizhen Sun later made a resolution to work alongside Paul Wei.

On 11 November 1917, Paul Wei went to Rongchen to sell a portion of his land so that the proceeds could be used to build a new chapel, print leaflets, and publish a book entitled the *True Testimonies of the Holy Spirit*. On 16 November, he sold two and a half acres of land for \$46 to cover his missionary expenses, and then another piece of land on 27 November for \$100 to cover the expenses of his co-workers and publishing costs.

On 2 January 1918, he wrote a letter to the Chief of Police, Superintendent Wu to request permission to use his shop “Enzhenhua” at Damochang as the premises for the True Jesus Church. From then on, the name of the church was officially called the “True Jesus Church”.

In March 1918, Wendelson wrote an announcement in the eighteenth issue of the *Herald of the Gospel Truth* to declare a return to the observance of Sunday as the Sabbath. Paul Wei was saddened that he had yielded to external pressure.

Paul Wei printed around 8,000 gospel tracts and sent them to various places. These testified to how he had discovered the truth and also proclaimed the ministry of the True Jesus Church. By now, he no longer wanted to continue with his textile business, so he sold off his remaining stock at a discounted price and paid off his bills. He was now ready to continue God’s work.

On 1 February, Paul Wei published the first free issue of *News Journal of the Church Which Corrects the Faith of All Nations*, which he distributed to many parts of China. He received numerous letters of response as a result. It also paved the way for the establishment of the True Jesus Church in various provinces. In March 1919, he started taking the gospel to the counties in Shandong, working closely with Lingsheng Zhang. He later published a second issue of the newsletter.

Starting on 3 May, a two-day spiritual convocation was held in Xizhuangtou of Wei County, during which twenty-one people were baptized into the Lord. In July, Paul Wei returned to Beijing.

In early October, Lingsheng Zhang, Qinming Liang and Xiaofeng Li all came together in sad circumstances—Paul Wei was dying. On 29 October, he was at the point of death. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul Wei laid his hands on Lingsheng Zhang and Qinming Liang, blessing them and commissioning them to carry on his work to propagate the truth. Pastor Wendelson also came to visit Paul Wei. As he grasped Paul Wei’s hands, both men wept. At a little past four o’clock in the afternoon, Paul Wei shouted with laughter: “Look! The angels have come!” With these words, he passed away.

#### **8.5.4 Conclusion**

The above account offers a brief overview of the ministry of the early True Jesus Church workers. Although Lingsheng Zhang, Barnabas Zhang and Paul Wei were important workers, the church does not consider them to be the founders. Rather, they were simply the servants and vessels of God who were called to be His hands and feet in laying the foundation of the church. Those of us enjoying their legacy should appreciate their work and continue to build upon it so that we can reveal the glory of God's true church in the last days.

#### **Review questions**

1. Outline the biblical evidence for the descent of the early rain.
2. Outline the prophecies regarding the cessation of the Holy Spirit.
3. Outline the prefigurations regarding the cessation of the Holy Spirit.
4. Why did the Holy Spirit stop descending on the post-apostolic church?
5. Outline the prophecies relating to the descent of the Holy Spirit in the early rain period.
6. Outline the prefigurations relating to the Holy Spirit in the latter rain period.
7. Draw a timeline showing the events in the worldwide Pentecostal movement.
8. Draw a timeline showing the events which marked the establishment of the True Jesus Church.
9. What is the True Jesus Church's mission in relation to other Christian churches and denominations?

# Chapter 9

## THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 9.1 Introduction

The baptism of the Holy Spirit refers to a believer's receiving of the Holy Spirit. It is the point at which the Holy Spirit comes upon him and lives in him (Jn 14:16–17). It was experienced for the first time by Peter and the other disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) and thereafter by other believers, such as the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17), Paul (Acts 9:17–18), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44–47) and the Ephesians (Acts 19:1–7).

The Bible uses a variety of descriptions for the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

- The *coming* of the Holy Spirit upon the believers (Acts 1:8; 19:6)
- The *falling* of the Holy Spirit upon the believers (Acts 8:16; 10:44; 11:15)
- The believers being *filled* by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 9:17)
- The believers *receiving* the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:17, 19; 10:47)
- The Holy Spirit being *poured out* on the believers (Acts 10:45)
- The Holy Spirit being *given* to the believers (Acts 8:18; 11:17)

- A *gift* (Acts 2:38; 10:45)
- A *sealing* (Eph 1:13; 4:30)
- A *promise* (Gal 3:14; Acts 2:39)
- An *abundant outpouring* (Tit 3:6)

A number of influential eastern and western Christian writers have written extensively about this subject. Unfortunately, many of their views are misconceived and have become ingrained in general Christian doctrine. Their views include the following: the Holy Spirit descended once and for all on the day of Pentecost and has continued to dwell in all Christians ever since; all believers have the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by their ability to confess Jesus Christ as Lord; speaking in tongues is but one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and is not the sole evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit; the tongues which the disciples spoke at Pentecost were foreign languages; spiritual tongues are the least of the spiritual gifts, which disappeared during the apostolic period.

This chapter will analyze the arguments presented by a number of writers, using the Bible as our reference.

## 9.2 General misconceptions about the baptism of the Holy Spirit

### Misconception 1

Every true believer has the Spirit (Rom 8:9), but that does not necessarily imply that he has the baptism of the Spirit.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 64)

Sanders draws a distinction between a person having or receiving the Holy Spirit, and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He argues that, while having the Holy Spirit is a universal and automatic experience, receiving the baptism of the Spirit is an exceptional one. His line of thinking also implies that the latter is somehow a higher spiritual state compared with “just” having the Holy Spirit.

### What does the Bible say?

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, receiving the Holy Spirit is synonymous with being baptized by the Holy Spirit. While the Bible describes this experience using different terms, it does not mean they are different experiences. For example, Jesus said to His disciples, “But you shall be *baptized* with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). Following this, He added, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has *come upon* you” (Acts 1:8). His words indicate that baptism of the Holy Spirit and receiving the Holy Spirit are one and the same thing.

### Misconception 2

The words ‘baptism’ and ‘filling’ are opposite in meaning. By the baptism, we are put into the element. By the filling the element is put into us. By the baptism we are in the Spirit. By the filling the Spirit is in us. The very word ‘baptism’ excludes all idea of an internal reception of the Spirit being meant.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 66)

### What does the Bible say?

Here, Sanders presents a seemingly logical argument: the existence of an external “baptism” of the Holy Spirit which contrasts with an internal “filling” of the Spirit. However, we need to understand that the Holy Spirit is not a physical entity and therefore cannot be explained using physical concepts.

Prior to His ascension, Jesus said to His disciples, “For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be *baptized* with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). The Bible records the fulfilment of this promise with the words: “They were all *filled* with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). These words contradict Sanders’ view that there is an external “baptism” of the Holy Spirit which is exclusive of an “internal reception of the Spirit”.



### Misconception 3

We have no record of individual persons baptized with the Spirit. We repeat that we have no account in Acts – or anywhere in Scripture for that matter – of an individual being baptized with the Holy Spirit...Take any of the disciples that God used in the apostolic era after Pentecost. Their being filled with the Holy Spirit was not a baptism experience; it was the daily experience of a dedicated life...The filling of the Spirit cannot be tied to any crisis experience because we have not the slightest evidence that a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is consciously aware of it.

John H. Pickford (p. 21)

Here, Pickford argues that, after Pentecost, individuals no longer needed to be baptized by the Holy Spirit as they were now filled by the Holy Spirit; there are only biblical records of groups of people being baptized in the Spirit, not individuals. Also, the in-filling of the Spirit is unrelated to what he terms a personal “crisis experience”.

#### What does the Bible say?

- Acts 9:17 gives a specific example of an individual receiving the Holy Spirit: Saul received the Holy Spirit after Ananias was sent to him and laid hands on him.
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the promise of the Lord Jesus (Acts 1:5) that everyone can experience personally. It cannot be considered a superfluous “crisis experience”. This promise is mentioned in the Bible repeatedly:

I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”

John 1:33

For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

Acts 1:5

And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, “John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 11:15–16

When we read the Book of Acts, we come to realize how the baptism of the Holy Spirit is such a crucial part of the Christian faith journey. When Peter and John learned that the Samaritans had accepted the Lord, they immediately went to them to lay hands upon them so that they could receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14–17). Also, when Paul went to Ephesus, the first question he asked the disciples was: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2). When they replied that they had not, Paul re-baptized them in the name of Jesus and laid his hands upon them (Acts 19:6).

In both cases, the apostles took care to ensure that the believers could receive the Holy Spirit: they asked questions, they administered the correct water baptism, and they laid hands.

### **9.3 The evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit**

#### **9.3.1 Can be seen and heard**

When Paul came to Ephesus, he asked the disciples: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”

Acts 19:2

The question that Paul asked the believers in Ephesus, and their subsequent reply, show that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is always accompanied by a definite sign; it is never verified by guess work, assumption or blind faith. The Bible describes it as an experience which one can “see and hear” (Acts 2:33). However, this fact is fiercely disputed by many churches today. In analyzing why this should be the case, we are reminded of the words of Jesus: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn 14:16–17).

The fact is, only the Holy Spirit Himself can enable us to understand matters of the Spirit. Where He is absent, a faith community will inevitably resort to conjecture, which leads to

erroneous teachings of the sort which claim that a person receives the Holy Spirit automatically at the moment of conversion.

Below are some common misconceptions that relate to the evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

#### **Misconception 4**

The Bible indeed tells us that we should repent and believe in the Lord, so that our sins may be forgiven (Jn 3:18; Acts 10:43). This will let us receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). We believe the words of the Lord as they are; this is not self-deception but honouring the word of the Lord. Whether we perceive the Holy Spirit or not, we have all received the Holy Spirit.

Ende Hu (p. 16)

#### **What does the Bible say?**

- Concerning the remission of sins, it is not sufficient for a person to merely believe and repent. When we read the whole of Acts 2:38, we see that the remission of sins comes about directly through water baptism. Peter specifically preached, “Repent, and let every one of you be *baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Hu has overlooked the most important part of this verse and, in doing so, has missed the role of water baptism in the remission of sins.
- In the apostolic period, when the Holy Spirit was at work, the pattern was that those who believed in Jesus received the Holy Spirit, sooner or later.
- Receiving the Holy Spirit is an experience that both the recipient and other people can perceive (Acts 2:33).

#### **9.3.2 The evidence from the Book of Acts**

What is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit? The answer to this question cannot be found in the four Gospels, as they only record the promise of the Holy Spirit. Neither can it be found in the apostles’ Epistles, as the Books of Romans right up to Jude record

matters relating to Christian living—what believers need to do *after* they have received the Holy Spirit. Also, the answer is not within Revelation, which is a prophetic book, whose contents point to future events. Rather, the answer lies in the Book of Acts, which records the circumstances relating to the descent of the Holy Spirit in the apostolic church. It presents us with the evidence which proves definitively that a person has received the Holy Spirit.

### 9.3.3 Speaking in spiritual tongues

From the Book of Acts, we see clearly that the sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is the speaking of spiritual tongues. The Greek words *glossa* (tongue) or *glossai* (tongues) are used in the original text to describe this phenomenon:<sup>1</sup>

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:4

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.

Acts 10:44–46

And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

Acts 19:6

In Acts 10, it is significant that the circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter on his visit to Cornelius' house witnessed with astonishment the family receiving the Holy Spirit: "For they heard them speak with tongues" (Acts 10:46). Later, when Peter returned to the church in Jerusalem, he reported how "The Holy Spirit fell upon them, *as upon us at the beginning*" (Acts 11:15), referring to the disciples' own experience on the day of Pentecost (Acts 15:8).

In Acts 8, we come across Simon, who was originally a sorcerer,

<sup>1</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1992). Strong's reference no. G1100.

but later accepted the gospel and was baptized. It records how, when he witnessed the believers in Samaria receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying of hands by the apostles, he offered money in exchange for this power:

Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Acts 8:17–19

So we see that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is anything but a quiet or discreet experience. On the day of Pentecost, it caught the attention of a multitude (Acts 2:6). The Book of Revelation alludes to the might of the spiritual tongue in its references to "the sound of many waters" and "the sound of mighty thunderings" (Rev 14:2; 19:6).

### **9.3.4 Christian writers who acknowledge the link between spiritual tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit**

A number of enlightened Christian writers have commented on the link between the speaking of tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit was regarded as a special gift which did not always accompany baptism and faith. The Samaritans are not regarded as having 'received the Holy Ghost' when they 'received the word of God'. They had believed and had been baptized, but it was only when Peter and John went down and prayed for them that the gift of the Spirit was bestowed (Acts 8:14-17). Evidently some special endowment or experience is here in view. The same conception emerges even more clearly in the narrative concerning the disciples of John who Paul found at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7). Not only did they not 'receive the Holy Ghost' when they believed, but after they had been baptized into the name of Christ, it was only when Paul had laid his hands on them 'that the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied' (v 6). Here it is obvious that the gift of the Spirit is regarded as synonymous with the ecstatic charismata of speaking with tongues and prophesying.

G. B. Stevens (p. 433)

The church's belief in the Spirit sprung from her experience of a fact. Very early in her career – probably at Pentecost – the disciples became aware of a new power working within them. Its most striking manifestation at first

was glossolalia, “speaking with tongues,” a power of ecstatic utterance in unintelligible speech; and both those seized by this power and those who saw and heard its manifestations were convinced that some power from a higher world had broken into their lives, endowing them with capacities of utterance and with other gifts, which appeared to be something quite different from a mere heightening of endowments already theirs. People who hitherto had seemed to be nothing out of the common suddenly became capable of impassioned prayer and speech, or of lofty moods in which they were manifestly holding converse with the Unseen.

A. B. MacDonald (p. 40)

In my early study of the Baptism with the Holy Spirit, I noticed that in many instances those who were so baptized ‘spoke with tongues’, and the question came often into my mind: if one is baptized with the Holy Spirit will he not speak with tongues? But I saw no one so speaking, and I often wondered, is there any one today who actually is baptized with the Holy Spirit?

R. A. Torrey

In his famous work, *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes writes about the events in Acts 8, where the baptized Samaritans experienced “those graces that were signs of the Holy Spirit, which at that time did accompany all true Beleevers”. He elaborates on the nature of the “signs” by quoting Mark 16:17–18: “They shall cast out Devills; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up Serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.”

We see that a number of writers and also some of the early church fathers—such as Chrysostom of Constantinople, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Justin Martyr and Origen—saw a link between receiving the Holy Spirit and the speaking of tongues. However, Hobbes and Torrey were of the impression that this phenomenon could no longer be observed.

### 9.3.5 Christian writers opposed to the evidence of spiritual tongues

Not all Christian writers acknowledge the link between spiritual tongues and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or specifically that tongues are the definitive sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. Among the most vociferous of opponents is J. Oswald Sanders.

## Misconception 5

When the three thousand at Pentecost were filled with the Spirit, we have no record of such a gift [i.e. speaking in tongues]. Later when five thousand were added to the Church, no mention. When the Spirit was given to the Samaritans in Acts 8, no mention. Throughout the whole of Paul's ministry as recorded in Acts we have no mention of the gift as accompanying the work, except by inference in the case of the Church at Corinth.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 73)

### What does the Bible say?

- The Book of Acts does not record that the 3,000 converts, who were baptized on the day of Pentecost, were “filled with the Holy Spirit”. Therefore, there is no context for Luke, the author of Acts, to write that they spoke in tongues.
- The believers at Samaria received the Holy Spirit when Peter and John went to them, to pray and lay hands on them. Although the Bible does not spell out that they spoke with tongues, we can infer that this happened when we read: “And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also’ ” (Acts 8:18–19). Simon’s words indicate that he witnessed something very apparent.
- Peter, who himself had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and later witnessed the outpouring on Cornelius and his household, would have drawn on these experiences to confirm that the disciples in Samaria had likewise received the Holy Spirit. It does not make sense for him to have used any other criteria, apart from the speaking of tongues, to come to that conclusion.
- When Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit, the circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter witnessed their receiving the Holy Spirit, “for they heard them speak with tongues” (Acts 10:46).

- When Peter returned to Jerusalem to make a report concerning Cornelius and his household, he testified, “The Holy Spirit fell upon them [i.e. the Gentiles], as upon us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15).
- The Book of Acts does not record all instances of believers receiving the Holy Spirit; rather, it presents an overview. For example, it does not record when and where the 3,000 converts in Acts 2 received the Holy Spirit, or the 5,000 in Acts 5. But does that mean they did not receive the Holy Spirit and speak with tongues there and then, or subsequently? A case in point is Acts 9:17 which records that Saul received the Holy Spirit, but does not specifically mention that he spoke in tongues. However, when we read his letter to the Corinthian members, it is apparent that he did: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays...I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all” (1 Cor 14:14, 18).

### **Misconception 6**

The omission [to mention speaking in tongues] is singularly striking in the case of the Epistle to Ephesians in which is given a list of gifts from the ascended Christ for the edification of His Church. Though Romans was written earlier and gives specific reference to ministry yet there is no reference to ‘tongues’. Is there no such thing as speaking with tongues today? We would not dogmatically state that the manifestation of this gift is impossible today, but we would say that most of the cases where it is claimed so violate the conditions imposed for its exercise as to give abundant evidence that they are counterfeit and not genuine.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 73)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- The churches in Ephesus and Rome were likely to have been well established from the time of Paul’s third and fourth missionary journeys (Acts 19:1–10; Acts 28:16–31). They would therefore have been aware of the elementary teaching that speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, and so Paul would have seen no need to cover the same



ground in his Epistles to these two churches. The purpose of writing to the Ephesians was, in fact, to highlight the work of Christ in the life of believers; and the purpose of the Epistle to the Romans was to address the matters of justification by faith and the need to uphold the law after justification (Rom 3:31).

- The speaking of tongues that accompanies the baptism of the Holy Spirit is for self-edification (1 Cor 14:4), as opposed to the edification of the church as a whole. It is therefore not listed among the spiritual gifts that could benefit the churches in Ephesus and Rome, or anywhere else. For example, when Paul talks about a range of specific gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, the ones that he refers to are those which benefit the congregation: “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all” (1 Cor 12:7). One particular gift mentioned is the “different kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12:10) which refers to the special gift of preaching in tongues and needs interpreting. This gift should not be confused with the speaking of tongues which is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit and edifies the individual (1 Cor 14:4). The spiritual tongue spoken in personal prayer towards God does not require interpretation (1 Cor 14:2, 28), because it is the Spirit Himself interceding for the believer with “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26–27).
- The spiritual gifts mentioned in Ephesians refer to the ministerial roles that benefit the church at large: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11–12). There is no context here for Paul to discuss the spiritual tongue whose function is to edify the individual.
- According to Sanders, the cases of speaking in tongues today are “counterfeit and not genuine”, but he offers no explanation as to why this might be the case, or what possible benefit can be derived from such a practice. However, should there be possible cases of “counterfeit tongues”, our concern should be

to discover their source. This is in accordance with the advice from Elder John: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1). The fact is, false prophets can also perform miracles to lead the elect astray (Mt 24:4f; 1 Jn 4:1f). If we fail to discern what is of God and what is not, we may end up disbelieving the power of God and stop praying for the Holy Spirit altogether.

### **Misconception 7**

What then about the now widely current doctrine, that multitudes of Christians have never received the Baptism of the Spirit, and that all such should seek it until they experience it? All I can say is, that such teaching is not derived from the New Testament, and the spread of it is bringing large numbers into bondage and darkness. This error is due, perhaps, to the confusing of the Fulness of the Spirit with the Baptism; but more especially it is due, I think, to a desire to associate with one another, the blessing of the Spirit with the gift of Tongues.

W. Graham Scroggie (p. 14)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- The teaching to seek and pray for the Holy Spirit was personally given by the Lord Jesus (Lk 11:9–13; Acts 1:4–5) and put into practice by the early church (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 8:14–17; 19:1–7). Far from leading to “bondage and darkness”, as Scroggie claims, those who pursue after the Holy Spirit in this way will be suitably rewarded with true freedom (Rom 8:1–2) and the guarantee of entry into the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5).
- Scroggie’s arguments highlight a fundamental misunderstanding of what constitutes the baptism of the Spirit and the infilling of the Spirit, and of the nature and purpose of spiritual tongues.

## Misconception 8

Incidentally, nothing so definitely shows that the manifestations were not a common or even an occasional experience as Peter's amazement at God's pouring upon the Gentiles the Holy Spirit 'even as he did upon the Jew'. Why was Peter amazed if this tongues experience was the normal Christian experience? Keep in mind that many Gentiles had been saved between Pentecost and Peter's visit to Cornelius, such as Nicolas of Antioch and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 6:5; 8:36–39). If the 'baptism experience' were the order of the day, Peter would have seen many Gentiles as well as Samaritans and Jews under its influence. That would make his astonishment as to what happened at Cornelius' house meaningless. How could he forget if Pentecost had been a standard experience of believers?

John H. Pickford (p. 18)

### What does the Bible say?

- The speaking of tongues was the primary manifestation accompanying the descent of the Holy Spirit in the apostolic period, as illustrated by the accounts in the Book of Acts. It was the standard experience of the believers (see Acts 10:47; 11:15).
- Cornelius and his household were the first Gentile converts (Acts 11:1, 18), as opposed to the others mentioned by Pickford.
- Nicolas of Antioch was a proselyte to Judaism (Acts 6:5) and was among the seven disciples, "full of the Holy Spirit", who were appointed to serve tables (Acts 6:3–6). The Ethiopian eunuch was likewise not a Gentile, for we see that he had gone to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27). He was therefore likely to have been a convert to Judaism. Significantly, we see that there were no objections or expressions of surprise from the Jewish Christians at the fact that either of these persons had received the gospel.
- In Acts 8:1–25, we see that Philip (and later, Peter and John) took the gospel to the people of Samaria, in fulfilment of the prophecy of Jesus (Acts 1:8). Again, it is significant that their conversion to Christ was not met with any objections from

the Jewish Christians, as in the case of Cornelius. This was because the Samaritans, though not favoured by the orthodox Jews (cf. Jn 4:9), were not Gentiles. They claimed a common ancestry with the Jews (cf. Jn 4:12), worshipped God, read the Pentateuch and upheld similar religious traditions and practices, such as circumcision.<sup>2</sup>

- Peter and the accompanying circumcised believers were astonished, not on account of the fact that the Holy Spirit had descended, but because it had happened to a Gentile household: “And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, *because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also*” (Acts 10:45). Peter could see that the salvation of God was now extended to the Gentiles and hastened to baptize them (Acts 10:47–48). When he returned to Jerusalem and was met with criticism from “those of the circumcision” (Acts 11:2), he justified his actions by explaining what had transpired. Satisfied with Peter’s report, they “glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Acts 11:18).

### Misconception 9

Tongues were given as a sign (Acts 2:7–8; 1 Cor 14:22). The New Testament shows that the signs accompanying the giving of the Spirit were temporary... There is nothing comparable to the modern tongues experience in Scripture... Paul gives an explanation of such experiences as we see in the tongues movement. He implies that there has been the loss of emotional control.

John H. Pickford (pp. 40-41)

### What does the Bible say?

- Neither of the scriptural passages cited by Pickford provides any evidence to show that tongue-speaking is a temporary sign.

<sup>2</sup> *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, eds. Pfeiffer, Charles F., Vos, Howard, F. and Rea, John (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975).

- In his address to the Corinthian church, Paul thanked God that he “spoke with tongues” more than they did. Furthermore, he told them not to forbid speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14:18, 39).
- There is no biblical evidence to show that Paul ever implied that the speaking of tongues is linked to a loss of emotional control. Moreover, Pickford’s argument is incongruent with Paul’s description of his own practice (1 Cor 14:18) and his message not to forbid the speaking of tongues (1 Cor 14:39). It also begs the question: was the Pentecostal experience merely an emotional experience?

### **Misconception 10**

The frenzied shouting and leaping of Baal’s prophets in their frantic efforts to call down tongues of fire remind one of an after meeting of agonizing seekers after the baptism experience (1 Kgs 18:22–28). One is tempted to taunt such fanaticism with the words of Elijah, ‘Cry with a great voice: for he is a god: either he is pursuing or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked’.

John H. Pickford (p. 26)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- Pickford makes, what can only be described as, an unfortunate analogy. There can be no sensible comparison between the prophets of Baal crying out to their false gods and Christians petitioning the true God for the Holy Spirit.
- When we read his comments, the sober warning of Jesus comes to mind: “Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Mt 12:31–32).

## Misconception 11

To fulfil the promise of God, the Holy Spirit was given to those who believed so that they spoke in tongues. Today, there are many things that can prove the truth of the gospel. Therefore, miracles, speaking in tongues, etc. are not as necessary as in the times of the apostles... The speaking of tongues as recorded in the Bible is the experience of the early saints. Today, we no longer need to pursue after such an experience.

Mingdao Wang

### What does the Bible say?

- During the period of the early rain, God gave the Holy Spirit to those who believed. In this way, He was fulfilling the promises that He had made through the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28–32) and Jesus (Mk 16:16–17). Believers in today’s period of the latter rain can still benefit from these promises.
- Speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46). To claim that there is no longer the need to speak in tongues is tantamount to saying that one does not need to receive the Holy Spirit.

### 9.3.6 Both visible and audible signs

While the speaking of tongues is the primary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, the Bible also indicates that there is often the accompaniment of visible signs. This is well illustrated by the events recorded in Acts 2. On the day of Pentecost, some of the Jews who witnessed the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit mocked them saying, “They are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13). They had just heard the disciples praying in tongues and witnessed something in their demeanour which led to their immediate assumption that the disciples were drunk. Hence, Peter refuted this, saying, “For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15). Following this, he delivered a sermon to prove that what they had witnessed was the fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28–32) and the outcome of the glorification of Jesus Christ. In talking about the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit by Jesus, Peter told them, “He poured out this which you now *see and hear*” (Acts 2:33).

In this present period of the latter rain, we are indeed blessed to be able to experience the same great power and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Receiving the Holy Spirit can still be seen and heard—just as on the day of Pentecost. But sadly, there are many people who deny and even mock the grace of God.

Jesus once told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again. The latter could not grasp this teaching and, feeling perplexed, asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (Jn 3:4).

Jesus then explained, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:6).

Nicodemus still could not understand and wondered what manner of birth Jesus could be referring to. So the Lord elaborated, using the analogy of wind to describe what it is like to be born of the Holy Spirit through Spirit baptism: “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from, or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:7–8). In this passage, the Greek word *pneuma* is used to denote both the “wind” and the “Spirit”.<sup>3</sup>

Jesus’ words reveal that:

- The Holy Spirit is like the wind that blows where it wills. No person can control or constrain His work.
- Just as the human eye cannot see the wind, so it cannot perceive the Holy Spirit: where He comes from, or where He goes.
- When the wind blows, all we can hear is the sound, and all we can see are the movements of the objects in its path. In the same way, when the Holy Spirit comes upon a person, we hear the sound of the spiritual tongues and see the movements of the body that are enabled by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G4151.

In short, the words of Jesus indicate that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by both visible and audible signs.

## 9.4 Functions of the spiritual tongues

The speaking of tongues has four important functions: intercession, serving as a sign to unbelievers, self-edification, and edification of the church.

### 9.4.1 Intercession

As Christians, we all have weaknesses, including the inability to grasp or comply with God's will (Rom 11:33); feeling spiritually low; being bound by our fleshly desires; and straying from God. At times like these, we often do not know how to pray, or what to pray for. Moreover, the human language has inherent limitations: we can pray with words of understanding, but there are occasions when words seem inadequate for conveying our innermost thoughts and feelings to God. Fortunately, God, in His mercy, has given us His Spirit to help us pray.

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Romans 8:26–27

Here Paul uses the Greek word *sunantilambano* for “help”. It means “to take hold of at the side for assistance”, “help in bearing” and “to help in general”.<sup>4</sup> The Spirit helps us to pray by interceding for us, according to the will of God, with spiritual tongues that transcend human words. God knows the mind of the Spirit and accepts His intercession. Therefore, when we pray in tongues, we can have confidence that God hears our prayers (1 Jn 5:14–15).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Strong's reference no. G4878.



Those who have received the Holy Spirit and experienced the profound nature of the spiritual tongue will understand the value of the Bible's encouragement to "[pray] in the Holy Spirit" (Jude 20) and to "[pray] always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph 6:18). Praying in the Spirit has the power to draw us closer to God.

However, the prayer of tongues does not do away with the need for prayers of understanding. Paul says, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Cor 14:14–15). There is, therefore, a place for both types of prayers in worship.

#### 9.4.2 A sign to unbelievers

Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.  
1 Corinthians 14:22

And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues.

Mark 16:17

The Greek word for "sign", *semeion*, is often used in the context of miracles and wonders.<sup>5</sup> It is a particularly apt word to use in connection with the speaking of tongues, because they serve to testify to unbelievers that a person has received the Holy Spirit, and that God abides in him (1 Jn 3:24).

We see the power of this sign in convicting the Jews who were in Jerusalem for the Pentecost. They were drawn in great numbers to the disciples who were speaking in tongues. At first, they were amazed and perplexed, but soon understood that the disciples had received the baptism of the Spirit. As a result, they repented, believed in Jesus as their Saviour, and were baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:5–7, 37–41). The spiritual tongues proved to the Jews that the prophecies concerning the Holy Spirit had been fulfilled. They also testified to the fact that Jesus Christ had resurrected and ascended to heaven. Peter, therefore, boldly preached: "This Jesus God has raised up, of which

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Strong's reference no. G4592.

we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear” (Acts 2:32–33). Later, Paul also added, “And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Cor 15:14).

### **9.4.3 Self-edification**

The spiritual tongue spoken through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not an earthly language; rather, it is a heavenly or spiritual language. It edifies the person who speaks it: “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Cor 14:4). It has the power to uplift and transform.

There are Christians who contend that self-edification is selfish and argue that it is nobler to seek after the gifts which can edify the church. However, Jesus teaches us otherwise, as we note from an incident involving Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38–42). While Martha was distracted with serving Jesus, her younger sister Mary sat quietly at His feet, listening to His teachings. When Martha complained to the Lord, He told her that Mary had made the better choice (Lk 10:38–42). Here, the lesson to believers is that, while it is undoubtedly important to serve God, it is equally important to pursue self-edification.

We see this lesson applied by apostle Paul, who wrote: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor 9:27). The principle is that, if one seeks to edify the church, he must first be edified himself (Rom 2:29). Paul spent his entire life serving others to accomplish “what [was] lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Col 1:24), but he took care not to neglect his own spiritual cultivation.

### **Misconception 12**

A Japanese writer, Kurosaki Koukichi, comments that some Christians hold the following view: “He who is led by the Holy Spirit utters mysteries in the Spirit, and therefore no one understands him.

Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue only speaks to God, without any regard to man.”

The writer claims that those who hold such a view cannot possibly know the thoughts and motives of any person who is speaking in tongues; understand what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is; have experienced the speaking of tongues for themselves.

### **What does the Bible say?**

- The speaking of spiritual tongues is the primary sign of baptism in the Spirit. The tongues are spoken as the Holy Spirit gives utterance; it is not an act or a trick.
- One who speaks in tongues speaks to God, and not to man. However, it does not mean that he shows a disregard for others. Indeed, such a claim would be inconsistent with Paul’s wish that all believers spoke in tongues (1 Cor 14:5).
- The writer has most likely confused the tongue for praying with the “different kinds of tongues” for preaching. (See section 9.5 “Gifts of the Holy Spirit which benefit the church”).
- Even though a person who prays in tongues cannot be understood by others or by himself, the tongues are inherently meaningful.

### **Misconception 13**

[Referring to 1 Cor 14:4] He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church...Those who have love will pursue the latter.

Kurosaki Koukichi

### **What does the Bible say?**

- The baptism of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by the speaking of tongues, is a basic requirement for salvation. The tongues

benefit the believer through self-edification. But it is only when we have this initial gift that we can even begin to seek after other spiritual gifts which benefit the church at large, such as the gift of prophecy.

- The writer's comments are correct in as much as they apply to the particular condition of the Corinthian church, but it is not appropriate for him to apply Paul's words to Christians in general.
- Members in the Corinthian church had already been baptized with the Holy Spirit and spoke with tongues; some members also had the special gift of different kinds of tongues for preaching. However, the issue was that they lacked love and used their spiritual tongues in a way which meant that they paraded this gift, leading to confusion in the church. Paul therefore wrote 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 to remind them about love being the basis of all gifts that edify the church.
- In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul gives the church a protocol for the proper use of tongues during services: those who preached in tongues were only to do so when there was an interpreter. Furthermore, they were to do it in an orderly manner. When there was no interpreter, they were to use their spiritual tongues in prayer for self-edification only.
- In chapter 14, Paul also urges the Corinthian church to take the further step of pursuing after the gift of prophecy. This gift enables a person to speak the message of God in words of understanding through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It edifies the church and, for this reason, is "greater" than the gift of tongues.
- From reading chapter 14, we come to understand that there is a role for all of the following: the tongue that is used in prayer for self-edification, the special gift of different kinds of tongues for preaching, and the gift of prophecy.

#### 9.4.4 Edification of the church

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

1 Corinthians 14:26–28

When we pray in tongues, we speak to God, and not to man. No one understands the tongues, not even the speaker himself (1 Cor 14:2). However, when the need arises, God gives believers the gift to interpret the tongues (1 Cor 12:10) so that the individual or others can understand and be edified. 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 talk about the gifts of the Holy Spirit that edify the church. They include “different kinds of tongues” and “the interpretation of tongues” (1 Cor 12:10).

Unfortunately, in the case of the Corinthian church, the believers did not use their spiritual gifts appropriately: they spoke in tongues to address the congregation, even when there were no interpreters. For this reason, Paul admonished them, saying, “Love does not parade itself...does not seek its own” (1 Cor 13:4–5), adding that, love seeks “the profit of many” (1 Cor 10:33). He taught them that, whenever they gathered to worship, they should do all things for the common good:

Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

1 Corinthians 14:26

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

1 Corinthians 14:5

Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

1 Corinthians 14:13

Therefore, we need to note that, while the gift of prophecy can edify the church, the speaking of tongues, when interpreted, can also edify the church. Paul gave the Corinthian church a clear protocol for the use of spiritual tongues during church services, to ensure that there was order and decorum.

## **9.5 Gifts of the Holy Spirit which benefit the church**

Today, many churches believe that the speaking of tongues is only one of a range of spiritual gifts, rather than the evidence of baptism in the Spirit. They are, therefore, likely to claim that they have the Holy Spirit, even though they do not speak in tongues.

The speaking of tongues is certainly a spiritual gift, because a person is neither born with the ability, nor does he learn it. But what many people do not realize, is that the Bible talks about two types of spiritual tongues: 1) the tongue that is given to everyone at the point of baptism in the Holy Spirit; and 2) the “different kinds of tongues” for preaching, which is a special gift apportioned by God, as He wills (1 Cor 12:11). The latter gift is for the “profit of all” (1 Cor 12:7)—that is, for the edification of the church as a whole. A great number of Christian writers and churches have long misinterpreted the Bible, thinking that the two types of tongues are one and the same.

We shall analyze a number of arguments presented by Christian writers, in order to unravel the confusion surrounding the two types of tongues.

### **Misconception 14**

An examination of 1 Corinthians, chapters 12 and 14 shows that speaking with tongues was the last and least of the gifts and not specially to be desired, as being so limited in its usefulness. This would never have been so stated if it had been the special mark of the baptism in the Spirit. Prophecy ranked much higher and was most to be desired as it was especially designed for the edification of the Church. ‘I had rather speak five words with my understanding than ten thousand in a tongue,’ says Paul. That the gift of tongues was not bestowed upon all saints is clear from the apostolic question, ‘Do all speak with tongues?’—to which the implied answer is, ‘No’.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 73)

## What does the Bible say?

- Sanders has confused the tongue that is given to every believer who has received the Holy Spirit with the gift of “different kinds of tongues” for preaching. The first is indeed the “special mark of baptism in the Spirit” (Acts 10:44–46), while the latter is one of many spiritual gifts given by God to build up the church and which is apportioned by Him as He wills (1 Cor 12:8–10). It follows, then, that all those who have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit will speak in tongues, but not all will have the special gift to preach in tongues.
- From chapters 12 and 14 of 1 Corinthians, we note that the tongues which Sanders terms “the last and least of the gifts” and which are listed alongside the “interpretation of tongues” (1 Cor 12:10, 30; 1 Cor 14:26–28) are, in fact, the tongues for preaching. They go hand in hand with the gift of interpretation for the edification of the church.
- When Paul asks the rhetorical questions, “Do all speak with tongues?” and “Do all interpret?” (1 Cor 12:30), he is making the point that not everyone will have the special gift to preach in tongues.
- Paul encourages us to especially desire the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 14:1, 39), that is, to speak the messages of God in words of understanding through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This gift is for the edification of the church. But, in the same breath, he reminds us that there is also a role in the church for the speaking of different tongues which, when accompanied by interpretation, can likewise edify the church (1 Cor 14:5, 12–13).
- In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul points out that there is a role for both spiritual tongues and words of understanding: “I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding” (1 Cor 14:15). He adds that, though he has the ability to use both, given the choice, he would rather speak words of understanding when teaching the congregation, as he recognizes that this would bring the greatest benefit to the church. Hence, he says, “I thank my God I speak with tongues

more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Cor 14:18–19).

### Misconception 15

The sign [i.e. the speaking of tongues], was temporary. In the discussion of gifts in 1 Cor 12, Paul includes tongues and then goes on to assert that ‘Whether there be tongues, they shall cease’ (1 Cor 13:8). He concludes the chapter by showing that tongues were passing in his day, ‘And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity’ (1 Cor 13:13).

John H. Pickford (p. 22)

### What does the Bible say?

- Speaking with tongues—far from being temporary—is an enduring experience. It is manifested consistently by every believer who has received the Holy Spirit. Paul himself claimed to speak in tongues more than the Corinthian believers (1 Cor 14:18) and told the church not to forbid it (1 Cor 14:39).
- Paul’s words: “Whether there are tongues, they will cease” (1 Cor 13:8), do not refer to the diminishing of tongues in this lifetime, but, rather, when Jesus comes again. This is when believers will meet with God face to face and will therefore have no more need to speak in tongues.
- Until the day of Jesus’ coming, spiritual gifts—including the speaking of tongues—will continue to have an important role. The Bible tells us that when He comes again, tongues will cease, as will the gifts of prophecy and knowledge, making way for “that which is perfect” (1 Cor 13:8–12).
- Paul made a point of talking about love because this was a particular issue for the Corinthian church. The members had different spiritual gifts, including the ability to preach in tongues, but, sadly, did not exercise them out of love. To them, he gave the reminder that love is greater than the



speaking of tongues, and that love endures forever. By this, he did not mean that only love is needed, or that tongues are unnecessary, but, rather, the two must go together.

## **Misconception 16**

In dealing with the tongues question, Paul showed that it was an inferior and restricted gift (1 Cor 14:1, 4, 19, 22; 12:29, 30).

John H. Pickford (p. 40)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- Unlike Pickford, the Bible does not make any reference to “inferior” spiritual gifts: all are necessary for the building up of the church (1 Cor 12:7–11, 29, 30). Paul gives us the analogy of a physical body and church whose members all have their use, and who need to work together for the common good (1 Cor 12:14–22; Eph 4:16).
- Although Paul encouraged the Corinthian church members to desire the gift of prophecy, he also talked about the need for spiritual tongues (1 Cor 14:18, 39). He did not promote one gift at the expense of the other. In fact, he encouraged them to speak with tongues, but added that they should go on to pursue other gifts, such as prophecy, which can edify the church (1 Cor 14:4–5).

## **9.6 A biblical interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14**

1 Corinthians 12 and 14 are often cited by Christians who believe that the speaking of tongues is one of many spiritual gifts, and a less important one at that. However, if we read these chapters carefully, we see that Paul makes a clear distinction between the spiritual tongue which signifies the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the special gift of different kinds of tongues.

So, to reiterate, firstly, there is the spiritual tongue which accompanies the baptism of the Holy Spirit and is the sign of baptism

in the Spirit (Acts 2:4; 10:44–46; 19:6). In the absence of this tongue, we can categorically conclude that a person has not received the Holy Spirit. Paul refers to this tongue when he talks about himself “pray[ing] in a tongue” (1 Cor 14:14) or “pray[ing] with the spirit” (1 Cor 14:15). It is directed at God, and not to man, and therefore does not require interpretation. No one understands the tongue, not even the speaker himself (1 Cor 14:2). As mentioned earlier in this section, this tongue utters mysteries in the spirit (1 Cor 14:2), edifies the speaker (1 Cor 14:4) and is a sign for unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22).

Secondly, there are the different kinds of tongues for preaching. These are spoken to the congregation and constitute a special gift whose purpose is to edify and build up the church. They have to be interpreted to reveal their meaning (1 Cor 14:27).

However, as mentioned earlier, the Corinthian members used their spiritual tongues inappropriately. For example, they spoke in tongues to the congregation, even when there were no interpreters. Therefore, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 14 to correct their disorderly practice. In this chapter, he made the following points:

- One who prophesies—that is, delivers the word of God in words of understanding through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to edify the church—is greater than one who speaks in tongues without interpretation (1 Cor 14:4–5).
- Tongues spoken to the congregation without interpretation cannot edify anyone (1 Cor 14:6).
- Even musical instruments produce distinctive sounds, enabling listeners to appreciate the music (1 Cor 14:7).
- If a trumpet produces a non-distinctive sound, no one would prepare for battle (1 Cor 14:8).
- If a person speaks in tongues to the congregation without an interpreter, no one would be able to understand him; it would be as if he were “speaking into the air” (1 Cor 14:9).
- There are many different languages in the world. Those who do not know the language are as foreigners to the one who speaks, and likewise the speaker to the listeners (1 Cor 14:10–11).

- In church, it is better to speak five intelligible words to teach others, than ten thousands words in a tongue (1 Cor 14:19).
- If unbelievers see members in the church assembling to speak to one another in tongues, they will consider it madness (1 Cor 14:23).
- In church, all things should be done for edification, and speaking in tongues is no exception (1 Cor 14:12, 26).
- The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. God is not a God of confusion, but of peace (1 Cor 14:32–33).

The different kinds of tongues for preaching are one of many spiritual gifts, whose purpose is to build up the church. The Holy Spirit apportions this gift to whomever He wills (1 Cor 12:8–11); not every person who has the Holy Spirit will be given it. Therefore, when Paul spoke of this gift, he spoke of it in association with other gifts, particularly the gift of interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 14:26–27; 1 Cor 12:10, 28, 30). This clearly distinguishes it from the tongues which mark the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Corinthian church members abused their spiritual gifts, using them to parade themselves before others. Therefore, in the same chapter, Paul gave them the following protocol for the use of spiritual tongues during services:

- Only two or, at most, three people to speak in tongues (v. 27).
- Members to take turns when speaking in tongues (v. 27).
- The tongues should be interpreted (v. 27).
- When there is no interpreter, the person is to keep silent in the church—that is, to refrain from speaking publicly to the congregation. He should only “speak to himself and to God”—that is, to speak in tongues in personal prayer (v. 28).

Concerning the gift of “different kinds of tongues”, this enables a person to speak to the congregation whenever there is an interpreter (1 Cor 14:27–28). However, there may be occasions when a person is suddenly compelled by the Holy Spirit to speak a message from God

(cf. Job 32:17–22; Jer 20:9). At such times, God will arrange for an interpreter, who might be the speaker himself, or another person. Paul advises that, in such a situation, the first speaker should keep silent and allow the other person, who has just received the revelation, to speak. In this way, members can prophesy one at a time so that everyone can learn and be encouraged (1 Cor 14:30–31).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians to exhort them to maintain order when the congregation assembled, so that all things could be done for edification (1 Cor 14:26). He said, “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion but of peace... Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:32–33, 40). However, Paul did not want them to misunderstand him and to end up despising, or even prohibiting, the speaking of tongues. Therefore, he added, “Do not forbid to speak with tongues” (1 Cor 14:39). He also shared his own experience with them: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays... I will pray with the spirit... I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all” (1 Cor 14:14–15, 18).

### **Misconception 17**

There are many charismatic assemblies where believers are said to be filled with the Holy Spirit but who all appear to be in a state of disorder. If they are not crying out loud or shouting, they are singing out loud, calling it a spiritual song. Then there are those who display a lesser state of disorder by all speaking in tongues during an assembly or speaking in tongues in small groups. Can this situation be found in the Scriptures? Even in chapter 14 of First Corinthians where the issue of speaking in tongues is much discussed, speaking in tongues during an assembly is not advocated. Only two or at most three may speak, and must do so in turn and in the presence of interpreters. At the same time, we read in verse 33 of the same book, “God is not a God of confusion but of peace”. Confusion does not come from God for we must remember that our God is a God of peace.

Ende Hu (pp. 7–8)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- There would certainly be an issue of disorderliness should believers shout out in a hysterical show of emotion in church.

However, we need to appreciate that there are some actions that are genuinely inspired by the Holy Spirit.

- The phenomenon of singing spiritual songs is documented in the Bible. Paul says, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Cor 14:15). He also teaches us to speak “to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19; cf. Col 3:16). The singing of spiritual songs is enabled by the Holy Spirit and is not a sign of disorderliness.
- When Paul tells the church to allow only two or three members to speak in a tongue (1 Cor 14:27), he is talking about the use of tongues to preach, not the use of tongues in personal prayer. Just as we would not think of limiting the number of believers who can pray together in church with words of understanding, so we would not limit the number of people who can pray together in tongues.
- In writing, “God is not a God of confusion but of peace”, Paul was addressing the Corinthian church’s lack of order during services which was brought about by their use of tongues to preach to the congregation in the absence of interpreters, and their failure to take turns.
- Paul never forbade the speaking of tongues. Rather, what he did was to give the church a protocol for their proper use. He was careful to say, “Do not forbid to speak with tongues” (1 Cor 14:39).

## 9.7 The Pentecostal experience

Pentecost, also called the “Feast of Weeks”, marks the end of the grain harvest. In Greek, it means “the fiftieth” as Pentecost fell on the fiftieth day after the Passover, counting from the second day of the feast (Lev 23:15–17).<sup>6</sup> In biblical times, it was a most joyous occasion and brought Jews together in Jerusalem from all over the world. God chose the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ to

<sup>6</sup> *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, eds. Pfeiffer, Charles F., Vos, Howard, F. and Rea, John (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975).

pour down His Holy Spirit on the chosen people of the new covenant. In this way, Pentecost came to have a whole new significance.

The speaking of tongues was a dramatic sign, bringing curious expatriate Jews to see what was happening. It provided the perfect opportunity for Peter to testify that the descent of the Holy Spirit, which they had just witnessed, had come about because Jesus Christ—whom they had crucified—had resurrected and been exalted (Acts 2:22–23, 30–33). In this way, the gospel of salvation reached its first intended audience, in accordance with the plan of God (Acts 1:8).

### **Misconception 18**

Many churches interpret Acts 2:1–13 as an event where the disciples spoke not in spiritual tongues, but in foreign languages, arguing that these were what the expatriate Jews heard. They also make the point that Christians who claim to speak in tongues today speak an unintelligible tongue and that their experience is different from the Pentecostal one.

### **What does the Bible say?**

When the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, though the tongues spoken by the disciples could be understood, we can conclude that they were not foreign languages for the following reasons:

- We note that the Holy Spirit filled the disciples and enabled them to speak “with other tongues” (Acts 2:4). Paul later described these tongues as the speaking of mysteries to God (1 Cor 14:2). However, they carry an inherently meaningful message that can be revealed when interpreted (1 Cor 14:27–28). What happened at Pentecost was that God gave the listening Jews the ability to interpret the tongues. The result was that they heard the disciples “speaking in [their] own tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). It was the Holy Spirit giving a sign to the Jews (1 Cor 14:22),

and it resulted in their conversion: their consciences were pierced, they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:37–41).

- The ability to interpret tongues is a gift that is given by God, as He wills (1 Cor 12:10–11, 30; 14:26–28). Sometimes, it may be given as a temporary gift as, and when, the need arises so that listeners can hear and understand a special message from God. This was the experience of the devout Jews on the day of Pentecost. We also see how the circumcised believers who were at the house of Cornelius received the same gift: the Holy Spirit opened their ears to hear Cornelius and his household “speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:44–46).
- Experience tells us that when even a small group of people speak at once, the listeners will have difficulty discerning what is being said. This would be all the more true with a large group of people. On the day of Pentecost, there were some 120 disciples who were filled with the Holy Spirit, all speaking in tongues at the same time. The mixture of sounds and the volume of noise would have been great. Surprisingly, in this situation, the expatriate Jews from some fifteen nations heard them speaking in their own native languages (Acts 2:8). Not only that, but they could discern the content of the message, which was “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11).
- It is interesting to note the specific reference to “devout men” (Acts 2:5). These were the devout Jews whose ears God opened to understand the spiritual tongues in their own native languages (Acts 2:5–12). In contrast, there were “others” (Acts 2:13) who made no sense of what they heard and even mocked the disciples, accusing them of being drunk. We can therefore conclude that if the tongues spoken by the disciples were foreign languages, then both the devout Jews and these other people would have understood what they were saying.

### **Misconception 19**

On the Day of Pentecost, it is to be noted that the speaking was not in an unknown tongue, but in the several tongues of all the nationalities gathered on that occasion. So far as the Scripture record shows, there was no repetition of this.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 72)

### **Misconception 20**

The gift of tongues at Pentecost was distinct languages of distinct peoples for the giving of the gospel to them (Acts 2:6–11)... Pentecost stands alone. Its baptism was never intended to be a recurrent experience.

John H. Pickford (pp. 12 and 14)

### **Misconception 21**

[Referring to Acts 2:1-4] When the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke in other tongues. In a state of ecstasy, they spoke languages of other nations that they themselves could not understand but which were understood by the people from other nations... After the Pentecost, the phenomenon of tongue-speaking surfaced in the Corinthian Church and other places. Although they too “spoke in tongues,” it was no longer the distinctive Pentecostal phenomenon. This is because this phenomenon is not the constant accompaniment of the Holy Spirit’s descent, but rather a concluded phenomenon. Therefore, those who hope to resurrect this distinctive miracle in this present age mistakenly assume that the absence of this miracle means the absence of the Holy Spirit. They have misunderstood the true meaning of the Spirit’s descent. The Holy Spirit who descended on Pentecost still remains with us to this day.

Kurosaki Koukichi

In summary, the above writers argue that:

- On the day of Pentecost, the disciples spoke in the different languages of the expatriate Jews.
- When the disciples spoke in the foreign languages, they were in a state of ecstasy.
- The phenomenon at Pentecost was a unique manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s descent.



- The Holy Spirit manifested at Pentecost has been with Christians up until today.
- One should not equate the absence of tongues with the absence of the Holy Spirit.
- The present-day experience of speaking in tongues differs entirely from that of Pentecost.

### **What does the Bible say?**

- The disciples were speaking in spiritual tongues, not foreign languages. The expatriate Jews understood the tongues because God gave them the temporary gift of interpretation. Another similar event took place when the household of Cornelius received the Holy Spirit, and the circumcised believers heard them “speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46).
- When the disciples spoke in tongues, they were not in a “state of ecstasy”. On the contrary, their minds were alert and clear, for they were aware that the people around them were amazed and that some were even mocking them (Acts 2:5–8, 13–15).
- The definitive sign of receiving the Holy Spirit is the speaking of tongues (Acts 10:46). The tongues are not necessarily understood (1 Cor 14:2). When the believers in Ephesus spoke in tongues, there is no indication that anyone understood the tongues, but it was evident that they had received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–6).
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit became a common phenomenon, each time accompanied by the speaking of tongues. This became a central theme of the gospel, as preached by the apostles. For example, Peter told the Jews to repent and be baptized so that they could also receive this gift (Acts 2:38).

- The five instances of Spirit baptism recorded in Acts (Acts 2:4; 8:17; 9:17; 10:44; 19:6) indicate that the Pentecostal experience was repeated, proving that it was far from a unique event.

## 9.8 The gift of interpreting tongues

The gift of interpreting tongues can be found among believers in the true church today. When we look in the Bible and at the experiences of members in the True Jesus Church, we see that there are a number of ways in which the Holy Spirit can enable a person to understand spiritual tongues:

- As in the case of the devout Jews at Pentecost, God can enable listeners to hear the tongues directly in their own native languages.
- God reveals the meaning of the tongues to the listeners after the speaker has finished speaking.
- The speaker speaks in tongues which he does not understand at the time of speaking, but God enables him to interpret the message afterwards.
- The speaker interprets the tongues as he speaks, a phrase at a time.
- The speaker speaks in tongues and can understand what he himself is saying, but knows that the Holy Spirit will move someone else to interpret. In such cases, an interpreter will invariably come forward to interpret. The message will always be consistent with the understanding of the speaker.
- The speaker of the tongues does not understand the tongues, but God moves a second person to interpret.

## **9.9 Testimonies from members of the True Jesus Church**

### **9.9.1 Testimony 1**

This testimony concerns Brother Ahgui Chen from Boai village, Heping county in Taichung, Taiwan. Brother Chen fell ill with tetanus on 26 July 1959 and became bedridden. Although he was under the care of three different doctors, they were not successful in treating him. There came a point when he decided to refuse medical treatment, choosing instead to pray to God for His mercy and healing. At the same time, the church made intercessory prayers for him.

During one particular prayer session, a sister, by the name of Qiuju Lin, interpreted her own spiritual tongues into the native Taiwanese hill tribe dialect. The message was: “There is sin in this household.” On hearing this, the congregation repented. However, subsequent prayers for Brother Chen remained unanswered.

During another prayer session, Sister Lin, again, interpreted her tongues, saying, “Among those praying here, there is someone who has committed a mortal sin. This person must be cast out. Do not let him pray.” When this matter was investigated, the revelation was found to be true; they discovered a believer who had sinned. The church obeyed the Holy Spirit and excommunicated the person.

When they next prayed for Brother Chen, he started to get better: his breathing, countenance and general well-being improved. Then, during a morning prayer session, Sister Lin interpreted the tongues to give Brother Chen the message: “Now you will be cured of your illness.” From that day on, Brother Chen made a marked recovery: he could eat, sit up, stand and, finally, walk. Before long, he fully recovered.

### **9.9.2 Testimony 2**

In 1927, when the True Jesus Church was first established in Taiwan, the members in Taichung held their services on the upper floor of the

business premises of Elder Philemon Kuo. At that time, there were very few preachers, so the church assigned members to take turns in delivering sermons. After the sermons, the preachers would give feedback to the speakers.

One Sabbath afternoon, a brother, by the name of Guichuan Yang, had just finished delivering a sermon and was about to step down from the pulpit when, suddenly, he was compelled by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues to Deacon Qian. Brother Yang spoke distinctly and urgently, pointing his finger at Deacon Qian in a manner that indicated a rebuke. However, Brother Yang could not understand what he himself was saying, nor could he make sense of what he was doing.

After he had finished speaking, Deacon Qian stood up and told the congregation, “What I heard just now was a message in the Fujian dialect. Brother Yang told me, ‘Although you’re in Taiwan, your heart is in Fujian. You need to evangelize in Taiwan with all your heart!’ ”

Brother Yang was a native of Taiwan and could not speak the Fujian dialect. Moreover, when he was speaking to Deacon Qian, the congregation had heard him speaking in spiritual tongues, but the Holy Spirit had moved Deacon Qian to hear the tongues in his own native dialect. It emerged that Deacon Qian, who was originally from Fujian in China, was homesick and could not concentrate on the church work. The Holy Spirit was rebuking him, reminding him to be alert and watchful and to complete the Lord’s commission. On hearing this message, he repented humbly and became more fervent in doing the church work.

### **9.9.3 Testimony 3**

One evening in 1927, in Taichung, Taiwan, Elder Gideon Huang was leading a church service. At its conclusion, the congregation knelt down to pray for the Holy Spirit. Brother Guichuan Yang was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. He understood the tongues, but knew that God would arrange for someone else to interpret. After the prayer, the person who had heard and understood the tongues felt the Spirit urging him to interpret, but did not feel brave enough to stand up.

Brother Yang then addressed the congregation, saying, “There is a brother among us who could understand the tongues which I spoke during the prayer. Please do not be afraid to stand up and interpret.”

Encouraged by his words, Brother Quan Yang (Guichuan Yang’s father) stood up and gave the following message: “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death” (cf. Heb 11:5).

God had known all along that Brother Quan Yang was sceptical about the speaking of tongues and gave him a personal message through the Holy Spirit to strengthen his faith.

#### **9.9.4 Testimony 4**

During an evening service a few months later, as the congregation was kneeling down to pray for the Holy Spirit, Brother Mouhuang Tsai from Qingshui (Taiwan) entered the chapel. The Holy Spirit moved Brother Guichuan Yang to interpret his own tongues to the congregation: “There is someone in the congregation who has committed a mortal sin.”

When the church investigated the matter, they discovered that Brother Tsai had committed adultery. He was subsequently excommunicated.

#### **9.9.5 Testimony 5**

In 1947, the True Jesus Church had just been established in Korea. There were very few believers and no full-time preachers. The believers were unfamiliar with the Bible and hungered for the word of God. A particular challenge for the church was discerning heresies. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit gave the gift of interpreting tongues to Sister Rende Bai in Kimchun.

From September of that year, and over the next few years, the Holy Spirit moved Sister Bai to interpret her own spiritual tongues for the edification of the church. On each occasion, the following would occur:

- She would first pray in tongues, after which the tongues would change to enable her to preach.

- After preaching in tongues, she would herself interpret the message into Korean. (She did not understand the tongues as she was speaking; she only understood their meaning when she came to interpret them).
- The Holy Spirit inspired her to interpret the tongues slowly and clearly, to enable the congregation to understand the messages.
- She would first interpret the Bible's message and then give the relevant Bible references. When the listeners analyzed what she had interpreted, they found her words to be consistent with the Bible.

The miracle was that Sister Bai was herself unfamiliar with the Bible. Moreover, the messages that she delivered through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were able to meet the needs of the church on every occasion.

#### **9.9.6 Testimony 6**

In September 1947, Brothers Xianglong Pei and Changhuan Pu were discussing the issues of water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit with an elder from the Presbyterian Church. At the same time, Sister Rende Bai retreated to a mountain to pray, accompanied by a number of believers. Together, they asked God to guide the evangelical work being carried out by the two brothers.

After she finished praying, Sister Bai interpreted her own spiritual tongues to reveal the following message: "That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (cf. Jn 1:9-12).

On hearing this, Brother Chongpei Hong immediately left the mountain to look for Brother Pei and Brother Pu. He shared with them the message from the Holy Spirit and told them that the True Jesus Church is the body of Christ; the world will reject the church in the same manner as they rejected the Lord. But those who accept the true

gospel proclaimed by the church will be blessed, as God will make them His children.

### **9.9.7 Testimony 7**

In February 1949, water baptism was being performed in a river near the church in Kimchun, Korea. After the baptism, the members returned to the church to pray.

During the prayer, the Holy Spirit moved Sister Rende Bai to interpret her own spiritual tongues. The message was: “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (cf. Col 2:11–13).

The Holy Spirit was speaking through the tongues to teach the believers in Kimchun personally about the truth of water baptism: that it has the power to remit sins, and that it signifies a person’s death, burial and resurrection with Christ.

### **9.9.8 Testimony 8**

Brother Xianglong Pei was the first seed of the gospel in Korea. He converted to Christ in Osaka, Japan in 1941. In January 1945, he returned to Korea, where he zealously preached the truth. He also prayed hard for the True Jesus Church to be established there. However, in 1951, he gave up the ministry to do business. Two years later, his business failed, and he faced mounting debts. One night, as he was reading the Bible, he came across Psalm 94:12. As he read the words, he shed tears of repentance.

Six months later, Sister Bai gave him a message from the Holy Spirit: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested

by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (cf. 1 Pet 1:6–9).

Brother Pei was greatly comforted by these words and resumed the church ministry with an even greater zeal for God.

### **9.9.9 Testimony 9**

In 1953, a problem developed in the church in Korea: Brother Changhuan Pu was found to be behaving inappropriately towards the female believers.

On the same day when Brother Xianglong Pei was being given words of comfort by the Holy Spirit, Sister Bai interpreted a separate message for Brother Pu: “And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts” (cf. Rom 13:11–14).

Sadly, even after hearing this message, Brother Pu refused to repent. About two or three years later, he committed adultery and was excommunicated from the church.

### **Review questions**

1. What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
2. Describe the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.
3. Describe the different functions of spiritual tongues.
4. What is the difference between praying and preaching in tongues?
5. Why did God choose the day of Pentecost to pour down the promised Holy Spirit?



6. What is wrong with the following views?
- a. Every true believer has the Holy Spirit, but is not necessarily baptized with the Holy Spirit.
  - b. Believers can be filled with the Holy Spirit, without necessarily being baptized by the Holy Spirit.
  - c. There is no biblical record of any individual receiving the Holy Spirit.
  - d. A person does not necessarily perceive anything when he receives the Holy Spirit.
  - e. The experience of the Samaritan believers proves that a person may receive the Holy Spirit without speaking in tongues.
  - f. The speaking of tongues was not a common experience during the apostolic times, as evidenced by the amazement of the Jewish believers when Cornelius and his household spoke in tongues.
  - g. The speaking of tongues was a temporary sign during the apostolic period and can no longer be experienced by Christians.
  - h. Paul said that the speaking of tongues is a sign of a lack of emotional control.
  - i. Paul's question "Do all speak in tongues?" indicates that the speaking of tongues is only one of many spiritual gifts.
  - j. Paul said that the speaking of tongues is an inferior and limited gift.
  - k. Churches whose members shout out in prayer and sing spiritual songs are exhibiting behaviour that indicates confusion and disorder (cf. 1 Cor 14:33).
  - l. Paul taught that the whole congregation should never speak in tongues at the same time: only two or three should do so when there is an interpreter, and they should take turns (1 Cor 14:27–28).
  - m. The tongues spoken on the day of Pentecost were not spiritual tongues, but foreign languages.

# Chapter 10

## THE INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 10.1 Introduction

The Holy Spirit established the True Jesus Church in 1917 and began calling Christians into the one true fold through the complete and perfect gospel, in fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy (Jn 10:16). God confirmed the church's ministry by pouring out His Spirit on the believers and by giving signs and miracles. However, a number of Christian writers from other churches and denominations were sceptical about the work of the Holy Spirit and openly criticized these experiences. Their criticisms highlighted a fundamental misunderstanding of what constitutes the baptism of the Holy Spirit and what constitutes the Spirit's inspiration.

In this chapter, we shall look at the differences between these two matters, and address some of the misconceptions.

### 10.2 Some common misconceptions

#### Misconception 1

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:3

Many churches cite this verse, claiming that a person's ability to proclaim Jesus as his Saviour is sufficient evidence that he has received

the Holy Spirit. What they do not realize is that there is a distinction between the Holy Spirit's work of inspiring and convicting people to believe in Jesus—which is what apostle Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 12:3—and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The latter is the promise of Jesus, who said that the Holy Spirit would come to dwell within believers forever (Jn 14:16–17). We can confidently say that all those who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit were first inspired by the Spirit; however, it does not follow that all those who have been inspired by the Spirit have necessarily been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

We see clearly the difference between the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Spirit in a number of examples from the Bible:

Firstly, we learn that when Jesus resurrected, He appeared to a doubting Thomas. On seeing the risen Lord, he cried out, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28). Here, we have an example of someone calling on Jesus to acknowledge Him as his Lord and God, but we know that it was not until the day of Pentecost that he actually received the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we have the account of the Samaritan believers (Acts 8:14–17). They had accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ through the preaching of Philip and had even received water baptism. But significantly, they did not receive the Holy Spirit until the apostles later went to them and laid hands on them (Acts 8:14–17).

Thirdly, in the account of the disciples at Ephesus, we note that they had already believed in the Lord by the time Paul met them, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. In fact, they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. Even after Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus, they did not receive the Spirit immediately; it was only after he laid hands on them that the Holy Spirit descended on them, and they began to speak with tongues and to prophesy (Acts 19:1–6).

## **Misconception 2**

The Norwegian theologian, Fredrik Wisloff, writes:

It [i.e. the Bible] says: All Christians have God's Spirit. “But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9) . . . Who was it that

awakened you when you slept the sleep of indifference? Who convinced you of your sin? Who was it drove you to Christ and glorified Him to you? . . . Is it not the Holy Spirit that has done and is doing all this?

Fredrik Wisloff (pp. 238–239)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- The Bible's accounts of the believers in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17) and Ephesus (Acts 19:1–6) disprove the argument made by Wisloff. Both groups of believers had already been “awakened” by the time they converted to Christ, yet they had not received the Holy Spirit. It was only after water baptism and the laying of hands by the apostles, that they received the Spirit baptism.
- The spiritual awakening of a person to realize his sins and to seek Jesus is certainly the work of the Holy Spirit, for it is He who moves a person to convert to Christ. However, it is not the same as, or the evidence of, receiving the Holy Spirit.

### **Misconception 3**

Wisloff talks about the church in Corinth, quoting 1 Corinthians 3:16:

‘Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?’ The Spirit of God dwelt in their hearts without their having a clear understanding of that fact.

Fredrik Wisloff (p. 330)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- When the Holy Spirit descends upon a person, he is aware of it, as are others around him (Acts 2:33). The Corinthian believers would have understood this.
- When the Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit, it was clearly visible to Simon, for we learn that he attempted to buy this power (Acts 8:12–19).

- When Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit, the circumcised believers witnessed the event and reacted with amazement that the gift had been given to Gentiles (Acts 10:45).
- Paul’s words: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16), did not refer to their lack of understanding of the fact that they had received the Holy Spirit, but, rather, to their lack of appreciation of their status in Christ. He reminded them to value their status, to keep holy and not grieve the Holy Spirit. He added, “If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Cor 3:17).

#### **Misconception 4**

Quoting the German theologian, Johan Arndt, Wisloff writes:

Heart-suffering because of sin is the best proof that the Holy Spirit dwells in your heart.

Fredrik Wisloff (p. 252)

#### **What does the Bible say?**

- The Bible does indeed teach us that the Holy Spirit can cause a person to grieve over his sins; but He can do this even prior to a person’s conversion and baptism in the Spirit. It is therefore not definitive proof of a person having been baptized by the Spirit. We see, for example, the Holy Spirit stirring up the listeners on the day of Pentecost to respond to the gospel preached by Peter. It is recorded that they were “cut to the heart” and compelled to ask how they could be saved (Acts 2:37). The Spirit was working here to convict the listeners of their sins; but they had yet to repent, to be baptized, and to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- Apart from the Holy Spirit, the law or word of God can also prick a person’s conscience. They have the power to show

him the difference between right and wrong, and good and evil (Rom 2:14–15). For example, in the Book of Romans, Paul wrote about how he became aware of his sins through the law and his resultant inner struggle (Rom 7:21–24).

### **Misconception 5**

Concerning the claim that any one who has not spoken in tongues has not received the Holy Spirit is too absolute! From ancient times till now, there have been many devout Christians all over the world who have loved the Lord, and many who have offered themselves up to become great servants of God. Yet they may have never spoken in tongues: does it mean they did not have the Holy Spirit?

Mingdao Wang (p. 15)

### **What does the Bible say?**

- Those who are inspired by the Holy Spirit can love the Lord and dedicate their lives to Him, in much the same way as those who have received the Holy Spirit. However, a godly life per se is not proof of baptism in the Spirit.
- Cornelius was a devout man, who did works of charity and prayed constantly to God. His own servants testified to the fact that he was an upright, God-fearing man, who was well spoken of by the Jewish community (Acts 10:1–2, 22). Yet, the Bible records that he had not received the Holy Spirit when Peter first met him. It was only subsequently that he and his household received the Holy Spirit—while listening to Peter’s sermon. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was manifested by the speaking of tongues (Acts 10:44–46).
- Apollos was well versed in the Scriptures; and after learning about Jesus, he preached about Him fervently (Acts 18:24–25). He was someone with both courage and fervour for God. Yet, we learn that he could not have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as the Bible states that “he knew only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25). We can infer that it was

not until Aquila and Priscilla took him aside to explain the gospel fully, that he became aware of the baptism of the Holy Spirit that comes from Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 3:11; Jn 1:32–33; Acts 2:33).

### **10.3 Inspiration of the Holy Spirit during different historical periods**

From the Old Testament to the New Testament, we can see evidence of the Holy Spirit working to inspire people to do God's work. By looking at some examples, we can gain a better understanding of the difference between the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

#### **10.3.1 The Old Testament period**

From the beginning, God's intention was to establish His kingdom on earth. As part of His plan, He created Adam and gave him a commandment to keep (Gen 2:16–17). Although God was capable of creating more people, He created only one person in the hope of securing godly offspring (Mal 2:15). Unfortunately, Adam disobeyed Him and caused sin to enter into the world (Rom 5:12). Man lost the image of God and brought about a steep moral decline, whereby even the sons of God conformed to the evil ways of the world (Gen 4:8, 19–24; 6:1–4). There came a point when God declared in exasperation, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh” (Gen 6:3). He would simply leave man to do as he pleased. The phrase “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever” is particularly significant. It indicates that, prior to the downfall of man, God's Spirit had been constantly inspiring His children to live a pure and godly life. But now, He would leave them to their carnal ways.

After Adam, the nature of the Holy Spirit's work changed, from inspiring all of God's chosen people, to inspiring only a select few. These, He moved for the purpose of carrying out specific divine missions, as and when the need arose.

**(i) Inspiring the prophets**

Yet for many years You had patience with them,  
And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets.  
Yet they would not listen;  
Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.  
Nehemiah 9:30

For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21

During the Old Testament period, the Holy Spirit worked prolifically to inspire the prophets. He moved them to deliver messages to the chosen people and to guide them on the right path. The Bible records the examples of:

- Moses, who led and judged the Israelites through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Num 11:17f; Isa 63:10–12).
- Elisha, who received a double portion of God's Spirit, enabling him to take up Elijah's work (2 Kgs 2:9–15).
- Micaiah, who was inspired to prophesy the truth to Ahab, according to God's revelation. He refused to speak words that would merely curry favour with the king (1 Kgs 22:13–23).
- The Spirit of God coming upon Azariah, which moved him to tell King Asa and his people to destroy the idols, repair the altar of the Lord, and to enter into a covenant to seek the Lord (2 Chr 15:1–15).
- The Holy Spirit coming upon Jahaziel, to help him deliver words of encouragement to King Jehoshaphat and his people. He told them not to be afraid of their enemies, but to know that God would deliver them (2 Chr 20:14–19).
- The Holy Spirit speaking to the chosen people through Isaiah, telling them that their hearts had grown dull, that their ears were hard of hearing, and that their eyes had closed shut, for they could no longer understand the word of God (Isa 6:9–19; Acts 28:25–27).



- Jeremiah, who felt that the word of God was like a fire burning within his heart, compelling him to speak out (Jer 20:7–10).
- The Spirit of God entering Ezekiel and sending him to warn the Israelites of their rebellious behaviour, and to admonish them to depart from sin and to escape death (Ezek 2:1–7; 3:16–21).
- The Spirit of God inspiring Daniel to interpret the writings on the wall for King Belshazzar, and to foretell his death and the fall of the kingdom (Dan 5:5–31).
- The Spirit of the Lord filling Micah with power, justice and might, to rebuke the Israelites for their sins (Mic 3:8).

## **(ii) Inspiring the judges**

When Joshua died, the Israelites lost an important spiritual leader. As they settled in the promised land, they began to enjoy a life of ease and plenty, forgetting to revere and give thanks to God, or to keep holy. Worse, they followed the evil practices of the Gentiles by worshipping idols. Therefore, God had no choice but to act to make them change their ways: He allowed enemy nations to attack them. However, He was also merciful: each time they repented and cried out to Him for deliverance, He would answer their prayers by inspiring judges to come out to save them.

We see God moving different judges to deliver His people:

- The Spirit of God came upon Othniel, to enable him to defeat Cushan-Rishathaim, the king of Mesopotamia, thereby giving Israel forty years of peace (Judg 3:9–11).
- The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, so that he sounded the trumpet to muster the Israelites against the Midianites. After defeating them, the nation enjoyed forty years of peace (Judg 6:34–35; 7:19–25; 8:28).
- The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, to enable him to fight against the Ammonites. He subdued them and captured twenty cities (Judg 11:29–33).

- The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson, to give him the power to tear apart a lion with his bare hands and to kill 1,000 Philistines using the jawbone of a donkey (Judg 14:5–6; 15:12–18).

### **(iii) Inspiring the priests**

In the Old Testament, the priests were specially ordained to minister to God. They acted as mediators between God and man, making offerings and sacrifices for sins (Lev 1:3–9; Heb 5:1–3; 9:6–7). Prior to them, it was the heads of families, the patriarchs, who fulfilled this role. The Bible records, for example, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job all making offerings to God (Gen 8:20; 22:13; 26:25; 33:18–20; Job 1:5). This continued up until the period of the Mosaic Law, whereupon the priestly duties were assigned to Aaron and his descendants (Ex 29:9, 29; 40:12–15; Num 25:11–13).

The work of the priests was mainly confined to the tabernacle and the performance of religious ceremonies. Rarely, it seemed, did the Holy Spirit inspire them to carry out special tasks. In fact, there is only one biblical account, which is of God speaking through Zechariah to rebuke the chosen people for transgressing His commandments. Unfortunately, instead of listening, the people stoned Zechariah to death (2 Chr 24:20–22).

### **(iv) Inspiring the kings**

The kingdom of Israel was established through the reign of Saul (1 Sam 9:17; 10:1). Prior to this, God alone had reigned over the Israelites. But the people insisted on having a king, just like the other nations. There were a couple of reasons for their request. Firstly, prophet Samuel's two sons were unfit to lead them: they failed to walk in God's ways, choosing instead to take bribes and to pervert justice (1 Sam 8:1–5). Secondly, Israel was constantly under siege from enemy nations (1 Sam 8:7; 12:12–18).

Sadly, history tells us that Israel's kings led the people with limited success. For example, Saul disobeyed God and was rejected by Him

(1 Sam 13:8–15; 15:10–23). He was replaced by David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 16:1–3). Next, Solomon became king (1 Kgs 1:28–40), but he turned to idolatry on account of his foreign wives. His son, Rehoboam, refused to take the advice of the elders and saw his kingdom divided (1 Kgs 11:1–13; 12:1–20).

Of all the kings of Israel and Judah, the Holy Spirit only really inspired Saul and David. The Bible describes how the Holy Spirit came upon Saul, so that he prophesied among the prophets and was “turned into another man” (1 Sam 10:6–10), and led the chosen people to defeat the Ammonites (1 Sam 11:1–11). We also learn of the Holy Spirit coming mightily upon David from the day that he was anointed (1 Sam 16:13). The Spirit inspired him to prophesy that Christ would be king forever, and that the people would follow this one shepherd (2 Sam 23:1–5; cf. Ps 89:20–29; Ezek 37:24–28); reveal the specifications for the construction of the holy temple, which he later gave to Solomon to complete (1 Chr 28:11–12); call Christ “Lord” and to know He would prevail over His enemies (Mt 22:42–44; Ps 110:1); and prophesy about Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (Acts 1:16; Ps 41:9).

#### **(v) Inspiring others**

Apart from inspiring the prophets, judges, priests and kings, the Holy Spirit also came upon a number of other people, to empower them to lead the chosen people and to accomplish special tasks. They included:

- Joseph, who was given wisdom to interpret Pharaoh's dreams and to prophesy concerning important events that would befall Egypt (Gen 41:25–32, 37–41).
- The makers of the priestly garments (Ex 28:2–3).
- Bezalel, who was given wisdom, understanding and knowledge in all areas of craftsmanship, to make the tabernacle and its furnishings: artistic designs, works of gold, silver and bronze, wood and precious stones (Ex 31:2–5; 35:30–33).
- The seventy Israelite elders, who were empowered to help Moses judge the chosen people and to prophesy (Num 11:16–17, 24–25).

- Eldad and Medad, who were moved to prophesy in the camp (Num 11:26–29).
- Joshua, who was filled with the spirit of wisdom, to act as the successor to Moses (Num 27:15–20; Deut 34:9).
- Amasai, chief of thirty mighty men, who was inspired to know that God was on David's side and to lead his men to follow him (1 Chr 12:18).
- The people of Judah, who were moved to do what King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded at the word of the Lord (2 Chr 30:12).
- Elihu, who admonished Job without partiality (Job 32:15–22).

#### **A. Different characteristics of the Holy Spirit's inspiration and baptism**

Even though the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the baptism of the Holy Spirit are both works of the same Spirit, they are different in nature and bring about different outcomes.

*The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is seen through:*

- His coming upon a person to help him accomplish a specific task or mission. Once completed, the Holy Spirit leaves him (Ezek 3:22, 24; 37:1).
- His empowering of a person, for example, by giving him courage, even in the face of death. But when the task is completed, the Spirit departs, and the person is no different from anyone else (1 Kgs 18:17–46; 19:1–14).
- His election of a person to become the servant of God—someone who is sent out to accomplish a specific mission (Ezek 2:1–3).
- The absence of spiritual tongues (Greek: *glossolalia*).

The *baptism of the Holy Spirit* is seen through:

- The evidence of spiritual tongues (Acts 10:44–46; 19:6).
- His continual indwelling within a believer (Jn 14:16–18).
- His power to transform a believer’s life and to give Him power to do all things through Christ (Acts 4:19–20; 5:40–42; Rom 8:2; Gal 5:16; Eph 3:16; Phil 4:13).
- The sealing of a believer as a child of God, an heir of salvation, and a future partaker of glory with Christ (Rom 8:15–17; Eph 1:13–14).
- His intercession for a believer during prayer (Rom 8:26–27).

## **B. Why the baptism of the Holy Spirit?**

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit worked to inspire the prophets, judges, priests and kings, to enable them to guide the Israelites to walk on the correct path. There were a number of periods when the spiritual condition of Israel was restored, but ultimately the nation became too corrupt to be helped in this way (Jer 17:9; 13:23). The only way that they could turn back to God and keep His statues and ordinances was for the Holy Spirit to come and live inside their hearts. God therefore inspired the prophets to speak of a time when He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28–29)—on people of all races and colour, age, gender and status—to turn their hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. Also, He would write His laws upon their hearts (Ezek 36:26–27; Jer 31:31–34). The fulfilment of these prophecies would serve to realize Moses’ heartfelt yearning: “Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!” (Num 11:29).

### **10.3.2 Before the descent of the early rain**

Prior to the descent of the Holy Spirit in the early rain period, there was a transitional period between the Old Testament and the New

Testament. People entered into an era of grace, which was marked by the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Saviour, into the world (Mk 1:14–15; Jn 4:21–23; Jn 1:17). Through His subsequent death on the cross, He ended the era of the Mosaic Law (Mt 11:13; Col 2:14–17; Heb 9:10). The Holy Spirit worked during this interim period to inspire certain people to proclaim Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah and to declare His mission to save humankind. The inspirational work of the Holy Spirit during this time is outlined below.

**(i) Proclaiming Jesus' arrival into the world**

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her the news that she would soon have a son, whom she was to name Jesus. Later, when she went to Zechariah's house to see Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt at Mary's greeting. Elizabeth was filled by the Holy Spirit to proclaim:

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Luke 1:42–45

The Holy Spirit had inspired her to understand the significance of Mary's pregnancy and moved her to refer to the baby as "my Lord" (Lk 1:43). She believed that the message from the angel would be fulfilled.

When we read Mary's response, which takes the form of a beautiful song of praise, we again see the Holy Spirit inspiring her choice of words:

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;  
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.  
For He who is mighty has done great things for me,  
And holy is His name.  
And His mercy is on those who fear Him  
From generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with His arm;

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.  
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
And exalted the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things,  
And the rich He has sent away empty.  
He has helped His servant Israel,  
In remembrance of His mercy,  
As He spoke to our fathers,  
To Abraham and to his seed forever.

Luke 1:46–55

## (ii) Giving insight into the future ministry of Jesus

When John the Baptist was born, his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, which moved him to prophesy about the work that would be accomplished by John and by Jesus:

Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,  
For He has visited and redeemed His people,  
And has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
In the house of His servant David,  
As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets,  
Who have been since the world began,  
That we should be saved from our enemies  
And from the hand of all who hate us,  
To perform the mercy promised to our fathers  
And to remember His holy covenant,  
The oath which He swore to our father Abraham:  
To grant us that we,  
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
Might serve Him without fear,  
In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;  
For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,  
To give knowledge of salvation to His people  
By the remission of their sins,  
Through the tender mercy of our God,  
With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;  
To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:68–79

We see here that Zechariah talks about the ministry of Jesus to deliver the Israelites, in accordance with the covenant made by God to Abraham. Zechariah's son, John, would serve as God's prophet, walking before Jesus to prepare the way.

We also see the Holy Spirit at work, moving the righteous and devout Simeon, who had been awaiting the consolation of Israel. On entering the temple, the Spirit revealed to him the identity of the child who had been brought in by His parents to be circumcised. He was inspired to take the baby up in his arms and to bless God:

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,  
According to Your word;  
For my eyes have seen Your salvation  
Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,  
A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Your people Israel.

Luke 2:29–32

Through the Holy Spirit, Simeon also prophesied about the nature of Jesus' work. He said to Mary, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:34–35).

Also in the temple, was an elderly and faithful prophetess by the name of Anna, a widow aged eighty-four. She worshipped day and night with fasting and prayers. Like Simeon, she instantly realized who the baby was. The Bible records: "And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Lk 2:38). From this account, we can see that it was the Holy Spirit who revealed to her the identity of the baby Jesus and moved her to testify to the people concerning Him.

### **(iii) Revealing the identity of Jesus**

When Jesus came to the place where John the Baptist was performing baptism, John realized that He was the Messiah:

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He



was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."

John 1:29-34

Previously, John the Baptist had not known who the Messiah was. But he saw the Holy Spirit coming down upon Jesus like a dove and heard the voice of God speaking to reveal His identity (Jn 1:31-34). This direct revelation from the Holy Spirit enabled John to proclaim with authority that Jesus was the Son of God, who had come to take away the sins of the world, and that He would baptize people with the Holy Spirit.

During the ministry of Jesus, very few people shared John's awareness: some thought that Jesus was John the Baptist; others thought He was Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. But when Peter was asked by Jesus who he thought He was, he replied with confidence, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Mt 16:17).

The Lord Jesus told the multitude that He was the living bread that had come down from heaven: anyone who drank His blood and ate His flesh would have eternal life, and would be raised up on the last day. Many of His disciples could not accept this teaching, saying, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" (Jn 6:60) and promptly withdrew from Him.

Seeing this, Jesus asked His twelve disciples, "Do you also want to go away?" (Jn 6:67).

Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn 6:68-69).

Other people had come and gone because they did not truly know who Jesus was, but, unlike them, Peter knew the Lord and resolved to follow Him to the end. His understanding obviously came from

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It brings to mind Paul's words: "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3).

In summary, during the Old Testament period and prior to the descent of the early rain, the Holy Spirit actively inspired people. But this was not the baptism of the Spirit for a number of reasons:

- The work of God in the flesh had to be completed before His work in the Spirit could begin—that is, Jesus had to return to heaven before the Holy Spirit could descend. Hence, Jesus told the disciples, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (Jn 16:7).
- Jesus had to be glorified: to resurrect, ascend to heaven, and sit at the right hand of God, before He could send the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:30–33). John records, "On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (Jn 7:37–39).
- Jesus had to assume the role of Mediator between man and God, at which point He would pray to the Father to send the Holy Spirit: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever" (Jn 14:16).

### **10.3.3 The early rain period**

In the period of the early rain, the Holy Spirit worked in a new way: He began to inspire both believers and non-believers. Specifically, He actively moved those who heard the gospel to believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, to repent and be saved. At the same time, He inspired those who had already believed and received the baptism of the Spirit

to continue walking in God's way and to carry out His ministry. We shall now look at these aspects of the Holy Spirit's work.

**(i) Urging people to turn to the Lord**

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:3

The phrase "Jesus accursed" in the Greek text is *Anáthema*<sup>1</sup> *Ieesoús*,<sup>2</sup> denoting a curse that comes from the inner heart; "Jesus is Lord" in the original text is *Kúrios*<sup>3</sup> *Ieesoús*, referring to a cry from the heart. The former is something that one would expect from the enemies of Jesus, for it is unthinkable that anyone who is inspired by God's Spirit could utter such words. The latter are words of conviction, arising from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Mt 10:32; Rom 10:9–10).

On the surface, it seems a simple enough matter for a person to confess that "Jesus is Lord". After all, what can be so difficult about declaring one's faith before others? However, if we consider the situation in society during the apostolic era, we come to realize that converting to Christianity or publicly professing one's faith was nothing short of a challenge:

- Many Jews found it hard to accept that Jesus was the Messiah because He did not fit their expectations. The Bible describes His lowly background and His absence of "form or comeliness" (Isa 52:14; 53:1–3). During His ministry, He was often met with incredulity and disdain (2 Cor 5:16; Mt 13:53–58).
- At the time, any Jew who accepted Jesus as their Lord would have been excommunicated from their community of faith (Jn 9:22) and probably persecuted as well (Acts 8:1–3; 9:1–2; 22:4; 26:9–11). Confessing "Jesus is Lord" was

1 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G331.

2 Ibid. Strong's reference no. G2424.

3 Ibid. Strong's reference no. G2962.

tantamount to denying Yahweh as God.

- The Greeks were exposed to different philosophies, including Gnosticism. These would have made it difficult for them to accept that God, a divine being, could come in the flesh to die on the cross (1 Cor 1:18–23; 1 Jn 4:2–3).
- Under Roman rule, whoever publicly confessed, “Jesus is Lord”, risked accusations of treason against Caesar. If found guilty, the penalty was death (Jn 19:12–15; Acts 17:6–8).
- Idol-worshipping Gentiles would have had to give up gods they could see for an invisible God who demanded their sole allegiance (1 Cor 12:2–3).

So, we can appreciate that, were it not for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, few people would have believed in Jesus Christ, or declared their faith openly.

Indeed, from the Book of Acts, we see that the Holy Spirit worked actively from the day of Pentecost to move great numbers of people to repent and accept the gospel. We see, for example, the Holy Spirit inspiring:

- The Jews, observing the Feast of Pentecost, to be aware of their sins and to seek salvation through Jesus Christ. Some 3,000 people received baptism (Acts 2:37–41).
- Peter to heal a man lame from birth and to preach to an astonished Jewish crowd about Jesus. He rebuked them for putting Jesus to death and urged them to repent. Some 5,000 people converted to Christ (Acts 3:12–26; 4:4).
- The Jews to believe in the Lord on account of the miracles performed by the apostles. The Bible records that the number of believers increased day by day (Acts 5:12–14).
- Lydia to be enlightened by the gospel preached by Paul and to receive water baptism, along with her family (Acts 16:14–15).
- The jailer, responsible for Paul and Silas, to ask how he could be saved. Following this, he and his whole family were baptized into the Lord (Acts 16:30–34).

## (ii) Guiding and prospering the church

The early church expanded rapidly from a small group of believers into a mighty force that changed the world (Lk 12:32; Acts 17:6). A significant factor in her dramatic growth was the willingness of the members to make sacrifices—sacrifices of their wealth, material possessions, personal safety and, even, their very own lives. We see in their actions the fulfilment of Jesus’ teachings about the attitude required of Christians: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mt 16:24). “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (Jn 12:24).

Where did this motivational drive come from? A believer can only sacrifice himself for God when he has attained a true awareness of who He is and the magnitude of His love. We see such an attitude manifested in Paul, who understood that his purpose was to live for Christ (Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 5:14–15). This was why he was able to count all things as loss (Phil 3:8), and why he could rejoice in suffering (2 Cor 11:23–33; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 4:6–8). Such a God-centred outlook is only possible when a person has been profoundly touched by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; Eph 3:16–19). And when it happens to all the believers in the church collectively, it is inevitable that the church will grow and prosper.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost resulted in the repentance and baptism of some 3,000 people. The new believers devoted themselves to prayer in the temple and also sold their possessions, laying the proceeds at the apostles’ feet for the benefit of all. The word of God spread in such a way that the number of disciples increased in Jerusalem, and even included many priests (Acts 2:44–47; 4:32–35; 6:7).

As we read the remarkable account of the early Christians, we see lives that were lived out in marked contrast to the selfishness of the world. We can conclude that this was the work of the Holy Spirit, who was stirring up their hearts. These believers were inspired to understand the great love of the Lord and to respond by loving Him and their fellow brethren in return.

After Stephen was martyred, the church in Jerusalem began to be greatly persecuted. Aside from the apostles, the majority of believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. These dispersed Christians continued preaching the gospel at risk to their own lives. God supported their work mightily through signs and miracles. In this way, the gospel reached Samaria and even led to the conversion of Simon the sorcerer, whom everyone had previously revered. The apostles sent Peter and John to the Samaritan believers; and when they had laid hands and prayed for the believers, they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:1–17). This event marked a historical episode which theologians often refer to as the “Samaritan Pentecost”.<sup>4</sup>

The disciples who were scattered during the persecution reached as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. Initially, they preached the gospel only to the Jews, but, before long, believers from Cyprus and Cyrene came to Antioch and preached to the Hellenists. God worked with them in such a way that a great number converted. When news of the gospel bearing fruit in Antioch reached the church in Jerusalem, the apostles sent Barnabas to them. When the latter saw for himself the great grace of God, he rejoiced and exhorted them to remain faithful and steadfast in the Lord (Acts 11:19–23). From that time onwards, Antioch became the centre of the Gentile Christian community. Christianity had finally become a faith for all nations.

From the accounts of God’s work in Samaria and Antioch, we come to appreciate the great power of the Holy Spirit. In the face of persecution, the gospel continued to spread far and wide, reaching Samaria and the Gentile world. Nothing was able to halt the progress of the church because the Holy Spirit was constantly inspiring the believers to preach the gospel and to live lives of self-sacrifice.

### (iii) **Entrusting the church with a great mission**

But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles).

Galatians 2:7–8

<sup>4</sup> Erdman, Charles R., *The Acts: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966).

Peter was chosen by God to be an apostle to the Jews, whereas Paul was chosen to be an apostle to the Gentiles. While their work focused on different audiences, they did not preach exclusively to these groups (see Acts 10:44–48; 15:7; 9:19–22; 13:44–46). Moreover, what both apostles had in common was that they preached the same gospel, were greatly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and were cognizant of their calling.

Paul referred to himself as “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13) and declared that his mission was from the Lord Jesus (Acts 22:21; 26:17–18). He proved to be a faithful worker, carrying out significant pioneering work abroad, until he was finally imprisoned (Eph 3:1; 6:20) and martyred (2 Tim 4:6–8). He succeeded in taking the Christian message to many Gentile cities.

In Galatians 2:8, we come across the phrase “work effectively.” In the original Greek text, the word used is *energeo*, which means “to be at work” and “the power of miracles.”<sup>5</sup> This leads us to understand that it was the Holy Spirit who inspired Peter to become an apostle to the Jews and empowered him to accomplish his mission. Likewise, it was the Holy Spirit who called Paul to become an apostle to the Gentiles and gave him extraordinary power. Hence, Paul says:

That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient.

Romans 15:16–18

Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

2 Corinthians 12:12

As Christians today, we, too, have been called by God to become members of the body of Christ. Just as each part of a body has different functions, we need to understand that we have been entrusted with different gifts and duties (1 Cor 12:4–30). To enable the body of Christ to grow, we need to carry out our respective roles in co-operation with each other (Eph 4:11–16). We should know what spiritual gifts

5 *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1992). Strong's reference no. G1754.

we have, and what type of work the Holy Spirit is inspiring us to do. Importantly, we also need to have the sacrificial spirit of the early workers, such as Peter and Paul, who were willing to obey the Lord to the end (Acts 21:10–14). When we do God’s work with this type of heart, then the power of Pentecost will be manifested in today’s true church—power that can truly shake the world.

#### (iv) **Foretelling future events**

For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:21

There were a number of prophets in the early church who spoke through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to reveal the will of God to the disciples (Acts 13:1; 15:32; 21:8–9; Eph 4:11), and their work was reminiscent of the Old Testament prophets. In the Book of Acts, we see how the Holy Spirit inspired Agabus to foretell a great famine over the entire world, which later occurred during the time of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:27–28).

The Holy Spirit also gave prophetic messages to apostle Paul, indicating what lay ahead in his ministry. Paul had resolved to go to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21), but the Holy Spirit testified to him in every city that chains and tribulations awaited him there. In Tyre, the disciples were inspired by the Spirit to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:3–4). Finally, at the house of Philip, the Holy Spirit, again, spoke through Agabus, telling Paul that he would be bound by the Jews in that city and delivered up to the Gentiles (Acts 21:8–11). Paul understood clearly what would befall him, but, for the sake of completing his ministry, resolved to go nonetheless. The prophecies were duly fulfilled (Acts 21:27–36).

Aside from foretelling future events through prophecies, the Holy Spirit also inspired people through visions. The best known example is John’s experience, as recorded in the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:1–3). In this book, we learn that the Holy Spirit revealed a number of visions to John. For example, he saw:



- The glory of the Lord. He was told to record all the visions that he would see into a book, and to send it to the seven churches (Rev 1:10–16).
- A throne in heaven with One seated on it. It signified that God would extend His grace, but would also execute judgment (Rev 4:2–3; cf. Heb 4:16; Mk 16:15–16; Jn 12:48).
- A vision in the wilderness, of a woman sitting on a scarlet beast. This was a prophecy of a powerful earthly nation, political body, or ideology that would emerge to oppose God (Rev 17:3).
- A vision atop a high mountain, of a great city, which was the holy Jerusalem, coming down from heaven from God. It was revealed to John that this was the true church, the bride of Christ, in all her glory (Rev 21:9–26; cf. Eph 5:31–32).

#### (v) **Sanctifying believers**

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

2 Thessalonians 2:13

According to this Bible verse, the stages to salvation are: our calling from God, belief in the truth, and sanctification. Concerning sanctification, Paul points out that it comes about through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16; 1 Pet 1:2). This is because:

- Through Adam, man was sold to sin and became its slave. A person may therefore wish to do what is right, but he is powerless to do so through his own efforts (Rom 7:14–24).
- The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of jealousy, who makes a person aware of his sin and guides him to walk on the right path (Jn 16:8–9; Gal 5:17–18; Eph 4:30).
- The Holy Spirit gives a believer power from above, to set him free from the law of sin and death, and to help him put to death the deeds of the flesh (Lk 24:49; Rom 8:2, 13; Gal 5:16).

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit is crucial for a Christian's sanctification and salvation. For this reason, Paul reminds us: "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19). Through his prayer for the church in Corinth, He also highlights the importance of the abidance of the Holy Spirit: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

In summary, we can see from the above examples that the Holy Spirit inspired many different people during the period of the early rain—both those who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and those who had not.

### **10.3.4 Prior to the descent of the latter rain**

Sometime after the apostles died, the early rain period ended as the Holy Spirit stopped descending. There developed a lapse of over a thousand years before the Holy Spirit was poured out once more in the early 1900s. During this time gap, the Holy Spirit did not stop working altogether (cf. Jn 5:17), but continued inspiring many devout Christians. We know this to be the case because of the fact that Christianity, as a religion, did not disappear altogether. Rather, people continued to draw near to God and to serve Him. Moreover, the Holy Spirit was preparing the hearts of believers to receive the outpouring of the latter rain.

#### **(i) Inspiring believers to walk in the truth**

The New Testament marks a time of grace and justification by faith. Through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, God's righteousness was manifested apart from the law (Rom 3:21–28; 8:1–4). The Bible says that people cannot be justified by works of the law; justification comes about through faith in Jesus (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:22). However, this does not mean that Christians can do whatever they like and indulge the flesh (Gal 5:13). On the contrary, they have to remain holy (2 Cor 6:14–18) and not abuse the freedom given to them by God. Hence, Paul emphasizes "faith working through love" and the importance of keeping the commandments of God. James also

teaches us that “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:14–16, 26). All these requirements far exceed the formality of, say, physical circumcision (Gal 5:6; 1 Cor 7:19).

The faith of a Christian is not based on words or theory—actions matter (1 Jn 3:17–18). The Bible teaches us how to live out our faith in a real and practical way:

- We should love one another, just as the Lord Jesus has loved us. When we do this, others will know that we are His disciples (Jn 13:34–35).
- We should be the salt and light of the world. When others see our good works, they will give glory to our Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:13–16).
- We should listen to and keep the word of God in order to receive His blessings (Lk 11:27–28).
- It is not the hearers of the law who are justified before God, but the doers of the law (Rom 2:13).
- If we listen to the word of God, but do not apply it, we will be deceiving ourselves (Jas 1:22–25).
- If we fail to do the will of the Father, we will not be able to enter the kingdom of God—even though we may preach in the name of the Lord Jesus and perform mighty miracles (Mt 7:21–23).
- We need to live out a pure and sincere faith, as demonstrated through our actions (Phil 2:12–18; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 1:5).

After the withdrawal of the Holy Spirit, it would have been inevitable that Christians were affected by the spiritual void. From history, we know that some failed to lead godly lives, but there were also many devout believers who led holy lives during this difficult period and brought great honour to the name of the Lord. Theologians have often claimed that these people were filled by the Holy Spirit, when, in fact, they were merely inspired by Him.

In truth, it is not only those Christians who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit who can live godly lives; those who have not yet been baptized can do so as well. It brings to mind the example of

a well-known person in the Book of Acts, as described by the author, Luke:

There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always... he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God... So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.”

Acts 10:1–4

Cornelius was well known for his charitable works and service to God. Even his servants testified of him, saying, “Cornelius the centurion, a just man, one who fears God and has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews” (Acts 10:22). We can conclude that his faith was borne out of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, for it was not until Peter preached to him and his household, that he received the baptism of the Spirit (Acts 10:44–46).

## **(ii) Inspiring believers to preach the gospel**

Prior to His ascension, Jesus commanded the disciples to go out into the world to preach the gospel of salvation (Mk 16:15). Today, this commission falls to all of us who have been chosen by the Lord, for we are His witnesses (Lk 24:48). We should therefore be brave to testify of the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20) and to share the gospel freely, in the same way that we received it (Mt 10:7–8).

God is righteous and loving: He does not want anyone to perish, but wishes everyone to repent and be saved (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9). To accomplish His divine purpose throughout history, God chose different evangelists after His own heart to do His work, inspiring and guiding them through His Holy Spirit. These workers, in return, often sacrificed everything for Him—sometimes, even their lives. They accomplished great things: embarking on global missions, venturing into undeveloped and, at times, dangerous places, and suffering great afflictions for God. They reprov'd sins, urged people to repent, and established countless churches. However, we need to be aware that, while the work of such evangelists was immensely significant, it does not mean they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Their work can be likened to that of the Old Testament prophets, who were inspired

by the Spirit of God to manifest an unyielding faith. Both groups of workers achieved great things, but neither were baptized with the Holy Spirit.

In the period before the latter rain, the church deteriorated spiritually. She no longer had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The perfect gospel was lost, and there were no longer signs and miracles. Yet Christianity continued to exist, and a limited gospel continued to be preached, whereby missionaries proclaimed Jesus Christ as Saviour and urged people to repent of their sins. It is possible that some workers at that time preached out of their own will, rather than God's, but we need to recognize that there were many genuine and faithful workers who actively undertook God's work.

### **(iii) Inspiring believers to undertake literary evangelism**

Literary evangelism has always played a vital role in the propagation of the gospel. It was employed by the early church to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Saviour, and is still employed today. It is particularly useful because it can reach audiences far and wide, and can withstand the test of time.

God chose many people throughout history to engage in this specific ministry. The Bible tells us that the saints of old wrote the Old Testament books through the inspiration of God (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21). Also, the very fact that we have access to the New Testament Bible and information about church history is because the early church workers cared to put pen to paper, working under the inspiration of God's Spirit (Eph 3:1-5; Rev 1:1-2; 1 Cor 7:40). Likewise, it is on account of God's workers disseminating the message of Jesus Christ over the past centuries, that Christianity has become the global religion it is today.

Present-day Christians benefit from a plethora of literature, which has been the outcome of the Holy Spirit's work in moving people to impart knowledge through the written word. Examples include:

- The formation of Bible societies all over the world, and the translation of the Bible into many languages.

- The compilation of *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* by James Strong, first published in 1890 by Abingdon Press, New York. This work enabled those who could not read the original text to benefit in the same way as those who could.
- The compilation of gospel literature proclaiming Jesus Christ as Saviour to people all over the world.
- The writing of reference books detailing the history and geography of the Bible, including archaeological discoveries that prove its integrity.

All of the above have served to tell the world about Jesus. Though some of the literature has only delivered the gospel in part—for their writers have only known in part—they have fulfilled an important role in paving the way for the revelation of the full and complete truth by the true church.

### **10.3.5 The latter rain period**

We are now in the period of the latter rain. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which had ceased for over a thousand years, is now being experienced by believers in the true church once more. However, we need to be aware that the Holy Spirit continues to inspire different Christian denominations and individuals, because it is God's plan for the gospel to be preached throughout the world (Mt 24:14) and for believers to ultimately enter into the Lord's one true flock (Jn 10:16).

However, this does raise some questions: If the different denominations are inspired by the Holy Spirit, why are their beliefs not in complete accord with the Bible? And why have they not yet joined the true church? There are a number of reasons. Firstly, many denominations do not have the truth because they have inherited erroneous teachings and traditions from their founders. But when the true church shares the complete gospel with them, they, too, will have the opportunity to know and obey the truth. Secondly, it is only those believers who are devout and genuinely seeking the truth, who will be called by the Holy Spirit to be joined as one flock with the true church (Jn 10:16). Any denomination or individual who rejects the truth will continue to lead a separate existence outside of the flock.

## Misconception 6

Does this movement [i.e. the charismatic movement] really come from God? This is a big question. First, this movement caused great excitement in the churches at the beginning, and many servants of God in other countries received unusual grace, and thousands were led to believe in the Lord. The gospel thus spread to various places throughout the world. At the same time, many believers were guided to lead holy and victorious lives. Among them were leaders such as Moody, Spurgeon, Torrey, Simpson, Moller, Alexander and Roberts, etc. But this charismatic movement and the servants of God were not united, and we find it difficult to believe that this movement belongs to God. The people in this movement often thought that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, but their actual work did not surpass that of the well-known workers mentioned above. It was estimated that Moody alone led nearly a million sinners to the Lord. The power he received from the Holy Spirit was incomparable, causing even the atheist sect to close its doors on account of his teachings. Just imagine, is there any one from the charismatic denomination who can match him? Why is it that all the servants of God cannot unite with one another?

Ende Hu (p. 7)

## What does the Bible say?

- The so-termed “charismatic movement” (which, incidentally, the True Jesus Church has sometimes been categorized under) preaches that the speaking of tongues is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46). It upholds God’s prophecy that people will receive the Holy Spirit in this way (Acts 2:38–39; Joel 2:28–29).
- The work of evangelists, such as Moody, in leading millions of people to believe in the Lord throughout the world and encouraging believers to lead godly lives, has been due to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- The message that these evangelists preach is not the perfect gospel, for theirs is an incomplete and, sometimes, distorted message. However, their ministries have served to introduce Jesus Christ as Saviour to the world and to urge people to repentance. Therefore, their work can be likened to that of John the Baptist (Lk 3:3–6) and Apollos (Acts 18:24–28), both of whom made way for that which was better.

- Moody and other similar evangelists shared a fundamental misunderstanding regarding the speaking of tongues and did not accept it as the evidence of baptism in the Spirit.
- Jesus says, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (Jn 10:16). By this, He means that there will be devout believers who will respond to the inspiration and calling of the Holy Spirit. They will seek the true church that has been established by the Spirit, obey the truth that she preaches, and come into the one flock.
- The results of a person’s work cannot serve to prove whether he is filled by the Holy Spirit or not. When we consider the ministries of those workers in the Bible who were described as being Spirit-filled, such as Peter and Paul, it is unlikely that they ever brought as many people to God as some latter-day evangelists.
- Aside from empowering a person through Spirit baptism, the Holy Spirit can also inspire a person to do God’s work—as in the case of the Old Testament prophets.
- Finally, not everyone necessarily works through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is possible that some may work through their own will, or even through dishonourable motives (Phil 1:15–16).

In summary, the Holy Spirit worked actively to inspire the workers of God, both in the Old Testament period and in the period before the descent of the early rain. It was not until the early rain period that believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit and experienced Him dwelling within them forever (Jn 14:16). At that time, the work of the Holy Spirit was particularly dynamic, working in the hearts of the believers to inspire them to do God’s will.

In the time prior to the latter rain period, the Holy Spirit did not come upon the believers, but He inspired many devout Christians to preach Jesus Christ and to preserve the Christian faith. Their ministries can be likened to that of John the Baptist, teaching repentance and paving the way for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11; Jn 1:32–34).



This pattern of God's work brings to mind the words of the Lord Jesus: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (Jn 5:17). We understand that these words refer not to the creation work of God, for the universe has long been completed (Gen 2:1-3), but rather to His salvation work. God has been continuously inspiring people through the Holy Spirit to be saved. We see God working in this way throughout the Old Testament and continuing to do so in the present time. He will not stop until Jesus comes again (Eph 1:14; 4:30).

According to Haggai's prophecy, the work of the Holy Spirit in the period of the latter rain will be greater than before (Hag 2:9). The Holy Spirit will continue His dual work of empowering people through Spirit baptism and also inspiring them. This will continue to be the case until the gospel reaches the whole world and the Lord's sheep come together into the one true flock.

#### **10.4 A common view held by many churches**

Many churches have, until now, mistaken the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, due to their misinterpretation of the Bible and their lack of spiritual experience. Others have, unknowingly, been confused by the work of the devil. This accounts for the vehement opposition to the speaking of tongues from a number of quarters, which have made references to "tongue-speaking sects", "fanaticism" or, even, "sorcery". As we have read, comparisons have, for example, been made between Christians praying for the Holy Spirit and the ecstatic behaviour of the prophets of Baal in Elijah's time (1 Kgs 18:27). So we see serious and, sometimes, blasphemous arguments levied against the work of the Holy Spirit by some churches which are zealous to defend what they believe to be the truth.

##### **10.4.1 Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit**

The most serious sin is not blasphemy against the Son of man, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us a sober warning: "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men,

but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come” (Mt 12:31–32).

Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit a greater sin than blasphemy against the Son of man? It is simply because the Son of man came to the world in a lowly state: He was God manifested in the flesh. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, is God in His full glory. Hence, the Jews were guilty of blaspheming against the Son of man (Jn 10:30–33; 19:7), but they could still be forgiven. But after Jesus resurrected and ascended to heaven, He proved to everyone that He is God, who is worthy of everlasting praise. It follows, then, that when He manifested Himself as the Holy Spirit, He could never be blasphemed again.

Paul says, “Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers” (1 Cor 14:22). Here, the word “sign” has the meaning of a “miracle.”<sup>6</sup> Like signs of healing and the casting out of demons in the name of the Lord Jesus, spiritual tongues serve to prove the abidance of God. They are counted among the signs and wonders which Jesus says will follow those who believe in Him (Mk 16:17–18). The speaking of tongues is a sign for unbelievers, to show them that a person has received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46) and that He abides in him (1 Jn 3:24). Therefore, people who stubbornly claim that speaking in tongues is a sign of sorcery, or being possessed by evil spirits, will be guilty of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit.

#### **10.4.2 Learning from Gamaliel’s advice**

The Lord Jesus told His disciples: “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me” (Jn 16:2–3). These words were later fulfilled when the apostolic church was persecuted. Those who carried out the persecution thought that they were zealously serving God (Acts 7:54–60; 8:1–3; 12:1–3). Paul was originally among

<sup>6</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G4592.

them and was personally responsible for the deaths of many Christians (Acts 22:3–4; Phil 3:6).

It was during this turbulent time that we hear some words of wisdom spoken by Gamaliel, a Pharisee who was well respected by the Jews:

“Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men... And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it—lest you even be found to fight against God.”

Acts 5:35, 38–39

Gamaliel’s advice served to calm the wrath of the Jewish Council. He told them to leave the apostles alone, in case it turned out that they were opposing God. His words remind us of an important fact: the church is the body of Christ (Col 1:24), and anyone persecuting the church is, in fact, persecuting Christ (Acts 9:1–5). It also follows that, as the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, anyone persecuting the church, which has been established by the Holy Spirit, is persecuting God Himself. We can all learn from Gamaliel’s advice not to judge the work of the Holy Spirit rashly or carelessly.

### **10.4.3 Learning from Apollos’ humility**

Apollos was a key worker within the apostolic church, who was used mightily by God and was well regarded by the believers (1 Cor 1:12; 3:4–6; 4:6). He was a Jew born in Alexandria, a place which was the centre of Hellenistic culture and knowledge—comparable to Athens, with its emphasis on learning and public debate. Apollos was well-versed in the Scriptures and eloquent in the art of public speaking and debate. He had the ability to persuade both Jews and Greeks. On receiving instruction in the way of Jesus, he began preaching Him fervently in the synagogues.

However, Apollos only knew of the baptism of John, and not the baptism of Jesus. John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance (Acts 19:4) because his mission was to urge the people to repent (Mt 3:5–11; Lk 3:8–14). On the other hand, the baptism of Jesus was one of forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16) and rebirth (Tit 3:5).

Moreover, Jesus was the one who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33; Acts 1:5). Repentance, therefore, was not rebirth, but merely a pre-requisite for rebirth. Those who repented, but were not reborn through water baptism in the name of Jesus, were still John's disciples. Priscilla and Aquila, who were lowly tent makers (Acts 18:2–3), picked up on this deficit in Apollos' knowledge and took him aside to explain the gospel more fully (Acts 18:24–26).

There is a difference between knowing about Jesus, and knowing that Jesus is Lord and Saviour. The former is knowledge that anyone can possess and even impart to others. The latter, however, is true knowledge that is born out of faith. From the account of Apollos, we learn that:

- Knowledge is necessary, for we cannot believe in Jesus without knowing Him. But theological knowledge does not equate to faith.
- With knowledge and a heart of sincerity, one can preach and even inspire others. But without being born again through water and the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5), it is not possible to preach the perfect gospel.
- Although Apollos was both learned and skilled in the art of debate, he was still deficient in knowledge and faith.
- Apollos had the humility to be taught by two disciples of lowly status.
- When Apollos finally understood Christ's perfect gospel, he utilized his knowledge and skill to share it with others.

The humility seen in Apollos was not unique. We also see this virtue manifested by the Ethiopian eunuch, to whom Philip was sent. When Philip heard him reading from the Book of Isaiah, he asked him whether he understood what he was reading. The eunuch's meek reply was, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:31). Similarly, Luke tells us that the people of Berea "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed" (Acts 17:11–12).

Today, there are many evangelists from churches that do not have the abundance of the Holy Spirit. They can be likened to Apollos: they may be learned and eloquent, well versed in the Bible, zealous and devout in serving the Lord. They may also have the ability to teach others about the love of Christ and the principles of Christian living; but what they lack is an understanding of the complete gospel of salvation. They will therefore not be able to teach others how to be reborn of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5), or how to enter into an abundant life in Christ, or how to receive the power from above to overcome sin (Jn 10:10; Lk 24:49; Rom 8:1–2,13).

We have much to learn from Apollos, who was humble enough to learn more about Jesus from others. It is only when we have this same heart and mind, that we, too, will be blessed with a clearer understanding of the perfect gospel.

#### **10.4.4 The role of John the Baptist**

John the Baptist was the pioneering worker responsible for preparing the way for Jesus (Jn 1:19–23). When we look at the accounts of his ministry, we see someone who served God with great humility and who was able to guide people to the Saviour.

When John saw Jesus, he indicated to his disciples to follow the Christ:

Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

John 1:35–37

Later, a dispute erupted between John’s disciples and the Jews about purification. The issue was likely to have been to do with baptism. John’s disciples would have been aware that Jesus had received John’s baptism (Mt 3:13–16), and He was, therefore, technically John’s disciple. They had now discovered that Jesus was Himself performing baptism and gaining the favour of the Jews, who were beginning to follow Him. The disciples of John, therefore, came to John and complained, “Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified— behold, He is baptizing, and all are coming to Him!” (Jn 3:26).

John replied to their indignation with the words:

A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent before Him." He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.

John 3:27–30

John understood that he and Jesus had different missions to accomplish. John was not the Christ, but was rather His forerunner; he was not the bridegroom, but the bridegroom's friend. Not only was he not jealous on account of Jesus' popularity, he felt great satisfaction and joy. He was, indeed, a worthy prophet of God.

In the same way, God has long been working with many churches whose role can be likened to that of John the Baptist. They have been preparing the way for the true church, which has come to reveal the full and perfect gospel of salvation.

## **10.5 Conclusion**

We are now in the last days. The time is approaching when Christ will receive His bride—the true church. The latter rain period of the Holy Spirit has already begun, and the power of Pentecost is reaching every corner of the earth. The Spirit calls for everyone to listen with humility to the perfect gospel and to accept it because it brings salvation through Christ Jesus.

## Review questions

1. Explain why the following statements are biblically incorrect:
  - a. All those who confess Jesus as Lord will have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:3).
  - b. An awareness of our sins and a desire to seek God and His salvation are evidence that we have received the Holy Spirit.
  - c. Having the Holy Spirit is not necessarily an experience that we can perceive: Paul had to remind the Corinthian church members that the Spirit of God dwelt in their hearts (cf. 1 Cor 3:16).
  - d. An ability to grieve over our sins proves that we have received the Holy Spirit.
  - e. The speaking of tongues does not prove that we have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit; rather, it is evidenced by our ability to love and serve God.
2. Give an account of how the Holy Spirit inspired God's workers during the following periods in history:
  - a. The Old Testament.
  - b. Before the descent of the early rain.
  - c. The period of the early rain, starting from the day of Pentecost.
  - d. Before the descent of the latter rain.
  - e. The period of the latter rain, starting from the early 1900s.
3. What is the common view of many present-day churches with regards to (a) the speaking of tongues (b) the true church?

# Chapter 11

## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 11.1 Introduction

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is essential for salvation. Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn 3:5). In addition, it is indispensable for our Christian journey and our service to God. The baptism of the Spirit leads to a new life in God (Ezek 37:14); power from above to contend for the truth (Acts 1:8; Eph 6:17); strength to put to death our deeds of the body (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:16); and our sanctification in Christ (2 Thess 2:13).

The Holy Spirit also has a crucial role in the church: He empowers her to proclaim the gospel to the world, in preparation for the Lord’s second coming (Mt 24:14; Rev 21:2, 9–10).

Unfortunately, many Christian churches do not know the truth concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Instead, they hold onto a plethora of misconceptions, which can be summarized as follows:

- The events at Pentecost only occurred once and were never repeated.
- The Holy Spirit descended once and for all on the early church, and all believers since then have the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit is a gift; He is not obtained through prayer and request.

The consequence of such beliefs has been that many Christians have been hindered from experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit.



In this chapter, we will analyze some common misconceptions and look at what the Bible has to teach us. May the Holy Spirit open our hearts to the word of God (Ps 119:18; Eph 1:17–18).

## 11.2 Pentecost will never be repeated

### Misconception 1

Pentecost stands alone. Its baptism was never intended to be a recurrent experience. The Spirit came but once; He now abides with God's children forever.

John H. Pickford (p. 15)

The baptism with the Holy Spirit occurred on Pentecost once for all.

H. G. Randolph (p. 19)

### What does the Bible say?

It is true that the exact events surrounding the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4) are consigned to history and cannot be repeated. However, what is equally true is that, after that day, God continued to pour down His Holy Spirit on believers. Therefore, the argument that “the Spirit came but once” is biblically unsound.

The Book of Acts records in detail some three instances when the Holy Spirit descended again, soon after Pentecost. We learn that:

- The people in Samaria accepted Christ with joy through the gospel preached by Philip, and on account of the signs that he performed. Later, when the apostles went to them to pray and lay hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:5–8, 14–17). Historians often refer to this event as the “Samaritan Pentecost”.<sup>1</sup>
- Peter was sent to preach to Cornelius and his household. During the sermon, the Holy Spirit descended on all who

<sup>1</sup> Erdman, Charles R., *The Acts: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966).

heard the word, causing amazement among the Jewish Christians, who had accompanied Peter, that this gift was now given to the Gentiles (Acts 10:9–23, 44–48). Historians often refer to this event as the “Roman Pentecost”.

- Paul met some disciples at Ephesus who had received John’s baptism, but had not yet received the Holy Spirit. He re-baptized them in the name of Jesus and laid hands on them, at which point they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–7). Historians refer to this event as the “Ephesian Pentecost”.

These historical events indicate that, far from being a one-off event, the Holy Spirit continued to be poured out on believers in the early church, giving rise to further mighty Pentecosts.

Before His ascension, the Lord Jesus told the disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:19–20). The first pronoun, “I,” refers to the Lord Jesus Himself, while the second “I” refers to the Holy Spirit, who will be with them “always, even to the end of the age.” This is because the Holy Spirit is also the “Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:6–7) and the “Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9). He is the other “Helper” whom Jesus promised (Jn 14:16).

We note, in the words of Jesus, a condition placed on the everlasting abidance of the Holy Spirit: the disciples were to teach people to keep His commandments and, by implication, to keep them as well. A conclusion that we can draw, then, is that if a faith community fails to observe the commandments of Jesus, or alters the truth, the Holy Spirit will not abide with them. This message is reinforced by another Bible passage, where Jesus is recorded telling His disciples, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:15–17).

History indicates that when the post-apostolic church changed the gospel and deviated from the teachings of Christ, the Holy Spirit ceased to descend. Even Martin Luther’s efforts at reformation failed to fully restore the complete truth. This resulted in a period of spiritual drought which lasted over a thousand years. While the Holy

Spirit continued to inspire faithful workers during this time, no one experienced the actual baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pickford's claim that "the Spirit came but once; He now abides with God's children forever" is therefore incorrect.

## **Misconception 2**

After Pentecost the gift of the Spirit is received the moment a person believes in Christ. Faith is the only condition. Peter made this plain on the day of Pentecost. 'Then Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"' (Acts 2:38). In fact, Christ stressed this same truth even before Pentecost. 'He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him shall receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.)' (John 7:38, 39). The epistles also give further confirmation as they show every believer indwelt by the Holy Spirit and conclude, 'Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His' (1 Cor 3:16; Rom 8:9).

John H. Pickford (p. 16)

## **What does the Bible say?**

Belief in Jesus Christ is certainly a key criterion for receiving the Holy Spirit, and we can see this from the communication between Paul and the churches. For example, he asked the Galatian church, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal 3:2); and told the Philippian church, "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13). However, from Paul's words, we should also note the particular importance of believing in the truth—the complete and perfect gospel of salvation—through faith. This is because only the truth, which is according to the Bible, can lead us to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Pickford quotes Paul's words out of context: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16), arguing that this verse proves that all believers have the

Holy Spirit. However, we need to understand that Paul's words were addressed to the Corinthian church, which had been established by the Holy Spirit. His words, therefore, cannot be applied to those churches which do not have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. To such churches, Paul gives the sober reminder, "Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Rom 8:9).

### **Misconception 3**

The teaching of Romans 6:3–4 is that the whole Church was united with Christ in His death on Calvary. It does not need the crucifixion to be repeated for each individual believer to say, 'I have been crucified with Christ' (Gal 2:20). Similarly the whole Church was baptized into the Body of Christ on the Day of Pentecost (1 Cor 12:13). It does not need the baptism to be repeated for the individual believer to affirm, 'I have been baptized into the One Body'.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 67)

### **What does the Bible say?**

It is true that there is no need for Christ's crucifixion to be repeated, but it does not detract from the fact that every believer must undergo both water baptism in the name of Jesus, and also the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5).

Concerning water baptism, Romans 6:3–4 states that we are united with Christ in His death at the moment that we are baptized. It follows, then, that whoever has not been baptized has not died with Christ, and so will be unable to resurrect with Him (Rom 6:5). Paul himself had the confidence to declare, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20), because he had undergone this sacrament (Acts 9:18).

The importance of water baptism can be seen in the message given by Paul and Silas to the jailer: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). At first glance, it appears that they were only telling the jailer and his family to believe in order to be saved. However, we know that this was not the case because, as we read on, we learn that the family not only believed in the gospel (Acts 16:32, 34), they also received water baptism (Acts 16:33).

Concerning the baptism of the Holy Spirit, this is equally vital. Every believer must be baptized with the Holy Spirit for salvation (Jn 3:5; Eph 1:13–14). The Bible says that when we receive the Holy Spirit, we obtain the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance, which is our salvation.

On the day of Pentecost, some 120 people received the Holy Spirit. However, this experience was separate from that of the Samaritan believers, Cornelius and his family, and the Ephesian disciples—all of whom received the Holy Spirit subsequently, at different times, and in different places. We can conclude, then, that the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was not once and for all.

Paul says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). These words were spoken to the Corinthian church which had been established by the Holy Spirit; they do not apply to churches which do not have the Holy Spirit. We need to understand that any church which does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him (Rom 8:9). 1 Corinthians 12:13 cannot be used to make the point that the whole church was baptized into Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

#### **Misconception 4**

There are but seven passages which deal directly with this baptism [i.e. baptism of the Holy Spirit]: Mt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5, 6:16; 1 Cor 12:13.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 67)

Dr W. Graham Scroggie categorizes the seven passages quoted by Sanders into three groups:

Those in which the baptism is viewed prophetically, as being yet in prospect (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33; Acts 1:5). In each of these passages there is a point of time in view. These predictions were prophetic, and therefore applicable immediately to the disciples alone. They were limited to a point of time ‘not many days hence’. To make them applicable to the believer today is to put him back before the Cross and to make Pentecost a constant necessity and an oft-repeated event.

Those in which the baptism is viewed doctrinally, in retrospect (1 Cor 12:13).

Those in which the baptism is viewed historically in present fulfilment (Acts 2:1–4; 11:15–17). It was historically necessary to give a factual basis for our faith.

The prophetic passages point forward. To what? The doctrinal passages point backward. To what? To the historical event of Pentecost. It should be noted that Peter identifies Pentecost and the experience at Cornelius' house with the fulfilment of the Lord's specific promise of the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 11:15–17).

W. Graham Scroggie

### **What does the Bible say?**

Briefly, Scroggie separates out those Bible references relating to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, according to those which are: a) prophetic (Mt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33; Acts 1:5); b) doctrinal (1 Cor 12:13); c) historical (Acts 2:1–4; 11:15–17). However, we need to note that these categories were developed through Scroggie's own devising, as the Bible makes no such distinction.

Concerning Scroggie's first "prophetic" category, we need to be clear what the verses are about. The first three Bible verses: Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16, relate to the accounts of John the Baptist baptizing people with water, and his prophecy that Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John 1:33 records John the Baptist witnessing the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove and realizing that He is the One who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:5 records Jesus saying that the disciples would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit. According to Scroggie, these five Bible verses prophesied events which were to be fulfilled on the disciples only, and within a specific future time frame, namely the day of Pentecost.

However, we see that Scroggie's argument cannot stand when we consider that, although the prophecies of Jesus were indeed fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, they also continued to be fulfilled thereafter. The Holy Spirit was poured out on believers subsequently, at different times and in different places. They included the Samaritans, Cornelius and his family, and the disciples at Ephesus. The five Bible verses that Scroggie mentions are equally relevant in all these cases and were not

meant to indicate solely the events at Pentecost. This fact is further confirmed by Peter's report to the church in Jerusalem, in which he testified that the Holy Spirit had descended on the Gentiles, making him recall Jesus' prophecy: "John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 11:15–16; cf. 1:5). From Peter's report, we can confidently say that Pentecost was indeed a "constant necessity and an oft-repeated event". Moreover, there is certainly no indication from the Bible to suggest that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his family (or any of the other believers) constituted their being "put back before the cross".

Significantly, we know that the Holy Spirit has continued to pour down on believers in this present period of the latter rain. Therefore, Scroggie's first category applies equally to the situation of Christians now.

Next, we come to 1 Corinthians 12:13, which forms Scroggie's second "doctrinal" category. He argues that the verse which reads: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit," teaches us that all believers have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ, as a matter of course. However, Scroggie has cited this verse out of context: Paul delivered these words to the Corinthian church—a church which had been established by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, they were meant to address a specific issue relating to disunity amongst its members, between the Jews and the Greeks, the slaves and the freemen. Paul told the church that all the believers are one body in Christ (cf. Eph 2:12–19; Gal 3:27–29), that there should be no distinctions among the members, and that everyone should care for one another (1 Cor 12:12–25). These verses, therefore, cannot be used to prove that all Christians today have received the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul teaches us that a faith community which does not have the Holy Spirit cannot claim to belong to Christ (Rom 8:9); and, furthermore, they have no commonality with the early church which Paul was addressing.

Finally, we come to Scroggie's third "historical" category. Acts 2:1–4 records the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the first time on the day of Pentecost, while Acts 11:15–17 records Peter's report to the church in Jerusalem, in which he talks about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his family—an experience that he

describes as being the same as the disciples' at Pentecost. As Scroggie states, these verses, indeed, talk about past historical events, but we need to note that they detail two separate incidents, proving that there was a repeat of the Pentecostal experience.

### **Misconception 5**

Writing about Dr F. B. Meyer, Sanders says:

Dr F. B. Meyer stated that some years ago leaders of the Keswick Movement, after careful consideration of the subject [i.e. the baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit], decided that the term "baptism" should be confined to the outstanding events of Acts 2 and 10 while reserving the terms "filled" or "anointed" for the experience of individual believers. The position was that the Spirit had been given to the Church during this dispensation, and given once for all, so that each member of the Body of Christ may claim his share in His gracious anointing.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 66)

### **What does the Bible say?**

The first point to make about Sanders' comments is that there is an issue of semantics here. There is no actual need to make a distinction between the "baptism of", "having" or "receiving" the Holy Spirit, for they are all one and the same thing. In fact, we see that the Bible uses a range of descriptive phrases to refer to this one experience:

- "born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5)
- "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8; cf. Acts 19:6; Lk 24:49)
- "the Holy Spirit fell upon them" (Acts 11:15; cf. Acts 8:16)
- "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 11:16)
- "gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38; cf. 11:17)
- "receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:15; cf. Acts 8:17; 10:47; Gal 3:14)
- "sealed with the Holy Spirit" (Eph 1:13)



- “renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out” (Tit 3:5; cf. Acts 2:33)

The Bible also uses the word “anoint” to refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We see its use by:

- Elder John, who, when talking about the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching believers the truth (cf. Jn 16:13), says, “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you” (1 Jn 2:27).
- Jesus, when referring to Isaiah’s prophecy: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Lk 4:18).
- The author of Hebrews, who also refers to Isaiah’s prophecy when writing about Jesus: “Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions” (Heb 1:9).

According to these verses, the word “anointing” refers to the Holy Spirit, while the verb “anoint” is used in the context of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It follows, then, that the term “anointed”, mentioned by Sanders, should have the same meaning as “baptism” of the Spirit.

Sanders is correct in bringing to our attention the fact that both Acts 2 (which records the events at Pentecost) and Acts 10 (which records the events relating to Cornelius and his household) refer to the early believers’ experiences of “baptism” in the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed by Jesus’ specific reference to these as “baptism” experiences: “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5; 11:16).

However, it is also worth our noting that Luke, who wrote the letter of Acts, used a range of phrases to describe the two events:

- “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4)
- “You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38)
- “The Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15; cf. Acts 10:44)
- “The gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out” (Acts 10:45)

- “...who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” (Acts 10:47)

The question is, was Luke referring to different matters? The answer is a categorical “no”. In all of the aforementioned passages, he was clearly writing about the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit.

There is also an inherent flaw in the argument that the term “baptism” should be confined to the “outstanding events” in Acts 2 and 10. In reality, we see that the same dramatic events were experienced by the Samaritans in Acts 8 and by the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19. Moreover, as in the cases of the disciples at Pentecost and Cornelius, the people around them witnessed the phenomena (Acts 8:17–19; Acts 19:1–7). There is, therefore, no reason to argue that one set of events warrants the label “baptism”, and not the other.

These additional biblical accounts of the Spirit baptism also serve to contradict the belief of the Keswick Movement that the “Spirit had been given to the Church . . . once for all” on the occasions recorded in Acts 2 and 10.

The second issue in relation to Sanders’ comments concerns the term “filled with the Holy Spirit”—a term on which the Bible confers a particular meaning. It refers to the state where a believer is completely directed by the Holy Spirit. Contrary to the resolution of the Keswick Movement, the Bible uses this term in the context of both individuals (Acts 6:5; 9:17) and groups of believers (Acts 2:4; 4:31).

From the Bible, we see some examples relating to the infilling of the Holy Spirit:

- The infilling of the Spirit within God’s people, prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (e.g. Lk 1:15, 67).
- The simultaneous baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit on the disciples and Paul (Acts 2:4; 9:17).
- The empowerment of Jesus and the apostles by the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1, 14; Acts 4:8–13, 31; 13:9–11).
- The fullness of joy that came from the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:50–52).
- The bestowal of extraordinary gifts on God’s workers by the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55, 59–60; 11:24).

From the above examples, we note that the Holy Spirit filled people, even prior to the day of Pentecost (Lk 1:15, 67). However, such experiences were similar to those of the Old Testament prophets, where the Holy Spirit came upon them, but did not “abide with [them] forever” (Jn 14:16). This was simply because the time had not yet arrived for the promised Holy Spirit to be poured out (Jn 7:37–39). But from the day of Pentecost onwards, we see that the infilling of the Holy Spirit was always associated with those who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. (Please read Chapter 13 for more information about the infilling of the Holy Spirit.)

### Misconception 6

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and they received power. We at once turn our eyes on the spectacular, the rushing wind, the shaking house, the fiery tongues, the speaking with tongues, the rushing crowd, and often we demand the same thing.... Pentecost can never be repeated. There can be but *one* Pentecost.

L. L. Legters (p. 48)

### What does the Bible say?

The baptism of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, with the accompanying evidence of spiritual tongues, truly warrants the description of “spectacular”. It reminds us of Paul’s words: “Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers” (1 Cor 14:22). Here, his use of the Greek word *semeion*, meaning “sign”, signifies something miraculous.<sup>2</sup> Jesus uses the same word to indicate the signs that will follow those who believe, including the speaking of new tongues (Mk 16:17–18). Through these signs, unbelievers will know that God lives with His people (1 Jn 3:24).

Concerning Legters’ claim that “Pentecost can never be repeated. There can be but one Pentecost”, we see the Bible providing evidence to the contrary. It records how Cornelius and his family received the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46); the disciples at Ephesus received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1–7); Paul claimed to speak in tongues more than

<sup>2</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1992). Strong’s reference no. G4592.

all the believers in Corinth, and told them not to forbid members to speak in tongues (1 Cor 14:18, 39). Therefore, believers in the early church who had been baptized by the Holy Spirit all experienced the miracle of speaking in tongues. It was clearly not a phenomenon that was confined to the day of Pentecost.

### **11.3 All believers have the Holy Spirit**

#### **Misconception 7**

He [i.e. Paul] affirms that every believer has been baptized in the Spirit whether he is Jew or Greek, bond or free. And the purpose of this baptism is to show the unity of the body of Christ. 'For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Greeks, bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit' (1 Cor 12:13). Observe the tense and the classes mentioned. The baptism of the Spirit is a past experience which includes all believers, no matter what was their religious, racial or social difference. When did the baptism of the Spirit take place? All believers are baptized representatively. This is seen in the historical manifestations of the Spirit in the experiences of the Jews at Pentecost and in the experiences of the Gentiles. The Scripture shows there is no other baptism of the Spirit. Of course, as Paul further indicates, positionally we are made members of that one body when we are 'made to drink of one Spirit' at conversion. This is conclusive. All were baptized in the Spirit. To insist now on a baptism experience subsequent to salvation in the face of this truth is a sheer affront to God and is an introduction of a pseudo-experience into the Christian faith.

John H. Pickford (p. 19)

#### **What does the Bible say?**

Firstly, as mentioned before, we need to understand that the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13 was addressed to the church in Corinth—a church that had been established by, and had the indwelling of, the Holy Spirit. It is not appropriate to apply them to believers or to churches without the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, if, as Pickford argues, "every believer has been baptized in the Spirit", then why did the people of Samaria not receive the Holy Spirit after they had received water baptism? The Bible records that

they only received the Holy Spirit after the apostles went to them and laid hands on them (Acts 8:14–17). We also see that the disciples at Ephesus went through a similar process (Acts 19:1–7). This begs the question: Does Pickford not consider the Samaritans and Ephesians to have been “believers”?

We need to understand that believing in Christ, being baptized in water, and receiving the Holy Spirit are three separate matters within a person’s faith journey. They should not be mistaken for being the same single experience. We see this point well illustrated in the Book of Acts, through its accounts of how the early believers came to Christ: some received water baptism before receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit (e.g. the people of Samaria, 8:14–17); others were baptized by the Holy Spirit before they received water baptism (e.g. Cornelius and his family, 10:44–48).

Thirdly, the belief that “all believers are baptized representatively” is doctrinally unsound. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a process which all believers must go through individually and personally. The experiences of the Samaritan believers (Acts 8:14–17), Paul (Acts 9:17), Cornelius and his family (Acts 10:44–46), and the disciples at Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7) all highlight this point. They received the Holy Spirit separately, at different times, and in different places. If they had already been baptized representatively at Pentecost, as Pickford claims, then their experiences would have been superfluous.

Fourthly, “to drink of one Spirit” does not occur as a matter of course at the time of one’s conversion to Christ. From the Bible, we see that this drinking of the Spirit, which is a symbolic reference to the baptism of the Spirit (Jn 4:14; 7:37–39), invariably occurs after conversion. This is well illustrated by the accounts of the believers in Samaria and the disciples at Ephesus.

Finally, far from introducing a “pseudo-experience into the Christian faith” which is a “sheer affront to God”, the apostles themselves preached a baptism of the Holy Spirit that is subsequent to the belief in Christ. They testified to a baptism that is evidenced by the speaking of tongues, and real enough to be seen and heard by all concerned (Acts 8:16–19; 10:44–46; 19:2–7).

## Misconception 8

We have no command in Scripture to be baptized with the Spirit. Any such command would be meaningless in the light of 1 Corinthians 12:13, 'For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks.' We have been all baptized in the Spirit.

John H. Pickford (p. 32)

On Pentecost the Lord sent Him [i.e. the Holy Spirit] as the Father's Promised Gift ... From that day the Spirit has held permanent residence on earth in all believers, beginning with the one hundred and twenty disciples who received Him on Pentecost, up to the present moment ... Since then, the moment a sinner becomes a member of that body of believers he immediately shares, with all its members, the gift of the Spirit.

H. G. Randolph (p. 12)

From this it follows that every child of God is baptized with the Spirit.... This is borne out by the circumstance that nowhere in the Bible are believers urged or commanded to be baptized with the Spirit.

H. G. Randolph (pp. 17 and 18)

## What does the Bible say?

There is no biblical basis for Randolph's belief that the Holy Spirit has lived with all believers since the day of Pentecost. For example, the believers in Samaria and Ephesus received the Holy Spirit after Pentecost; moreover, they did not have this experience "immediately" after they believed (Acts 8:14–17; 19:1–7).

During the apostolic times, the speaking of tongues was considered the primary evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–46). It follows, then, that if all believers today have received the Holy Spirit, they should all speak in tongues. But why is it that so many Christians and churches do not manifest this evidence?

Concerning Pickford's argument that there is no command within the Bible telling Christians to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, we, again, find evidence to the contrary. John the Baptist taught that, while he baptized people with water, Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:11). Furthermore, Jesus' teachings echoed those of John (Acts 1:5) and included an instruction to the disciples to wait for the promised Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5).

In addition, we see a great emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit within the ministries of the apostles. For example, on learning that the believers in Samaria had not yet received the Holy Spirit, Peter and John laid hands on them (Acts 8:14–17). Similarly, when Paul discovered that the disciples at Ephesus had not received the Holy Spirit, he re-baptized them in the name of Jesus and laid hands on them (Acts 19:1–7).

It is significant that the Bible positively encourages believers to seek after the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We see this in the teachings of Jesus and in the messages and ministries of the apostles. The Bible tells us that, without the Holy Spirit, a person cannot be saved (Jn 3:5) or be clothed with power (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8). The command to “receive the Holy Spirit” is aimed, then, at all believers who have not yet received the Spirit. In contrast, 1 Corinthians 12:13, which is quoted by Pickford, was directed at the Corinthian church, which had already received the Holy Spirit.

## **Misconception 9**

Today many who are praying to be filled are ignorant of the fact of His present indwelling. There can be no filling by the Spirit where the primary fact of His presence is disbelieved or ignored.... You were saved when you believed, and you received the Holy Spirit...to live in you at one and the same time that you believed God's Word about His Son.

L. L. Legters (pp. 9–10)

### **What does the Bible say?**

Like many other Christian writers, Legters contends that all Christians receive the Holy Spirit the moment they believe in Jesus. But the Bible records only one instance of this happening—when Cornelius and his family accepted the gospel (Acts 11:15–17). As we can see from the Bible, this was not the standard pattern, as illustrated by the examples of the believers in Samaria and Ephesus (Acts 8:14–17; 19:1–7).

Therefore, while belief in Jesus is an important requisite for the baptism of the Spirit, it does not follow that everyone receives the Holy Spirit as a matter of course when they accept Christ. And, importantly,

it will not be experienced by members of churches which do not preach the complete and perfect gospel. This is because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17), and He can only be found where the truth is preached.

### **Misconception 10**

Since the only passage in the Epistles which deals with our theme [i.e. the baptism of the Holy Spirit] is 1 Cor 12:13, this verse demands our most careful attention. The Book of Acts is an incomplete stage of revelation. It is the record of continued activity of the ascended Christ, as He gave shape to His Church and its doctrine, but the experiences of the apostles in founding the Church are not necessarily models for Christians today. Actually none of the experiences of the baptism in the Spirit recorded in Acts, even in the house of Cornelius, can be exactly duplicated today.

This verse alone gives us any light on the meaning and purpose of this ministry of the Spirit. Four facts emerge clearly from the text.

Every believer has been so baptized. 'Were we all'. This 'all' included even some who were guilty of immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols.

It is a past event in every believer's life. 'Were we all'. Aorist tense.

It has reference to the believer's being brought into the body of Christ, when he is united vitally and organically to Christ. Because of this union he is 'in Christ', with all the blessings that brings.

There is no distinction among believers in this respect. All privilege had come to an end, 'whether Jew or Gentile'. All disability had ceased, 'whether bond or free'. All became members of the One Body.

As it was then, so it is today. Scripture nowhere exhorts believers to seek this baptism, nor does it distinguish between believers, those who have and those who have not been so baptized.

J. Oswald Sanders (pp. 78–79)

### **What does the Bible say?**

The four points raised by Sanders concerning 1 Corinthians 12:13 are flawed for the following reasons:

- The use of the past tense in this verse was for the benefit of the Corinthian church, which had been established by the Holy Spirit.
- The message has no application for present-day churches that do not have the abundance of the Holy Spirit.



- A church that does not have the Holy Spirit cannot be “in Christ” or share in all His blessings.
- It is certainly the case that, where a church has the abidance of the Holy Spirit, there is naturally no more “distinction among believers”, as all the members are “of the one body”. However, these words do not apply to all churches.

## Misconception 11

Quoting Bishop H. C. G. Moule, J. Oswald Sanders writes:

May I say with tenderness and deep spiritual sympathy that a mistake seems to underlie the practice not uncommon now amongst earnest Christians, of ‘waiting’ for a special baptism of the Spirit in order to more effectual service for the Lord. Surely ‘by one Spirit we have been baptized into one body’. And now our part is to open in humblest faith all the avenues and regions of the soul and of the life, that we might be filled with what we already have.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 71)

Sanders adds:

The gift, though complete, awaited and still awaits the appropriation of the individual members of the Church. There are yet many who are unaware that the Spirit has been given.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 113)

## What does the Bible say?

Here, Sanders makes the point that today’s Christians are misguided in “waiting” for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He argues that the Spirit has already been given to them; the issue is that they are unaware of it.

Concerning the matter of seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit, both Moule and Sanders have overlooked the fact that this teaching was given by Jesus Himself (Lk 11:9–13; 24:49), and put into practice by the apostles and believers in the early church.

Concerning an apparent unawareness of the Spirit’s baptism, the Bible tells us that when the Holy Spirit truly baptizes a person, it leaves him and others in no doubt of it. The Bible describes it as an experience

which can be seen and heard (Acts 2:33). We can therefore conclude that the people whom Sanders describes as being “unaware that the Spirit has been given” are simply those who have not yet received the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Acts paints a picture of a Spirit baptism which is clearly discernible. For example, we note the reaction of the Jewish bystanders at Pentecost, who are described as being “amazed” (Acts 2:7) and “perplexed” (Acts 2:12) at what they had witnessed. We also learn of Simon the sorcerer who “saw” the disciples in Samaria receiving the Holy Spirit and wanted to buy this power (Acts 8:17–19). Next, we note the amazement of the Jewish Christians who witnessed the Gentile, Cornelius, and his family, receiving the Holy Spirit. The Bible specifically records: “For they heard them speak with tongues” (Acts 10:46). Then, we learn of the disciples at Ephesus receiving the Holy Spirit when Paul laid his hands on them, and, again, that “they spoke with tongues” (Acts 19:6).

We need to appreciate that the letters written by the apostles were addressed to churches which had all been established by the Holy Spirit, or else, to individuals who had received the Holy Spirit. There was, therefore, no necessity, on the part of the writers, to address fundamental doctrines that they would already have been familiar with.

In fact, if we look at the chronology of the biblical books, we see a systematic approach to the documentation of teachings relating to the baptism of the Holy Spirit: the promise of the Holy Spirit and the teaching to seek after Him are covered in the four Gospels; a detailed history of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is presented in the Book of Acts, enabling believers to understand the nature of the experience; following these are the apostles’ letters whose purpose was to encourage the believers in those churches (which had already been established by the Holy Spirit) to lead Spirit-filled lives through the bearing of spiritual fruit and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

It is unfortunate, then, that many churches have read and quoted various Epistles out of context, thinking that words spoken to those believers and churches with the Holy Spirit apply, without condition, to all believers today. This explains the consistent misinterpretation and misapplication of many verses, including the following:

- “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Cor 3:16).
- “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).
- “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13).

This shows that we need to return to the Bible, to study its teachings concerning the Holy Spirit, as presented in the Gospels, in Acts, and in the apostles’ letters—systematically and in due context.

#### **11.4 There is no need to seek after the baptism of the Holy Spirit**

##### **Misconception 12**

The expression ‘baptized with the Holy Ghost’ or its equivalent is used only six times in the New Testament [i.e. referring to: Mt 3:11, Mk 1:8, Lk 3:16; Jn 1:33, Acts 1:5 and Acts 11:16]...The quotations also show that the baptism of the Spirit was sovereignly sent. In each case, it is ‘Ye shall be baptized’, not ‘Ye may be’. No human conditions are attached to the outpouring of the Spirit. God, in His sovereign purpose, decreed Pentecost. It was not determined by the disciples’ waiting or agonizing. Many forget this. The baptism was never sought; it was sent.

John H. Pickford (pp. 14–15)

##### **What does the Bible say?**

It is certainly correct to state that “the baptism of the Holy Spirit [is] sovereignly sent”, for no one would ever claim that it is the outcome of man’s will. It is God who bestows this grace on whomever He wills, and no one can prevent Him from doing otherwise (cf. Acts 10:44–45; 11:15–17). It is also the case that God’s promise is absolute, and nowhere in the Bible does it imply that the baptism of the Spirit is

merely a possibility. However, contrary to Pickford's view, all this does not detract from the individual's responsibility to pursue after the Holy Spirit.

In the Parable of the Friend at Midnight recorded in Luke 11:5–10, the Lord Jesus Himself teaches us to pray for the Holy Spirit with persistence. At the end, He adds:

If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Luke 11:11–13

The lesson here is that an earthly father will quite naturally give his son good things on request—things that he needs in this life. However, our heavenly Father will do more than that: He will give us the very best, which is His Holy Spirit, who can lead us into an abundant spiritual life. The only condition is that we ask.

In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (Jn 4:10). "The gift of God" and the "living water" which Jesus refers to is the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44–45; 11:15–17; Jn 4:14; 7:37–39). Having access to material comforts can be likened to drinking from Jacob's well—after a while, we will thirst again because they cannot satisfy our soul (Jn 4:12–13). In contrast, the "living water" from God can become a fountain of water, springing up to eternal life inside of us. When we drink of it, we can have everlasting joy and satisfaction (Jn 4:14). The only way to obtain this living water is to accept Christ, who is the giver of this water, and to ask Him for it (Jn 4:10).

### **Misconception 13**

The Bible in no way exhorts believers to pursue for this baptism [i.e. the baptism of the Holy Spirit] and it does not make any difference to believers who have never undergone such baptism.

We often sing that beautiful hymn 'No more let sin deceive or earthly cares betray; O may we never, never grieve The Comforter away'. Is this Scriptural conception? The writer thinks not. He does not withdraw, for He

has come to abide with us forever. We need never pray with David, 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.'

J. Oswald Sanders (pp. 79, 126–127)

### **What does the Bible say?**

Contrary to Sanders' argument, the Bible does indeed encourage believers to pursue after the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In Luke 11:13, Jesus teaches, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" In John 4:10, He says, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." Paul explains that we need to seek after the baptism of the Holy Spirit because He "is the guarantee of our [heavenly] inheritance" (Eph 1:13–14).

Concerning Sanders' point about the baptism of the Spirit not making any difference to believers, the Bible reveals otherwise. Firstly, when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that there were believers in Samaria, they specially dispatched Peter and John to go to them, to lay hands on them. The Samaritans were believers who had already accepted the gospel and had even undergone water baptism. Yet, there remained something vitally missing which warranted a visit from the apostles—they had not yet received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15). Secondly, we see that when Paul went to Ephesus, the first thing he asked the disciples was whether they had received the Holy Spirit. When he ascertained that they had not, he hastened to re-baptize them in the name of the Lord Jesus and to lay hands on them, so that they could receive the Holy Spirit. So it is apparent that the baptism of the Holy Spirit mattered to the apostles. It also made a difference to the believers: He became the guarantee of their salvation (Jn 3:5; Eph 1:13–14).

Throughout the centuries, composers and psalmists have written beautiful poems and hymns under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as a way of expressing their innermost feelings for God. For example, David wrote a psalm which prophesied about the Messiah (Ps 110:1; cf. Mt 22:44; Acts 2:29–35) and which testified to the inspirational work of the Holy Spirit. David himself was a man filled with the Holy

Spirit (1 Sam 16:13) and was well aware of the treasure within him. After sinning against God, he wrote a psalm of repentance, in which he pleaded with God: “And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11). Unlike Sanders, he understood that God’s Holy Spirit can be grieved by sin and depart (cf. Eph 4:30).

Therefore, while it is the case that the Holy Spirit has now been sent to abide with God’s children forever, we also need to understand that a righteous and holy God will not strive indefinitely with those who consistently fail to walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16–17, 25).

#### **Misconception 14**

In view of the insistence in some quarters on the necessity of ‘tarrying’ in order to receive this baptism, a brief consideration of this problem will not be out of place here.... That the one hundred and twenty disciples did tarry in the upper room is an indisputable fact. And in so doing they were obeying the clear command of Jesus Christ (Luke 24:49). They obediently tarried in Jerusalem, the specific location named in that command. Is that command of Christ applicable to believers today? If so, they must make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem as do the Moslems to Mecca, for in no other place could the command be fully obeyed. The answer to the question hinges on whether or not the tarrying of the disciples caused the descent and baptism of the Spirit. The answer is emphatically, No! The Spirit descended ‘when the Day of Pentecost was fully come’, when the Risen Christ had ascended to His Father, when the day appointed before the foundation of the world for this wondrous event, had arrived.

J. Oswald Sanders (p. 71)

#### **What does the Bible say?**

Prior to His ascension, the Lord Jesus instructed the disciples, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). What followed was not an idle wait on the part of the disciples, but, rather, a wait that was accompanied by prayer and expectation. The Bible records that 120 disciples devoted themselves to daily prayer until the day of Pentecost arrived. On that day, the promised Holy Spirit duly descended, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit

and spoke in tongues (Acts 1:12–15; 2:1–4). The teaching of tarrying through prayer is still very much applicable to Christians today. Whoever thirsts for the baptism of the Holy Spirit must wait, pray and ask with patience.

The first outpouring of the Holy Spirit was indeed in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12–15; 2:1–6). However, we need to understand why it happened here: God’s intention was to call the devout Jews who had returned to this city to observe the feast of Pentecost. He wanted them to take the gospel back to their respective homelands and, in this way, propagate the gospel throughout the world. We should note that, after the day of Pentecost, there were no longer any fixed or pre-determined locations for the continual outpouring of the Holy Spirit—He was poured out in different locations, such as Samaria, Caesarea and Ephesus (Acts 8:14–17; 10:1, 44–46; 19:1–7). The necessity to wait specifically in Jerusalem was for a particular reason and time. Christians today do not need to wait there.

Concerning the point about whether the tarrying of the disciples caused the descent and baptism of the Holy Spirit, the answer has to be “yes”. The instruction to wait was given explicitly by the Lord Jesus to His disciples. In this way, they were simply following what He had earlier told them to do. Their obedience reflects the final words of Jesus: “[T]eaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). He promised His disciples that He would be with them forever, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, on condition that they took care to teach everyone to keep His commandments and, naturally, to keep them as well. It comes as no surprise, then, that they followed the instruction of Jesus faithfully and waited for the Holy Spirit. If, on the other hand, as Sanders contends, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with their tarrying in Jerusalem, then, they could simply have chosen to commence the work of evangelism immediately after Jesus ascended, and to disperse from Jerusalem to do so. Yet, we learn that they did not do this—they waited prayerfully in the place designated by Jesus, until they were clothed with power from on high.

## Misconception 15

The New Testament has never stipulated any requirements or conditions for praying for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Charismatic denominations refer to the Bible for support, but have misinterpreted its meaning. They have distorted the Bible to support their own opinions. They claim that in Acts 1:14, the apostles and some women gathered in an upper room after the Lord's ascension and 'devoted themselves in prayer' and that after 10 days the Holy Spirit descended upon them. The truth is the Bible says that they were only praying and did not pray for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Prior to the Lord's ascension they were told to stay in Jerusalem and 'wait for the Father's promise, that is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit', for which the disciples waited in the holy city. The Lord told the disciples about the coming of the Father's promise, but did not command them to pray for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Even if the disciples had not prayed, they would still have received Him because the Lord would not break His promise. He is faithful and trustworthy. They were to stay and wait in Jerusalem for the imminent promise of the Father.

Today the Holy Spirit has already descended: why do we still have to wait? In those days the disciples devoted themselves to daily prayer, enabling us to see their change on account of their knowledge of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, and their godliness from communion with the Lord and their love for one another. There is no suggestion of their praying for the Holy Spirit. We must not try to read certain teachings from the Bible.

Ende Hu (p. 10)

### What does the Bible say?

The Lord Jesus gave His disciples the following promises concerning the Holy Spirit:

- He would be with them forever and would not leave them desolate (Jn 14:16–18).
- He would guide them into all truth and declare to them the things that were to come (Jn 16:13).
- He would teach them what they ought to say and give them eloquence and wisdom in the face of opposition from their adversaries (Lk 12:12; 21:15).
- He would clothe them with power from on high, so that they could preach the gospel to the end of the earth (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8).



- He would send them out to preach the good news and give them the authority to forgive sins (Jn 20:21–23; Lk 4:18).

To receive these promises, the disciples would have to wait in Jerusalem, where they would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5). The disciples followed the Lord’s instruction by waiting ten days, during which time they “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14). The word “supplication” is particularly significant: during their wait, they made their request known to God. In short, we see the apostles engaging in three related actions: waiting, praying and making supplication. There can be no doubt as to what they were asking for: the sole purpose of their waiting in Jerusalem was for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Hu’s claim that the disciples were doing otherwise is simply invalid.

Waiting requires patience; patience is an expression of faith; and without faith, it is impossible to please God (Mt 21:22; Heb 11:6). Faith compliments patience: the more faith that a person has, the more patient he will be in waiting for God, enabling him to remain steadfast to the end. We see that when David waited patiently for God, his cries were heard (Ps 40:1).

Hu’s belief that Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit would have been fulfilled as a matter of course, without the need for prayer and supplication on the part of the disciples, is incorrect. It is equivalent to claiming that, as God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4), He will save humankind without condition and regardless of man’s efforts. However, we need to be aware that this verse indicates that, while God wishes for everyone to be saved, people also have a duty to believe in Him and to obey Him. In the same way, the Lord’s promise to send the Holy Spirit is but one part of the equation: our responsibility to wait, pray, and ask for the Holy Spirit with faith, is the other.

## **Misconception 16**

“How much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Lk 11:13). Concerning this verse, the Lord was not teaching His disciples to pursue the Holy Spirit: He was only emphasising the steadfast love of the Heavenly Father and His willingness to hear the prayers of His children. If we pray for blessings from above, the Heavenly Father

will give us these good gifts through the Holy Spirit for when the Holy Spirit is given to us, these blessings will come upon us. When we compare the promise recorded in Luke 11:13 with Matthew 7:11, we can see that our interpretation is correct. Matthew 7:11 says, “How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” The two verses give the same teaching: the verse in Matthew promises to give good things to those who ask the Father; the verse in Luke promises to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him. When we combine these two verses, we learn that good things are given to us through the Holy Spirit. Therefore Luke chapter 11 does not teach the believers how to obtain the Holy Spirit; the pleading mentioned is not a method or condition for the descent of the Holy Spirit. Some people refer to John 4:10 where the Lord said to the Samaritan woman, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give Me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water’, thinking that the method of obtaining the Holy Spirit is asking. But the Lord was only pointing out here that if the woman knew the Lord, she would ask Him for living water. In other words, asking the Lord is merely a way to get to know Him, rather than a condition for receiving living water.

Ende Hu (p. 11)

### **What does the Bible say?**

Luke 11:11–13 records Jesus talking about the natural instinct of an earthly father to love his son and to give him every good thing. He compares it to God’s divine love: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” The crux of the message is God’s willingness to give His children the very best when they ask, which is the Holy Spirit. Hu misses this key point when he says that Jesus was merely teaching about the love of God and His willingness to hear His children’s prayers.

There is an inherent contradiction in Hu’s claim that: “If we pray for blessings from above, the heavenly Father will give us these good gifts through the Holy Spirit for when the Holy Spirit is given to us, these blessings will come upon us.” Previously, on page ten of his book, he had remarked, “Today the Holy Spirit has already descended: why do we still have to wait?” If Hu’s beliefs are true, then his teaching to “pray for blessings from above” is contradictory, because he has already argued that blessings come from the Holy Spirit, who is bestowed

at the time of one's conversion. The issue is that, like many other Christian writers, Hu believes that the Holy Spirit descended once and for all at Pentecost, and that all believers now receive the Holy Spirit the moment they accept Christ.

Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13 record the same teaching of Jesus. They should be read together, to provide a clearer understanding of the Holy Spirit as one to be desired and sought after. The "good things" which Jesus talks about in Matthew 7:11 are synonymous with the "Holy Spirit" in Luke 11:13. It is unfortunate that Hu has treated them as two different matters, arguing, "When we combine these two verses, we learn that good things are given to us through the Holy Spirit."

Concerning Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (Jn 4:10), Hu argues that Jesus was simply making the point to the woman that she did not know Him. He adds that the act of asking is merely a means of getting to know Jesus better, rather than the condition of receiving the Holy Spirit.

When we consider what the Bible tells us, we discover flaws in Hu's line of thinking. The Bible says:

- The Holy Spirit is a gracious gift from God (Acts 10:44–45; 11:15–17).
- The Lord Jesus is the giver of the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:32–33).
- Whoever asks for the Holy Spirit from the Lord will be given this "living water" (Jn 7:37–39).

There can be no mistaking the fact that the Samaritan woman was asking specifically for the living water. This is because, once she learnt that the living water had the lasting ability to quench one's thirst, she said to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw" (Jn 4:15). From this biblical account, we can take heart that we, too, can ask for the Holy Spirit and, moreover, have the confidence that He will grant our request (Jn 4:10).

## Misconception 17

In Acts chapter 8, Peter and John made separate prayers for the Holy Spirit to descend upon the disciples of Samaria; they did not gather together in an assembly to pray. When the Holy Spirit descended upon Cornelius and his family, as recorded in chapter 10, it was not because they received the laying of hands or made individual requests, but because they heard and believed in the gospel.

Ende Hu (pp. 11–12)

## What does the Bible say?

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:14–17

This passage tells us that Peter and John went specifically to the Samaritan believers to help them to pray for the Holy Spirit. It records that when they laid hands on the Samaritans, the Holy Spirit came upon them. It is illogical to contemplate that the apostles could have gone to Samaria to pray on their own—they were praying for, and together with, the Samaritan believers to receive the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his family, this was a landmark event, indicating God's election of the Gentiles (Acts 11:8). God revealed His mission and purpose to Peter beforehand through a vision and dispatched him to preach the gospel to the family. In the middle of Peter's sermon, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, causing amazement on the part of the circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter. Peter said to the Jewish believers, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:47). He then proceeded to baptize the family in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 10:23–48).

This event is significant because it served to put an end to all the conventions and views previously held by the Jews about the Gentiles. Before, it was unlawful for Jews to associate with Gentiles. Now, Peter understood that no one was to be considered common or unclean, and

that God is impartial where salvation is concerned. He later related the incident to a group of disgruntled apostles and brethren back in Jerusalem, who, when finally enlightened, gave glory to God and acknowledged that, “God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18).

Through this incident, God wanted the church to understand that those who were uncircumcised were made righteous through belief in Him, and that He is God of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews (Rom 3:29–30). He had revealed the mystery, previously hidden throughout the ages, that Gentiles would become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (Eph 3:3–6). He did this through a series of signs and miracles:

- He instructed Cornelius through a vision to send his servants to Joppa to invite Peter to share the gospel of Christ.
- He revealed to Peter through a vision not to consider Gentiles as common or unclean.
- He poured down His Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his family, while they were listening to the gospel, even before they had received water baptism.

It is indeed the case, as Hu states, that Cornelius and his household received the Holy Spirit “not because they had received the laying of hands or had made individual requests, but because they heard and believed in the gospel”. However, this was a unique event, and in no way suggests that praying for the Holy Spirit and the laying of hands are unnecessary. In fact, the examples and teachings contained in the rest of the Bible indicate otherwise.

## **11.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Holy Spirit serves to guide believers to understand the complete truth (Jn 16:13) and to clothe them with power from on high (Lk 24:49). The baptism of the Spirit is the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance (Eph 1:14).

We all need to keep the commandment of Jesus, and the teachings of the apostles, to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is time to move away from erroneous teachings of the sort which claim that Christians have no need to pray for the Holy Spirit because Pentecost can never be repeated, and that everyone receives the Holy Spirit when they accept Christ.

May God inspire all Christians to become aware of the need to seek after the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And may we also learn from the reflections of some enlightened Christian writers:

It does not follow therefore that every believer has received this baptism [i.e. the baptism in the Holy Spirit]. God's gift is one thing; our appropriation of that gift is quite another thing.

A. J. Gordon (p. 67)

The Spirit of God cannot take possession of believers beyond their capacity of receiving Him. The promise is waiting; the Spirit is now in all His fullness. Our capacity of reception needs enlargement. It is at the footstool of the throne where believers continue with one accord in praise and love and prayer.

A. Murray (pp. 152–153)

Finally, let us return to the teachings of the Bible so that we can understand the truth of what it means to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. In doing so, we, too, can enjoy abundant blessings in Christ Jesus.

## Review questions

Explain why the following beliefs are unbiblical:

1. From the day of Pentecost onwards, people have been receiving the Holy Spirit when they accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour (cf. Acts 2:38; 11:15, 17; Eph 3:17; Jn 7:38–39).
2. Pentecost will never be repeated because the Holy Spirit came upon the church once and for all (cf. 1 Cor 12:13).
3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a “historical event”, while the infilling of the Holy Spirit is now a believer’s personal experience.
4. All believers received the Holy Spirit symbolically on the day of Pentecost. Teaching people to pray for the Holy Spirit adds a false experience to Christianity and is an affront to God.
5. Nowhere in the Bible can we find the command to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit because all believers already have the Holy Spirit.
6. The descent of the Holy Spirit is an accomplished event.
7. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a gift; it is not obtained through prayer.
8. The command to wait for the descent of the Holy Spirit is not applicable to present-day believers; or else, they should wait specifically in Jerusalem.
9. The disciples would not have been praying for the Holy Spirit after Jesus’ ascension (cf. Acts 1:14) because the outpouring was a promise and would have happened anyway, even without their asking.
10. The people of Samaria did not assemble with the apostles to pray for the Holy Spirit, and so Christians today do not need to come together to pray for the Holy Spirit.

# Chapter 12

## RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 12.1 Introduction

The Book of Acts presents a dramatic account of the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church:

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled.... Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."

Acts 2:1–7, 13

An emboldened Peter stood up to explain to an astonished crowd that what they had just witnessed was the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams,  
And on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;  
And they shall prophesy."

Acts 2:17–18; cf. Joel 2:28–29



He then proclaimed, “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39).

This biblical account shows that the coming of the Holy Spirit was long prophesied, and its fulfillment began on the day of Pentecost. Today, this promise is for everyone, for Paul says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

In this chapter, we shall look at what the Bible teaches us about obtaining this promise.

## **12.2 Finding the Holy Spirit in the true church**

From different accounts in the Bible, we learn of the need to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit specifically in God’s true church.

### **12.2.1 Waiting in Jerusalem**

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus instructed His disciples, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). Also, “He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’ ” (Acts 1:4–5). Jesus was very specific about their need to wait in Jerusalem as opposed to any other place. The disciples obeyed by waiting and praying there. When the day of Pentecost arrived, the promise was duly realized (Acts 1:12–15; 2:1–4).

Jerusalem is an allegory of the true church, which was established by the Holy Spirit. After the day of Pentecost, the believers in the church received the Holy Spirit wherever the apostles preached (Acts 8:14–17; 10:44–46; 19:1–7). This served to fulfill the words of the prophet Zechariah: “And it shall be that whicheckver of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the

LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain” (Zech 14:17). As rain symbolizes the Holy Spirit, we understand that this prophecy speaks of people coming to Jerusalem—the true church—to receive the Holy Spirit.

The apostolic church rightfully belonged to Jesus Christ because she was personally established by the early downpour of the Holy Spirit and had the Spirit’s abidance. Hence, the Bible refers to her as God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16); the body of Jesus (Eph 1:23); the house of God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15); and the bride of the Lamb (Rev 21:2, 9–10). The church upheld the truth, and so her faith was built upon the foundation of the apostles, the prophets and Jesus Christ (Eph 2:19–20). The gospel that the apostles preached had the witness of the Holy Spirit through signs and wonders, to help win the obedience of the Gentiles (Mk 16:20; Rom 15:18; Acts 3:12–16; Heb 2:4).

### **12.2.2 A grace bestowed through the apostles**

As we read the Book of Acts, we see a pattern whereby people who received the Holy Spirit invariably did so by first coming into contact with the apostles of God’s church. Firstly, we learn that the people of Samaria accepted the gospel through Philip and later received the Holy Spirit when Peter and John came to lay hands on them (Acts 8:14–17). Secondly, we see that Saul was called by Jesus on his way to Damascus, but did not immediately receive the Holy Spirit. It was only after the Lord sent Ananias to lay hands on him that he received this grace (Acts 9:3–17). Thirdly, Cornelius, a devout and God-fearing man who did works of charity and prayed constantly, did not receive the Holy Spirit until the Lord sent Peter to preach to him and his household (Acts 10:1–5, 44–46). Fourthly, the disciples at Ephesus did not receive the Holy Spirit when they first believed (because they had only received John’s baptism); it was only after Paul went there to re-baptize them in the name of Jesus and to lay hands on them that the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 19:1–7).

These examples show us that, during the period of the early rain, believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit when they came into direct contact with the church through the apostles. In today’s period

of the latter rain, this same principle applies: those who desire the baptism of the Holy Spirit must first come to the true church which continues the ministry of the early church and the apostles.

### **12.2.3 Identifying today's true church**

The true church, in the present time, is the church that has been modelled on the original apostolic church. The Bible refers to her as the “mountain of the Lord’s house [which] shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills” (Isa 2:2). This church is the True Jesus Church, which has been established by the Holy Spirit and has His indwelling. She preaches the truth and has the witness of signs and miracles. Since her establishment at the beginning of the last century, we see that believers have been experiencing the same mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit as 2,000 years ago. Therefore, anyone who desires the baptism of the Holy Spirit can come and seek Him in this church.

The True Jesus Church has, over the years, witnessed different people coming through her doors on account of personal evangelism and through literature evangelism. On hearing and accepting the complete gospel, people have been receiving the promised Holy Spirit. In contrast, there have been Christians from other denominations who have heard of the abidance and work of the Holy Spirit in the True Jesus Church, but have not received the Holy Spirit for themselves because of their reluctance to come to the church. There have also been cases of ministers from different denominations initially accepting the gospel preached by the church and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but eventually losing this grace on account of their reluctance to relinquish their former faiths and positions of authority in order to fully enter into the church.

### **12.3 Obeying the truth**

Just as every country is governed by a leader, so the kingdom of God—which is His church—is ruled over by God. He is our King, and we are His people (Eph 2:19; Phil 3:20). We therefore have a duty to

obey His will and His commandments. The Bible states the case for obedience to God: “Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps 119:165); “Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea” (Isa 48:18).

### **12.3.1 Examples of obedience and disobedience**

The Bible presents many examples of people who either obeyed or disobeyed the will of God. They show us that obedience and disobedience have different outcomes for the people concerned, and even for the generations that follow.

Among those who failed to obey was our forefather, Adam. God gave him a single commandment to keep: “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). Sadly, Adam disobeyed because he was unable to overcome temptation. The result was that he was cursed and banished from the garden of Eden (Gen 3:4–6, 16–19, 24). Worse, sin entered into the world from that time onwards, and humankind became bound by sin and death (Rom 5:12). It became necessary for one man’s disobedience to be counteracted by another’s obedience: Jesus Christ, the last Adam, came to the world to submit Himself to the will of God, to the point of death on the cross. But God resurrected Him, exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above all names. Through His death, Jesus destroyed the work of the devil by abolishing death and revealing eternal life (1 Cor 15:45; Phil 2:8–9; Heb 2:14; 2 Tim 1:10).

The Bible also records the example of King Saul, who despite being commanded by God to destroy all the Amalekites and their herds, decided to spare the life of the Amalekite king and to keep the best of the livestock. When Samuel later pointed out his wrongdoing, Saul not only failed to repent, he claimed that he had kept the animals to offer to God. Samuel rebuked him, saying, “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.... Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Sam 15:22–23).

An example of a man who obeyed was Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, who happened to be afflicted with leprosy. On hearing of a prophet in Israel, he went in search of him. Elisha responded by relaying him the message: “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.”

Naaman’s initial response was one of anger: “Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?”

However, his servant persuaded him, by saying, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’ ”

So Naaman relented and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, as instructed by the prophet. His obedience was duly rewarded (2 Kgs 5:1–14).

The above examples show that obedience to the word of God is a basic requirement for receiving the grace of God. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is no exception.

### **12.3.2 Obeying the gospel to receive the Holy Spirit**

In order to receive the Holy Spirit, we need to believe in Jesus and to obey the gospel. The Bible records: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (Jn 1:1). It tells us that Jesus Christ is the Word who became flesh to dwell among humankind. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except through Him (Jn 1:14; 14:6).

From history, we learn that there were people who should have known better by obeying Jesus, but failed to do so. They included many of the Jews, who rejected Jesus and crucified Him to fulfil their understanding of the law (Jn 19:7). They also included Saul, who persecuted the church out of mistaken fervour (Phil 3:5–6). Even when Jesus resurrected, the Holy Spirit was poured out, and signs and miracles were manifested to testify to the gospel preached by the apostles (Mk 16:19–20; Acts 2:1–5, 23–33; 5:12–16), many Jews, including Saul, persisted in rejecting the truth.

However, despite facing opposition, the apostles continued to preach. They proclaimed boldly, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior” (Acts 5:30–31). They also added, “And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those *who obey Him*” (Acts 5:32, emphasis added). It is significant that the apostles used the word “obey” to indicate a condition for receiving the Holy Spirit.

Sadly, history often repeats itself. The Book of Ecclesiastes says: “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). Despite the fact that, today, the Holy Spirit has descended from heaven and is evidenced by the speaking of tongues (Acts 10:44–46), many denominations dispute this biblical truth. Therefore, it seems that, just as Satan deceived Adam in the garden of Eden, so he is, again, deceiving people concerning the truth of the Holy Spirit.

We need to return, then, to those key words spoken by the apostles: “The Holy Spirit whom God has given to those *who obey Him*” (Acts 5:32). They indicate that when we accept and obey the complete gospel, as preached by the true church, God will surely shower us with His Holy Spirit.

#### 12.4 Praising God with “Hallelujah”

The Lord Jesus promised His disciples, “And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it” (Jn 14:13–14). These words teach us that we should call upon the name of Jesus when we pray. Therefore, the best way to begin our prayer for the Holy Spirit is to say, “In the name of the Lord Jesus, I pray.”

Our prayer for the Holy Spirit should be filled with praise for God, who bestows this wonderful grace. The Bible teaches us a word of praise which we can use—“Hallelujah”. It comes from the Hebrew *allelouia*, meaning “Praise the Lord” (cf. Ps 104:35; Rev 19:1). So a simple prayer could be: “Hallelujah, praise the Lord Jesus. May You fill my heart with Your Spirit,” or just, “Hallelujah, praise the Lord Jesus.”

### 12.4.1 The use of “Hallelujah” in the Bible

We come across the word “Hallelujah” most often in the Book of Psalms. They can be grouped into three categories: 1) Those that begin with “Hallelujah” (Psalms 111 and 112); 2) those that end with “Hallelujah” (Psalms 104, 105, 115, 116 and 117); 3) those that begin and end with “Hallelujah” (Psalms 106, 113, 135, 146–150). Psalms 113–118 are called the “Hallel Group Psalms”, meaning “Psalms of Praise”. Psalms 146–150 begin and end with “Hallelujah” and were called the “Hallelujah Psalms” by the early church.

In the New Testament, “Hallelujah” appears four times in the Book of Revelation: chapter 19, verses 1, 3, 4 and 6. In the first three instances, it is used in the context of giving praise for God’s almighty power over the destruction of the great harlot, Babylon, and for vindication of the martyred saints. In the fourth instance, it is used to praise the Lord as the King who reigns: “And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!’ ” (Rev 19:6). This verse provides an apt description of the sound of prayers offered up in spiritual tongues within the true church.

### 12.4.2 Using “Hallelujah” for effective prayer

Jesus teaches us: “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words” (Mt 6:7). The phrase “vain repetitions” is *battologeō* in Greek, meaning “to repeat idly”.<sup>1</sup> Its origin is likely to be from an Aramaic phrase, referring to meaningless and mechanically repeated phrases which are uttered in pagan (non-Jewish) modes of prayer.

The fact is, an effective prayer does not depend on its length or the use of repetitions; rather, it depends on whether we pray with sincerity and earnestness. Knowing this helps us to reconcile the Bible’s examples and teachings about different ways of praying, such as the act of pleading, in-depth prayers, and praising God with “Hallelujahs”. We see, for example, that the Lord Jesus Himself prayed three times in

1 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary Of Old And New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G945.

the garden of Gethsemane, saying the same words over and over again (Mt 26:44), and that He spent all night praying on the mountain (Lk 6:12). Therefore, where prayer is concerned, it is our heart that matters.

### **12.4.3 Addressing a misconception**

The writer Ende Hu talks critically about churches which advocate the repeated use of “Hallelujah” during prayer. He refers to the practice of some ministers who teach people to chant this word rapidly and repeatedly for prolonged periods of time, with the result that they enter into trance-like states and speak incoherently, or even become possessed by evil spirits. He cites Matthew 6:7 in support of his argument, concluding: “We can see that this is wrong because the Lord Jesus warned His disciples, that when they pray, they should avoid vain repetitions as the Gentiles do. Therefore, the charismatic manner of tongue-speaking does not come from the Bible.”

Unfortunately, Ende Hu has a misconceived view about praying for the Holy Spirit. There are a number of issues that need addressing:

Firstly, he has misunderstood the meaning of Matthew 6:7 for the reasons that we mentioned earlier in this section. It is a positive matter to praise God with repeated “Hallelujahs”, especially when we are praying for the Holy Spirit—as long as we do it out of a sincere heart, and not in a meaningless way as indicated by Hu.

Secondly, a person who genuinely receives the Holy Spirit is fully conscious. Moreover, the experience can be seen and heard by others (Acts 2:33; 8:17–19; 10:44–46; 19:1–7). Contrary to what Hu claims, the person does not enter into a trance-like state.

Thirdly, we need to understand that the speaking of tongues cannot, by their very nature, be understood—that is, unless God opens our ears. The Bible explains: “For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries” (1 Cor 14:2).



## **12.5 Water baptism**

Water baptism has the efficacy to forgive sins (Acts 3:8; 22:16) and enables a person to have a clear conscience before God (1 Pet 3:21). It is also part of the process that we need to go through, if we are to receive the Holy Spirit.

### **12.5.1 The way of salvation**

When the Holy Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to the Jews who had witnessed the event. He testified that the disciples had received the promised Holy Spirit on account of Jesus Christ, whom they had killed and who had now resurrected. After hearing his words, their consciences were pricked, and they asked Peter and the apostles: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Peter replied, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Peter’s answer details the way to salvation—a way highlighted repeatedly in the Book of Acts. To be saved, we need to repent, undergo water baptism for the remission of sins, and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit—usually in that order, although there are exceptional cases (e.g. Saul and Cornelius, who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit before water baptism). Water baptism, then, is a key requirement for any person who wishes to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

### **12.5.2 The relationship between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit**

Water baptism must have the witness of the Holy Spirit so that the blood of the Lord can be present in the water (Jn 19:34; 1 Jn 5:6–8). Paul writes, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). In this verse, he addresses two matters which take place in sequence. Firstly, he talks about water baptism: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”. This sacrament needs to be carried out by a baptist who himself

has the Holy Spirit, because it is the Spirit who confers the authority to forgive sins (Jn 20:22–23). Secondly, Paul talks about the baptism of the Holy Spirit: “To drink into one Spirit”. The Holy Spirit is the “water of life” which the Lord Jesus gives to believers so that they will never have to thirst again. This water will become a fountain within them, springing up into everlasting life (Jn 4:14; 7:37–39).

This sequence is consistent with that described by Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost. Moreover, we see it illustrated in the experiences of the believers in the apostolic church. However, there were some exceptions to the pattern. They included the case of Saul who was baptized with the Holy Spirit before he underwent water baptism (Acts 9:17). Here, Jesus was showing that He had chosen him to proclaim His name before the Gentiles, kings and Israelites (Acts 9:10–19). Another exceptional case was Cornelius and his family who, likewise, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit before water baptism. Again, this occurred to demonstrate God’s wisdom, and to show the circumcised Christians that His salvation grace now extended to the Gentiles (Acts 10:28, 44–48; 11:1–4, 15–18).

Today, in the True Jesus Church, we can witness many examples of people receiving the Holy Spirit prior to water baptism. These are signs of God’s grace upon those who seek after Him and His true church. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit serves to confirm the gospel that they have received and helps to establish their faith.

### **12.5.3 The correct mode of water baptism**

When Paul met some disciples in Ephesus, he asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2).

Their reply was, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”

Paul was perplexed and wondered if the baptism they had received could, in some way, be at fault. This was because, during the period of the early rain, anyone who received water baptism would also receive the baptism of the Spirit. There had to be a logical reason why the Ephesian disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 8:18–24). So Paul asked them, “Into what then were you baptized?”

Their reply was: “Into John’s baptism” (Acts 19:3).

Paul now understood. He told them, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4).

He then proceeded to baptize them in the name of Jesus. And after laying his hands on them, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1–7).

This account proves that the mode of water baptism is crucial: it must be carried out according to the instructions of the Lord Jesus and the apostles; otherwise, one’s sins cannot be forgiven, and the Holy Spirit will not be bestowed.

The Bible sets out the correct mode of water baptism:

**(i) In the name of Jesus**

Water baptism must be performed in the name of Jesus (Acts 8:16; 19:5; Acts 2:38; 10:48). This is because, other than this name, there is no other by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12). Baptism in the name of Jesus has the power to wash away sins (Acts 10:43; 22:16; 1 Jn 2:12).

**(ii) Head bowed**

The significance of water baptism is that we are baptized into the Lord’s death (Rom 6:3). Therefore, we must bow our heads to show that we are united with Christ in death (Rom 6:5; Jn 19:30). This action also reflects the penitent attitude of a sinner who is seeking God’s forgiveness (Ezra 9:6; Ps 38:4; 40:12; Lk 18:13–14).

**(iii) Full immersion**

During baptism, our whole body must be fully immersed in the water, to signify our burial with Christ (Rom 6:3–4). We see this mode of baptism recorded in the Bible, specifically: the baptism of the Lord Jesus (Mt 3:16); the baptism performed by Philip on the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36–39); the baptisms carried out by John the Baptist in Aenon, where “there was much water” (Jn 3:23).

#### **(iv) A qualified baptist**

In addition to the correct mode, water baptism must also be performed by a suitably qualified baptist. He needs to: (a) have received the correct water baptism himself, in accordance with the Bible. It would be illogical for a person whose own sins have not yet been forgiven—and who himself is not yet in Christ—to perform baptism for the remission of sins on behalf of others; (b) have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to prove that he has been sent by God (Rom 10:15; Jn 3:34; 20:21–22; Lk 4:18). This is because the power to forgive sins is vested in the baptist through the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22–23).

#### **12.5.4 Failure of many churches to baptize correctly**

Today, the majority of Christian churches have overlooked the correct mode of baptism. Common practices include baptizing people “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; with their heads facing upwards; through the sprinkling of water; and so forth. Such modes fail to comply with the biblical standard. Another issue is that those performing baptism do not fulfil the qualifications set out in the Bible. As such, there is no difference between these types of baptisms and the baptism of John the Baptist, which merely served to lead people to repentance. For these reasons, they are not effective for the forgiveness of sins and cannot enable people to receive the Holy Spirit.

### **12.6 The laying of hands**

The practice of “laying of hands” has particular significance in the Bible, both within the Old Testament and the New Testament. There were specific occasions when it was routinely carried out:

#### **12.6.1 Offering sacrifices**

The Old Testament law stipulated that when the Israelites made burnt offerings, the person making the offering had to lay his hands on the

animal's head (Ex 29:10–14; Lev 1:3–4). This action was an expression of unity between the person making the offering and the sacrificial animal. It signified that: a) the sins of the person making the offering would be imputed on the animal; b) the animal would die in his place.

### **12.6.2 Giving blessings**

In the Bible, the first record of the laying of hands for the purpose of imparting blessings related to Jacob. He laid his hands to bless Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:8–20). In the New Testament, we learn of Jesus blessing the children (Mt 19:13–15; Mk 10:13–16).

### **12.6.3 Healing the sick**

Before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples, “They will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mk 16:18). The laying of hands has the effect of healing because it confers two things: unity and blessing. It enables the minister to confer God's healing power upon the sick person and, at the same time, impart a blessing on him. Accounts of Jesus' ministry in the New Testament show us that He healed many sick people in this way (Mk 6:5; 8:22–25; Lk 4:40; 13:10–13). Also, when Paul was washed ashore on the island of Malta, he healed Publius, the father of a leading official, who had a fever, through the laying of hands (Acts 28:7–8).

### **12.6.4 Imparting spiritual gifts**

The laying of hands also has the power to impart spiritual gifts. Moses laid hands on his successor, Joshua, who was then filled with wisdom and the gift of leadership, enabling him to take care of the Israelites (Deut 34:9). Through prophetic inspiration, Paul and the elders laid their hands on Timothy so that he could receive spiritual gifts for the missionary work (1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6–7).

### **12.6.5 A sacrament**

The laying of hands can also be regarded as a sacrament (Heb 6:2). The Bible teaches us to exercise it with due care and consideration (1 Tim 5:22). Examples in the Bible include:

#### **(i) Ordaining ministers**

In the Old Testament, Moses asked God to appoint a man over the congregation so that they would “not be like sheep which have no shepherd” (Num 27:17). So God said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him.... And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient” (Num 27:18, 20). Moses did as God commanded and ordained Joshua before the people, through the laying of hands (Num 27:15–23).

In the New Testament, when the Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) complained against the Hebrews that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, the apostles told the disciples to select seven men of good reputation, who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. They did so and appointed them through the laying of hands (Acts 6:1–6).

#### **(ii) Sending out workers**

In the apostolic church, workers first had to receive the laying of hands before being sent out to preach the gospel. The Book of Acts records: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2–3).

### **12.6.6 Praying for the Holy Spirit**

The laying of hands also has particular significance in relation to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Bible indicates that, during the period

of the early rain, believers often received the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying of hands. It gives the examples of:

**(i) The believers in Samaria**

After Stephen was martyred, the church in Jerusalem suffered great persecution. The disciples were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. It was during this time that Philip travelled to Samaria to proclaim the gospel with great zeal, performing many signs and wonders. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had received the word of God through Philip, they sent Peter and John to them. The believers had already received water baptism, but not the Holy Spirit. When the apostles prayed for them and laid their hands on them, they immediately received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:1–17).

**(ii) Saul**

In the beginning, Saul opposed the gospel and persecuted the church (Phil 3:6; cf. Jn 16:2–3). He obtained letters from the high priest to authorize him to arrest the Christians in Damascus and to bring them to Jerusalem. On the way, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and chose him to be His apostle to the Gentiles. At the same time, He appeared to Ananias to tell him to go to Saul. When Ananias found him, he laid his hands on him and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus...has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). It was at this point that Saul received the Holy Spirit, and later arose to be baptized with water.

**(iii) The disciples at Ephesus**

When Paul went to Ephesus, he met some disciples who had only received John’s baptism and had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Paul promptly re-baptized them in the name of Jesus and laid his hands on them. The Holy Spirit immediately descended upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and prophesied (Acts 19:1–6).

All of the above events tell us that the early Christians often received the Holy Spirit through prayer and the laying of hands. Today, in the True Jesus Church, we can witness this same grace.

## **12.7 Being poor in spirit**

Receiving the Holy Spirit is an indispensable requirement for entry into the kingdom of heaven (Jn 3:5; Eph 1:14). The Lord Jesus teaches us the correct attitude for pursuing this kingdom: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3).

Being poor in spirit means being humble and completely emptying ourselves, to make room for the Holy Spirit to fill us and direct our lives. It is significant that, very often, it is the children in our midst who seem to receive the Holy Spirit most easily and quickly. It truly reminds us of the Lord’s words: “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3).

### **12.7.1 The churches in Laodicea and Smyrna**

In the Book of Revelation, we learn that the church members in Laodicea considered themselves rich and lacking in nothing, failing to realize that they were, in fact, “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked” (Rev 3:17). These words describe the condition of some churches today which do not have the truth, but think they do—and so are poor; do not have the Holy Spirit, but claim they do—and are blind; consider themselves holy, but are not—and so are naked. Hence, the Lord calls to them: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev 3:20).

In contrast, we learn of the church in Smyrna to which the Lord said, “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)” (Rev 2:9). We should emulate the virtues of this church, to be poor in spirit so that we might become rich in God’s sight.



## 12.7.2 Departing from non-biblical beliefs

Many Christians today take issue over the speaking of tongues, contending that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is not necessarily accompanied by spiritual tongues. Also, there are those who maintain that receiving the Holy Spirit happens as a matter of course, when a person converts to Christ. Others claim that the Holy Spirit has entered the heart of every believer on account of the events at Pentecost. Such beliefs are positive barriers to people receiving the Holy Spirit. Just as a vessel must be emptied of its old contents before it can be filled with the new, so we need to remove any erroneous theological concepts before the Holy Spirit can come into our hearts.

From the account in Acts 19 concerning the disciples at Ephesus, we see an example of those who had the humility to put aside their incomplete understanding of the gospel. Paul was forthright in asking them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

The believers replied frankly, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2).

Paul then realized that the reason they had not received the Holy Spirit was because they had only received John’s baptism of repentance. Therefore, he re-baptized them in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:3–5).

Some Christians oppose any form of re-baptism, reasoning that, as water baptism signifies our death, burial and resurrection with the Lord, we can only be baptized once in our lifetime. They fail to realize that if baptism is not performed according to the Bible, it is ineffective in removing sins and is equivalent to not being baptized at all. The importance of the correct water baptism is clear from the outcome of Paul re-baptizing the believers at Ephesus: when he subsequently laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues (Acts 19:6).

## 12.8 Holiness

Holiness is another important pre-requisite for receiving the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus teaches, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). God is holy, and without holiness no one can

see Him (1 Pet 1:15–16; Heb 12:14) or receive His grace (Ps 73:1). He has chosen us from among the nations and separated us out to be a holy people. Therefore, He expects us to be sanctified and clean (1 Thess 4:3–7).

We see that God has always demanded holiness of His people for, during the Old Testament period, He stipulated that the Israelites should keep themselves holy by keeping His statutes and ordinances (Lev 1:3–4; 11:44–47; Jer 4:4; 9:25).

The Bible advises us to “keep our hearts with all diligence, for out of it springs the issues of life” (Prov 4:23). God commanded the chosen people in the Old Testament to do this through the act of circumcision, warning that the uncircumcised would be punished (Jer 4:4; 9:25). In the New Testament, true circumcision is no longer an external or physical act; rather, it is a spiritual condition of the heart (Rom 2:27–29). Unfortunately, the Pharisees in Jesus’ time overlooked this point and emphasized external cleanliness, to the neglect of inner holiness. They paid more attention to rituals, such as the washing of hands before meals, and criticized Jesus and His disciples for eating with unwashed hands. Jesus rebuked their misguided approach, saying, “Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness” (Lk 11:39). Holiness, then, comes from nurturing a pure heart; and this was the original purpose behind God’s law.

It needs to be said that being pure in heart does not necessarily mean we have to be totally above reproach. Rather, it is a way of life whereby we continuously strive for holiness. It also entails that we repent wholeheartedly, should we stray. This is because we are human, and no one is perfect, except God (Mt 19:17; Rom 3:9–12). What is important, then, is to pursue holiness and to deal promptly with any transgressions.

We can learn from many examples in the Bible. For example, Job resolved to sit on an ash heap to repent and was duly rewarded by seeing God with his own eyes and being healed (Job 42:5–6, 10). Also, Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, repented before Jesus and was forgiven and saved (Lk 19:1–10).

God is merciful and gracious. He is willing to abide with those who are contrite in spirit, and who fear His word (Ps 103:8–9; Isa 57:15; 66:2). The Bible explains that the kind of sacrifice which He

wants is a broken spirit, and a broken and contrite heart (Ps 51:17). Therefore, we need to continually examine ourselves, to ask God to search our hearts, and to repent of any transgressions (Lam 3:40; Ps 139:23–24).

In the time of King Solomon, God made a promise to the Israelites: “Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you” (Prov 1:23). Today, in the period of the latter rain, anyone who hears God’s rebuke and turns back to Him will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We can take inspiration from David’s prayer: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:1, 10).

## **12.9 Faith and perseverance**

### **12.9.1 Faith**

God takes pleasure in people who have faith and rewards them by answering their prayers: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6). The writer of Hebrews defines faith, saying, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Also, Jesus teaches, “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them” (Mk 11:24).

### **12.9.2 An invisible God**

Today, many people find it difficult to believe in God because they cannot see Him. The Bible indeed states: “No one has seen God at any time” (Jn 1:18; cf. Jn 4:24). However, humankind is without excuse concerning His existence: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are

without excuse” (Rom 1:20). Believing in the existence of God is the very first step in our journey of faith; and with faith, the distance between God and ourselves will diminish over time.

Our faith will also grow when we take to heart the Bible’s teachings about God’s steadfast love, almighty power and faithfulness. It says:

- God is love (1 Jn 4:8). The proof is that He came in the flesh to sacrifice His life for us and to deliver us from death into life (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:7–8). Knowing this, we appreciate that there is nothing He would withhold from us (Rom 8:32).
- God is almighty (Gen 17:1) and all things are possible through Him (Mt 19:26). The Bible says: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Ps 33:6). Nothing is too difficult for God to accomplish on our behalf (Gen 18:14).
- God is faithful (Deut 7:9). Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13). God promised through Jesus that whatever we ask in faith, we will receive (Mt 21:22). So we need to believe that He will answer our prayers.

### **12.9.3 People of faith**

From the Bible, we learn of two people who demonstrated remarkable faith in Jesus. Firstly, there was a woman who had been suffering from a haemorrhage for twelve years. She approached Jesus and touched His garment, believing she would be healed. She was not disappointed, for her haemorrhage stopped immediately. Jesus told her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction” (Mk 5:34). Secondly, we learn of an official whose son was ill and at the point of death. He begged Jesus to go with him. At this critical moment, Jesus chose not to accompany him, but simply said, “Go your way; your son lives” (Jn 4:50). The man believed in His words and returned home in faith. He was duly rewarded, for his servant met him on the way and told him that his son had recovered.

#### **12.9.4 Erroneous teachings**

During the time of the apostles, there were false teachers who claimed that resurrection was a thing of the past. Their teachings threatened to spread like a virus, to destroy the faith of many people (2 Tim 2:17–18; 1 Cor 15:12–22). A similar situation can be found in Christianity today, where some church leaders claim that Pentecost has passed. Others argue that the Holy Spirit descended once and for all at Pentecost, and that He has continued to abide with Christians ever since. Like the false teachings in the apostolic period, these ideas have permeated Christianity, distorting people’s faith and preventing them from experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

We need to understand that the original day of Pentecost has indeed been consigned to history, but similar Pentecosts have occurred ever since because the Holy Spirit has continued to pour down mightily on believers. Paul says, “That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14). His words tell us that the Holy Spirit, as promised by God, will surely be showered upon all those who seek after Him with faith. This was the case in the period of the early rain, and remains the case in this period of the latter rain. We should never doubt the words of the Bible.

#### **12.9.5 Where should we pray?**

Jesus teaches: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Mt 6:6). If we take this verse literally, it means that we should find somewhere quiet to pray—a place where we can concentrate and not be disturbed. However, it also signifies the need to enter into the inner room of our heart, where we can communicate with God sincerely and earnestly.

It is certainly good practice to go somewhere quiet to pray. However, the condition of our heart is just as important. If a person fails to concentrate and allows his mind to wander, the quietest of rooms will fail to bring about an effective prayer. In contrast, a person

who prays wholeheartedly, even in a public place, will be able to please God. Jesus also teaches us the importance of being sincere in prayer, warning us not to emulate the hypocrites who loved to pray standing in the synagogues and on street corners, just so that they could be noticed by others (Mt 6:5).

Jesus often retreated from the cities and the crowds to pray in a tranquil environment and in solitude—sometimes high up on a mountain (Mt 14:23; Lk 6:12; 9:28) or in the wilderness (Mt 4:1–2; Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16). When He was in the garden of Gethsemane, He put a distance between Himself and His three beloved disciples to pray privately (Mt 26:36–40; Lk 22:39–41). But these were not the only ways in which He prayed—we also learn of occasions when Jesus prayed in the presence of the multitudes (Lk 3:21; 11:1; Jn 11:41–43; 12:27–29). He also highlighted the efficacy of communal prayers (Mt 18:19–20) and taught that the temple should be “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mk 11:17).

During the time of the early church, there appeared to be places where prayers were routinely made (Acts 10:9; 16:13) and other places which were chosen by the believers more spontaneously (Acts 21:5; 27:35). Not surprisingly, Paul teaches us to pray “everywhere” (1 Tim 2:8), indicating that it is not so much the place that matters the most, but, rather, that we pray in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

### **12.9.6 Pursuing the Holy Spirit with all our hearts**

In the Old Testament, God spoke to His people, who were in captivity in Babylon, through the prophet Jeremiah: “Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jer 29:12–13). These words remind us that we need to actively seek after God. Without His Holy Spirit, we, too, are like captives, who are unable to overcome sin, because our spirit may be willing, but our flesh is often weak (Rom 7:14–24; Mt 26:41). He gives us the power by which we can be set free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1–2, 13; Gal 5:16). We can find Him if we endeavour to call upon Him with all our heart.

## 12.10 Constancy in prayer

Constancy is the key to successful prayers. In Romans, Paul exhorts the church to be “continuing steadfastly in prayer” (Rom 12:12). He uses the verb “continue”, which translates from the Greek *proskartereo* and has a number of meanings, including, “to tarry”, “to remain somewhere”, “to continue steadfastly with someone”, and “to cleave faithfully to someone”.<sup>2</sup>

### 12.10.1 Examples of constancy

There are many biblical examples of people who showed constancy in prayer and were rewarded. They include the following:

#### (i) Abraham

When Abraham approached 100 years of age, he considered himself too old to become the father of many nations. Likewise, his wife Sarah had long passed her child-bearing years (Gen 17:17). Nevertheless, he believed in God’s promise, waiting patiently and without wavering, until he finally received it (Rom 4:19–21; Heb 6:15).

#### (ii) Jacob

On his return from Haran, Jacob wrestled with God at Penuel by night. He refused to let Him go until He gave him a blessing. In this case, it was not that God could not prevail—rather, He was so moved by Jacob’s persistence, that He chose not to. He could not help but grant his request (Gen 32:24–30).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G4342.

**(iii) Elijah**

During the reign of King Ahab, there was a drought and an ensuing famine in Israel which lasted for three and a half years (Lk 4:25). Elijah went up to Mount Carmel to pray for rain, bowing down and praying seven times. God answered his prayers: the winds began to gust, and the skies filled up with rain clouds which released their loads upon the parched earth (1 Kgs 18:41–45; Jas 5:17–18).

**(iv) A Canaanite woman**

A Canaanite woman, whose daughter was possessed by demons, came before Jesus to plead for help. At first, Jesus did not say a word. When He did reply, He told her, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24). He also added, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs” (Mt 15:26). Jesus rejected her plea a total of three times, yet the woman did not lose heart. She meekly responded, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table” (Mt 15:27). Jesus marvelled and praised her faith. Best of all, He healed her daughter.

**(v) Friends of a paralytic man**

When Jesus was teaching in a house in Capernaum, four men carrying a paralytic man came looking for Him. However, they could not get near Him because of the crowd, but they did not give up. Their persistence was revealed through their climbing up onto the roof to make an opening from which to lower the paralytic man. When Jesus saw their faith, He was moved to forgive the sins of the paralytic man and to heal him (Mk 2:1–12).

**(vi) The early church**

There came a time when King Herod persecuted the early church with great ferocity. In the course of doing so, he imprisoned Peter amidst the highest security: he ordered that Peter be bound with chains and



to be guarded by two sentries, with a further four squads of soldiers on the other side of the prison door. In the meantime, the church offered up constant prayers for his safety. God responded by sending an angel to rescue Peter (Acts 12:4–19).

### **12.10.2 The parable of the persistent widow**

The Lord Jesus gives us a parable which encourages us to pray earnestly and persistently, and never to lose heart. He says, “There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, ‘Get justice for me from my adversary.’ And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, ‘Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me’” (Lk 18:1–5). Here, Jesus makes the point that the unrighteous and uncompassionate judge acted for the widow, simply because she was persistent. He reminds us that our heavenly Father, who is merciful and compassionate, will be all the more willing to answer the prayers of His beloved children, as long as they pray earnestly and in faith.

### **12.10.3 The praying life of Jesus**

Apart from teaching us to pray, Jesus also showed us through personal example how to lead a prayerful life:

- He fasted and prayed for forty days and nights for power from above so that He could accomplish the mission entrusted to Him by the heavenly Father. He was filled by the Holy Spirit and was empowered to overcome the temptations of the devil, and to begin His ministry (Lk 4:1–15).
- He offered many night-long prayers to ask the heavenly Father to continue helping Him in His ministry (Mk 1:35; Mt 14:23, 25; Lk 6:12–13). Therefore, He was always filled with the Spirit’s power which enabled Him to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons (Mk 5:30; Lk 5:17; 6:19; Acts 10:38).

- On the night that He was to be arrested, He prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemane. At this critical point, He desperately needed strength and power from the heavenly Father to accomplish the plan of salvation on the cross. Even when angels came to strengthen Him, He continued to pray, crying out to God and pleading with tears. The Bible describes His sweat which fell to the ground like great drops of blood. Because of His earnest prayers, Jesus was able to face death on the cross and to be resurrected in glory (Mt 26:36–44; Lk 22:41–44; Heb 5:7; Acts 2:24).

#### **12.10.4 Praying constantly for the Holy Spirit**

Constancy in prayer is crucial when we are praying for the precious Holy Spirit, whom we need for salvation. Jesus spoke two parables which address this matter, both of which are recorded in Luke 11. The first parable tells of a person making an importunate request of a friend at midnight (vv. 5–8). The second parable tells of a loving father who gives the best things to his son when he asks (vv. 11–12). In verse 13, Jesus concludes by teaching that, just as these people’s requests were answered, so God will give the Holy Spirit to those who pray to Him with the same heart.

Jesus commanded His disciples “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’ ” (Acts 1:4–5). He also said, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:29). His words taught the disciples to wait for God’s appointed time with patience and expectation. Indeed, after Jesus ascended, the disciples stayed together in Jerusalem and “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14). Finally, on the day of Pentecost, the wait was over: they heard a sound from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4).

After Saul (i.e. Paul) was chosen by the Lord on his way to Damascus, he fasted for three days and nights, during which he prayed

to God. At the appointed time, Ananias was sent to lay hands on him, and Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:8–19).

### **12.10.5 Thirsting for the Holy Spirit**

The writings of John teach us that when we pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we must do so with a genuine spiritual thirst (Jn 4:10, 13, 14):

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive.

John 7:37–39

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

Revelation 22:17

We need to learn from God’s warning to the believers in Laodicea not to be complacent (Rev 3:14–17). Our prayers should reflect a true longing for God. Our hearts should be like that of the psalmist who desired God like a deer longing for flowing streams (Ps 42:1). If we can pray with this attitude, the Holy Spirit will surely flow through our hearts.

### **12.11 Keeping the commandments of God**

As Christians, we demonstrate our love for the Lord by keeping His commandments. We cannot claim to love God whilst transgressing His commandments at the same time. Pertinently, keeping the commandments is a condition of receiving the Holy Spirit. Jesus says, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever” (Jn 14:15–16). He also says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest

Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (Jn 14:21, 23).

### **12.11.1 Religious observance alone is insufficient**

In the Old Testament, God rebuked the Israelites through the prophet Isaiah, saying that, even though they offered many burnt offerings, He was not pleased. In fact, He could not endure their sacred meetings and did not want to listen to their prayers, which they offered up with widespread hands. The problem was that their hands were filled with violence and evil deeds. God accused them of honouring Him only with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him. He warned them that, unless they ceased to do evil and learned to do good, sought justice and released the oppressed, He would not draw near to them (Isa 1:10–17; 29:13). The moral is, if we lead sinful lives and, at the same time, ask God for His Holy Spirit—no matter how avidly we pray—He will not answer our prayers.

### **12.11.2 The commandment to love one another**

One of the most important commandments that Jesus gave us is to love one another, just as He has loved us (Jn 13:34; 15:12–14). As He laid down His life for us, we ought to be willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Jn 3:16). Indeed, when we love and care for them, both in times of joy and suffering, we are showing our love for the Lord Jesus (Col 1:24; 12:25–27).

We see the truth of this from Jesus' words to Saul, who was persecuting the Christians. He said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

Saul responded by asking, "Who are You, Lord?"

The Lord answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:1–5).

These words indicate that, whatever we do to the brethren, we do to the Lord.

Our love for one another is symbolic of the Christian way of life (Jn 13:34–35). It is how we show the world that we are Jesus’ disciples. Love is the summary of the law and the teachings of the prophets (Mt 22:39–40; Gal 5:14); he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. We should always live our lives in such a way that we feel we owe a debt of love to others, and to look for opportunities to repay this debt (Rom 13:8).

Elder John teaches us that the failure to love our brethren is incongruent with the claim to love God. He says, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also” (1 Jn 4:20–21).

Love is all encompassing. Hence, Jesus teaches us that, not only should we love God and our brethren, we should also love our enemies: “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:44–45).

### **12.11.3 Putting love into practice**

Love is not demonstrated through words alone; it needs to be put into practice. Elder John says:

But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

1 John 3:17–21

He also tells us that there is a reward for those who love others:

And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things which are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he

who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1 John 3:22–24

The reward is that God will answer our prayers and that we will receive whatever we ask for (cf. Jn 15:7–10). This is an important truth for all those who are seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

### **12.12 Conclusion**

Today, the Holy Spirit is being poured out on believers, just as in the time of the apostolic church. Yet, we see that many churches and denominations are rejecting this truth. They argue, for example, against the speaking of tongues as the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or else, maintain that it is a by-gone experience. We need to ask God to open our eyes to the message of the Bible (cf. Lk 24:45) so that we can understand the truth concerning the Holy Spirit and, importantly, experience this wonderful Spirit baptism for ourselves.

## **Review questions**

1. Why must people come to the true church to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
2. Why is it important to obey the gospel?
3. What does the Bible have to say about repeating words of praise, such as “Hallelujah” when we pray?
4. What is the relationship between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit?
5. What accounts are there in the Book of Acts of believers receiving the Holy Spirit through the laying of hands?
6. Why must we be poor in spirit?
7. Why must we be pure in heart?
8. Why must we have faith?
9. Why must we concentrate in prayer?
10. Why are constant prayers important?
11. What is the relevance of keeping God’s commandments to praying for the Holy Spirit?

# Chapter 13

## THE INFILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 13.1 Introduction

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul highlights a dichotomy between two potentially life-changing agents. He teaches: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Wine is renowned for its ability to captivate people with its beauty and taste. However, it often has a sting in its tail: it leads to intoxication, impropriety, contention, addiction and remorse. In contrast, the infilling of the Holy Spirit confers lasting joy, a clear conscience, self-control, spiritual blessings and power for a godly life.

Luke 1 records that John the Baptist (Mt 11:13) and his father Zechariah (Lk 1:8) were both filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:15, 67). However, their experiences were not the same as those of the believers from the day of Pentecost; their experiences can be likened to those of the Old Testament saints, who were filled by the Holy Spirit for a time and for a specific purpose.

John the Baptist was filled by the Holy Spirit to enable him to have the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the Jews back to God (Lk 1:16, 17). Zechariah was filled by the Holy Spirit to prophesy and to praise God’s salvation grace, and to testify of the fact that a Saviour had been raised from the line of David (Lk 1:67–69). It was only from the day of Pentecost onwards that believers experienced the infilling of the Holy Spirit as a permanent and continuing state (Jn 14:16–18).

There are, at least, two common misconceptions regarding the infilling of the Holy Spirit. One misconception is that it is signalled by the loudness of one’s prayer or the accompaniment of visible body movements. Another misconception is that it is evidenced solely



by the manifestation of godly virtues, as opposed to the speaking of tongues. The first misconception is often held by Christians who already have the Holy Spirit but need a better understanding. The second misconception is often held by Christians who do not know the truth of the Bible and what the baptism of the Holy Spirit is.

The Bible clearly teaches that the fruit of the Spirit can only be borne by those who have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It also tells us that those who have the Holy Spirit possess the unequivocal evidence: they speak in tongues. Therefore, a person may well do good works, just as Cornelius did before he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:2), but these works cannot be considered the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

This leaves us with a number of questions: What is the fullness of the Holy Spirit? What effect does it have? And how can we be filled? This chapter will present some answers from the Bible.

## **13.2 Definitions of the infilling of the Holy Spirit**

### **13.2.1 References in the Bible**

The Bible describes the infilling of the Holy Spirit in two contexts: those instances where the Holy Spirit fills a believer at a significant or critical point in time; an ongoing process in a life that is fully submissive to the direction of the Spirit.

Concerning the infilling of the Holy Spirit at a significant or critical point in time, we learn of believers who were filled at the very moment they received the baptism of the Spirit (e.g. Acts 2:4); conferred with boldness by the Spirit to witness for Jesus (e.g. Acts 4:8–13, 31); empowered by the Spirit in specific circumstances (e.g. Acts 13:9–11).

The Bible records a couple of instances when the Holy Spirit filled believers at the moment they received the Holy Spirit. One instance was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). Another instance related

to Paul, who was filled by the Holy Spirit when Ananias laid hands on him (Acts 9:17–18).

However, the pattern in the Bible is that the infilling of the Holy Spirit usually follows the initial baptism of the Spirit. It talks predominantly about the infilling of the Holy Spirit as a continual process, whereby the Spirit helps believers to live lives that manifest their obedience to Him. The Bible says that the Spirit helps believers to:

- Overcome the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:16–21; Eph 4:30–32)
- Live godly lives and bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–25)
- Be empowered with wisdom and faith for God’s work (Acts 6:3; 6:5; 11:24)
- Have joy and comfort, even in the face of persecution (Acts 7:55–56; 13:52)

### **13.2.2 The infilling of the Holy Spirit as a continual process**

The Bible indicates that the infilling of the Holy Spirit is a life-long process. It occurs when our lives are completely directed by the Holy Spirit, so that we continually “walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:16)—that is, we are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:1–14). He becomes our source of spiritual power, by which we put off the deeds of the flesh:

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:19–21

The fact is, receiving the Holy Spirit does not guarantee that we will be filled by the Spirit. This is evident from the situation in the Corinthian church. Paul referred to them as “God’s temple” and “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) because the members had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and become one in Christ’s body (1 Cor 12:13). Yet, they were by no means led by the Spirit. In

fact, they exhibited deeds of the flesh, such as jealousy and contention. Paul had no choice but to reprimand them:

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

1 Corinthians 3:1–3

From this example, we come to understand that baptism in the Holy Spirit is but an initial step. Every believer needs to pursue the constant infilling of the Holy Spirit thereafter. In this way, we allow the Spirit to work in us to renew us (Tit 3:5), sanctify us (2 Thess 2:13), and help us to live a godly life—a life that manifests the fruit of the Holy Spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22–25

Jesus gives us a wonderful description of what can happen when the Holy Spirit fills us: “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (Jn 4:14). He also says, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:37–38). Here, Jesus speaks of an infilling that is clearly more than a one-off experience. It has the power to transform our lives—like the welling up of a spring within us, and the never-ending flowing of rivers of living water. When we are filled by the Holy Spirit, we shall never thirst again.

### **13.2.3 Offering up ourselves as a complete sacrifice**

According to the law of the Old Testament, a person who made a burnt offering to God had to offer up a complete sacrifice: to lay out the pieces of meat, the head, the fat, the entrails and the legs of the

animal, and to burn them on the altar as an offering made by fire (Lev 1:6–9). God took pleasure in such offerings as they produced a sweet aroma. The burnt offering in the Old Testament prefigured the offering up of Jesus on the cross in the New Testament (Jn 1:29). He was the ultimate fragrant offering (Eph 5:2; 1 Cor 5:7) because He completely submitted Himself to the will of God when He sacrificed His life for us (Mt 26:39; Heb 10:5–7).

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can likewise offer up our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Rom 12:1). Paul says, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19). His own life exemplified this principle, and he was able to declare:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Galatians 6:14

These words are of a man to whom the world no longer mattered, and whose life no longer belonged to himself; it was hidden in Christ and lived out in imitation of Him (1 Cor 11:1).

### **13.2.4 Putting God first**

As Christians, we need to give God our priority and do what pleases Him (2 Chr 12:14; 19:3). The Lord Jesus says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt 6:33). What is the kingdom of God? It is where God rules, where His will is carried out, and where His righteousness is manifested. In one aspect, this kingdom refers to the future heavenly kingdom. In another aspect, this kingdom is already here—within each true believer’s heart (Lk 17:21). We establish God’s kingdom when we focus on God and put His will before our own mundane needs (Mt 6:10–11; 1 Jn 5:14; Lk 22:42), and when we allow Him to direct our lives (Jas 4:15; 1 Cor 4:19; 16:7; cf. Acts 20:22–24; cf. 21:10–14).

God is Spirit, and we need to strive to be filled with His Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). In this way, we can walk in the Spirit and be led by Him (Gal 5:16, 25). This is the meaning of loving God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind (Mt 22:37), and how we can offer up our body as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1–2; 6:13).

### **A misconception**

And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John 20:22

### **A Japanese writer comments on this particular verse:**

After His ascension, the Lord Jesus showered the Holy Spirit upon His disciples on the Day of Pentecost to enable them to accomplish the mission entrusted upon them. But before His ascension, He had already given them an initial portion so that they could take up the mission.

Kurosaki Koukichi

In other words, Kurosaki Koukichi believes that the disciples were baptized with the Holy Spirit when Jesus breathed on them—that He conferred on them an initial portion of the Spirit, which was to be followed by a greater infilling on the day of Pentecost.

### **What does the Bible say?**

Firstly, when Jesus breathed on the disciples, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22), He was not conferring the Holy Spirit at that particular moment; the time had not yet arrived. Rather, Jesus was giving them a promise of what was to come. This is why He told the disciples to stay in Jerusalem to “wait for the Promise of the Father” which “you have *heard* from Me” (Acts 1:4, emphasis added). Importantly, He told them that they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now” (Acts 1:5). The fact is, the Holy Spirit did not, and would not, come until Jesus had been glorified and had ascended into heaven: “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that

I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you” (Jn 16:7, emphasis added).

Secondly, the Bible teaches us that there is only one Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4; Eph 4:4) who is the one true God. When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, He comes into our hearts to abide with us forever (Jn 14:16–17, 23). We cannot use physical concepts to generate explanations about partial outpourings.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—the fountain of power, whom the Lord Jesus describes as “power from on high” (Lk 24:49; cf. Acts 1:8). Prophet Isaiah says that those who receive the Holy Spirit “shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isa 40:31). Therefore, the infilling of the Holy Spirit refers to a life which manifests the power of God (Lk 4:1, 14).

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). This tells us that a person may not necessarily live an abundant life. Similarly, although a person may have the Holy Spirit, he might not be led by the Spirit. Our spiritual life begins with the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Ezek 37:14; Rom 8:2; Gal 5:25), because He is the Spirit of the Lord, who is the fountain of life (Acts 16:7; Jn 1:4). But we still need to allow Him to work thereafter, to strengthen our inner person (Eph 3:16) and to enable us to lead an abundant spiritual life.

### **13.3 The effects of being filled by the Holy Spirit**

#### **13.3.1 Empowerment for God’s ministry**

##### **A. The purpose of empowerment**

A worker of God needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to be empowered for the church ministry. This is because the devil is a formidable adversary, who disrupts the holy work at any given opportunity.

In the Old Testament, God chose craftsmen to build the tabernacle and filled them with His Spirit to give them wisdom, intelligence and

knowledge (Ex 31:1–5; 35:30–35). In the New Testament, the church workers are called to build a spiritual house (1 Pet 2:4–5). They, likewise, need to be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be of good repute and have wisdom and faith (Acts 6:2–5).

The Lord Jesus instructed the disciples to wait in Jerusalem, to be clothed with power from on high, before going forth to witness for Him (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8). This duly happened on the day of Pentecost, with the result that the gospel was preached rapidly throughout Judea, Samaria and other cities (Acts 1:8; 4:33; 8:1–5, 14; 26:20).

## **B. The effects of empowerment**

We can see the effects of the fullness of the Holy Spirit on God's workers in the Book of Acts:

- Before the day of Pentecost, Peter had professed his willingness to suffer with Jesus, but later denied the Lord three times (Lk 22:33, 54–62). After the day of Pentecost, he was empowered by the Holy Spirit to testify for the Lord and was no longer afraid of persecution (Acts 2:1–4, 14, 40; 4:8–20).
- In the face of persecution, the disciples prayed with one accord and were filled with the Holy Spirit to speak the word of God boldly (Acts 4:23–33).
- Stephen, one of those appointed to serve tables (Acts 6:5), was filled with the Holy Spirit, faith and power to perform great signs and wonders (Acts 6:8). He witnessed for the Lord with such great wisdom and power that no one could contradict him (Acts 6:10). Whilst being stoned by an enraged crowd, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and saw the glory of God and the Lord Jesus. Even at the point of death, he was able to ask the Lord to forgive the people (Acts 7:54–60).
- Philip was filled by the Holy Spirit to perform signs and miracles in Samaria (Acts 8:5–8). He became an important worker who helped to preach the good news (Acts 8:5–13, 29–40), earning the title “Philip the evangelist” (Acts 21:8).

- The apostle Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith, bringing many people to Jesus (Acts 11:24).
- At Paphos, Paul encountered Elymas, a magician, who opposed him and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul rebuked Elymas, and the latter became blind. This incident demonstrated the power of God and led to the proconsul's conversion (Acts 13:6–12).
- Even though Paul and Barnabas were persecuted by the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, the Holy Spirit filled them with joy (Acts 13:14, 50–52).

### **C. The power to touch the hearts of listeners**

A preacher who has knowledge and skill may well be able to deliver eloquent sermons. But without the fullness of the Holy Spirit, his sermons will neither have life, nor the power to convict the listeners to repent of their sins and follow the Lord Jesus.

We see the truth of this illustrated in the ministry of the apostle Peter, who was described as an “uneducated and untrained” man (Acts 4:13). He was filled by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, such that he was able to deliver a sermon which cut the hearts of the listening Jews. They responded immediately by asking the way to salvation, and subsequently receiving baptism in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:37–41). Peter's sermon had this effect, not because it was eloquent, but because it revealed the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4).

The Lord Jesus was likewise perceived as someone “having never studied” (Jn 7:15), yet He could astonish listeners with His sermons, such as those delivered on the mountain (Mt 5–7:27). The crowds saw that He taught with authority, unlike the scribes (Mt 7:28–29). The authority of Jesus came from His being constantly filled by the Holy Spirit and with power (Lk 4:1, 14).

Paul was a well-educated man, who had received a prestigious training in the law. Yet, he chose to cast his worldly knowledge aside, giving way, instead, to the Holy Spirit to work through him. Paul reflected thus on his ministry: “And I, brethren, when I came to you,



I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.... And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:1, 4–6). He added, “For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power” (1 Cor 4:20).

#### **D. The power to administer church affairs**

A person without the Holy Spirit may be able to manage the church’s affairs using his worldly knowledge and skills. But his work could well be shaped by secular thinking. The worst scenario is where the church relies solely on this approach, such that worldly knowledge takes the place of the gifts of the Holy Spirit; human power dominates over the rule of the Holy Spirit; and human will takes precedence over the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In such a situation, we would forfeit the true character of the church for something akin to a social or political organisation.

The original church was governed completely by the Holy Spirit. All roles, including those of workers with responsibility for church administration, were based on specific spiritual criteria. The workers had to be “of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Today, the church needs to take care not to deviate from these principles. For example, we should never recruit workers for their secular, rather than spiritual, qualities; judge the delivery of sermons on the basis of eloquence, rather than the power of the Holy Spirit; assign positions of leadership to those with wealth and status, rather than those who are filled by the Holy Spirit. We need to follow the model of the apostolic church so that we can see the glory and work of the Holy Spirit.

#### **13.3.2 The power to overcome sin**

The fullness of the Holy Spirit helps us, as individuals, to overcome sin. Sin is such a powerful and binding force that only the power of God can help us to conquer it.

## A. Paul's experience

In the life of Paul, we see that it is not sufficient to know in theory how we ought to live our lives. Paul himself was originally a Pharisee who was taught by the renowned Gamaliel. He was well versed in the law and also had a great zeal for God (Phil 3:5; Acts 22:3). Yet this learned man lamented:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Romans 7:15, 18, 24

In other words, Paul had the theoretical knowledge about God's requirements, but lacked the strength to put them into practice. He saw his problem as one of bondage to sin: "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" (Rom 7:14, 19–20).

He added, "I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom 7:21–23).

Fortunately, he finally discovered a way to resolve the struggle—he learned to obey and rely on the Holy Spirit. He said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:1–2).

## B. Walking in the Spirit for a triumphant spiritual life

The moment we are united with Christ in water baptism, we become released from the law of sin and death. This is because baptism has the power to regenerate (Tit 3:5); impute our sins on Christ, in exchange

for His righteousness (2 Cor 5:21); and justify us before the law (Rom 4:15; 5:9; 8:33–34). We are freed to lead a new and abundant life in the Spirit, in which we can overcome sin (Tit 3:5; Jn 10:10; Lk 4:14; 1 Jn 5:18). Therefore, forgiveness through water baptism marks a significant start; but it is important that we continue to live a triumphant life that is marked by holiness, “without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

Paul teaches that, once we are in Christ Jesus, we should no longer walk according to the flesh, but according to the Holy Spirit. This means being filled by the Holy Spirit and letting Him direct our lives. He says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor 5:17). When our lives are filled by the Holy Spirit, we lose the old nature and manifest the new one, which is revealed in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24).

### **C. Why do we sometimes fail to overcome sin?**

Even when we have received both water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we sometimes fail in our struggle against sin. One reason might be that we become stagnant in our faith and lack the ability to live out the triumphant life which Paul talks about in Romans 8:1–2. However, he tells us the remedy: “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor 3:17). In other words, we need to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us so that we can be set free.

Another reason why we fail may be because we rely on our own strength. When this happens, the outcome is often sorrow, despair and failure. Hence, the Lord Jesus says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt 11:29–30).

In the past, Palestinian farmers used cross-shaped yokes to plough the land. These were harnessed to a pair of oxen or donkeys so that both animals could bear the burden together (cf. Deut 11:10; 2 Cor 6:14). Today, Jesus offers us His yoke, which He will bear with us, promising that it will be light and easy, and that we will find rest. What is this yoke? It is His commandments: “For this is the love of God, that we keep

His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 Jn 5:3). So if we walk with Him to keep His commandments, He will strengthen us when we are weak (Heb 4:15–16).

Not surprisingly, Paul exclaimed, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom 7:24–25). When he relied on himself, he could not overcome sin; but when he trusted in the Lord Jesus, he was freed. Therefore, when we are weak, we should imitate Paul, as he imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1), so that we can have victory.

#### **D. Relying on God when we are weak**

Paul talked about his weaknesses in this manner:

And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:9–10

Most people tend to boast about their strengths. Paul, however, chose not to hide his weaknesses, but even declared them openly. His attitude was to rely on God, who could give him the power to overcome them. Through his weaknesses, he was able to experience the grace of God.

We all have weaknesses; no one is perfect. The important thing is how we deal with them. In the case of a spiritual person, his weaknesses will be the reason for him to draw close to God and to rely on Him. For the unspiritual person, his weaknesses will merely serve as an excuse to carry on sinning.

#### **E. Not loving the world**

The Bible teaches: “For you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (Ex 34:14). “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2).

God is our husband (Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14), and we are His bride (Hos 2:19–20). A husband’s love for his wife is inherently jealous and will not tolerate the intrusion of a third party. However, we are in danger of arousing God’s jealousy if we turn our hearts to evil, or if we love and befriend the world. The Bible describes these matters, in no uncertain terms, as spiritual adultery (Jas 4:4–5). Jesus says that we cannot serve two masters (Mt 6:24), as we will be sure to love one and despise the other. Therefore, if we love the world, we cannot love God as well (1 Jn 2:15).

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will love God with all our heart. Rather than being tainted by the world, we will be as pure virgins who are betrothed to the one husband.

## **F. Resisting the devil**

The chosen people in the Old Testament made up “the armies of the LORD” (Ex 12:41). In the Book of Ezekiel, God gave His Spirit to the house of Israel, to give them life and turn them into “an exceedingly great army” (Ezek 37:10, 14). In the New Testament, the believers are the soldiers of Christ (2 Tim 2:3) who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and have spiritual life (Rom 8:2; Gal 5:25). This army is fighting against an invisible enemy—the “spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). In other words, we are contending against the devil and his angels, who prowl around seeking to devour whomever they can (1 Pet 5:8). Their weapon of choice is temptation, and they work through the lust of the flesh (Gal 5:17). The only way to overcome their schemes is to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we can subdue the flesh (Gal 5:16; Rom 8:13).

John says, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.... We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1 Jn 5:4, 18). Our protection is also our shield of faith which guards us against the fiery darts of the devil (Eph 6:16). Without faith, a person cannot walk in the Spirit, for he will give way to the flesh (Rom 8:7). The consequence is that he will become like the church members in Sardis who were alive in name, but were spiritually dead (Rev 3:1–2).

The work of the devil can be likened to an invisible virus that wields deadly power. But, whereas a virus attacks the human body and can destroy physical life, the devil attacks a person's spiritual wellbeing, with the intent of bringing about his eternal condemnation. Therefore, Paul says soberly, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27). He also advises us to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12) and not give the devil any opportunity to work (Eph 4:27).

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we become alert and sensitive to the devil's schemes. Without the fullness of the Spirit, we lack this sensitivity, with the consequence that we may sin and not even feel the need to repent; or else, we realize only when it is too late. Hence, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray in this manner: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Mt 6:13). We cannot avoid temptation—even our Lord Jesus was tempted by the devil (Heb 4:15). But instead of being afraid of temptation, we can rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome it, just as Jesus Himself did (Lk 4:1, 14).

We see in the life of Jesus the effects of being Spirit-filled. For example, when He was tempted by the devil three times, He used the word of God with power and authority to defend and rebuke. The first time He was tempted, He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" The second time, He said, "For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" The third time, He said, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'" In all His responses, He pointed out His obligation to God, and to Him alone. Not surprisingly, the devil was not able to do any work and departed from Him until another opportune time (Lk 4:3–13). These incidents confirm the truth of the Bible's teaching: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas 4:7).

Just before His arrest, the Lord Jesus made a prayer of intercession for the disciples, in which He asked, "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (Jn 17:15). From His words, we see that the Lord does not wish for us to depart from the world, but, rather, that we know how to

be watchful concerning the work of the devil. We will not be spared temptation, but we can emulate Jesus' example to lead a life which is directed by the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:25).

### 13.3.3 Bearing the fruit of the Spirit

To overcome sin is an act of defence on our spiritual journey. However, we cannot triumph over the devil through defence alone; we also need to be proactive. This means bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls His believers "the light of the world" (Mt 5:14), and so it is fitting that we should bear fruit to glorify God and to benefit others (Mt 5:16; 1 Cor 10:33). The fruit of the Spirit refers to our spiritual virtues (cf. Mt 12:43–45).

#### A. Being known by our fruit

You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Matthew 7:16–18

Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"

Matthew 7:22–23

The Lord's "Sermon On The Mount" teaches us a number of important matters relating to the bearing of fruit:

- Sheep and wolves represent different types of people. Wolves may try to disguise themselves with service to society, rhetoric about Christian love, and a show of godliness; but time is a good test of character—sooner or later, they will reveal their true nature (Mt 7:15).

- Just as we cannot tell whether a tree is good or bad solely by looking at its appearance, so we may find it hard to distinguish a true believer from a false one. The best way to judge is to look at their fruit, and not their spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor 1:4–7; 3:1–3; 1 Cor 13:1–3). Hence, the Lord’s judgment of a believer will not be based on what abilities he has, but, rather, on the fruit that he bears.
- The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to each one individually, as He wills (1 Cor 12:11). These are for the building up of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18; Eph 4:11–12, 16). But what is far more important is a person’s ability to bear spiritual fruit, for this is Jesus’ purpose for us (Jn 15:16). So, even though people may preach, heal the sick, or even cast out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus, their names may not even be recorded in heaven (Lk 10:17–20; Mt 7:21–23). In other words, the possession of spiritual gifts in no way guarantees salvation.
- People who call Jesus, “Lord, Lord” (Mt 7:21) might not necessarily do the will of God. There is a difference between paying lip service to God and truly having Him in our hearts (Eph 3:17). Jesus says, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Lk 6:46).
- A bad tree bears bad fruit because it does not have the capacity to do otherwise (Rom 7:18, 21). In the same way, it is impossible for an inherently good tree to bear bad fruit. Jesus says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things” (Mt 12:35). Therefore, the nature of a person determines the type of life that he will lead.
- The Lord Jesus says to those who fail to do His will, “I *never* knew you” (Mt 7:23, emphasis added). We need to note that He does not say, “I do not know you *now*.” Therefore, we can infer that these words are spoken to people who have been guilty of doing evil throughout their lives and have not repented. A bad person does not become so instantaneously—it usually happens over a period of time. Jesus reminds such people, saying, “The one who comes to



Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn 6:37). So, while there is still a chance, they should turn back to do God’s will.

- Jesus is the true vine, the heavenly Father is the vinedresser, and we are His branches. Jesus has chosen us so that we can bear fruit—fruit that will remain. By bearing much fruit, we can give glory to God. On the other hand, if we fail to bear any, we will be cut off (Jn 15:1, 2, 5, 8, 16).

## **B. Salvation by grace**

The bearing of the fruit of the Spirit has a firm bearing on our salvation. This does not mean that we despise the grace of salvation through the cross, or that we attempt to refute the belief in righteousness through faith and revert back to the era of the law. But we must understand that true faith can never be separated from works (Jas 2:26). Indeed, true faith brings forth deeds of love (Gal 5:6).

On one occasion, Jesus’ disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Mt 19:25–26). This means that, while it is impossible for anyone to obtain salvation through his own efforts, salvation is possible with God’s help. Likewise, we may not be able to bear fruit through our own efforts, but with God’s power we can.

## **C. Abiding in Jesus**

The Lord Jesus says, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). In other words, as Christians, we should place God at the centre of our lives and be directed by His Spirit. This requires that we “do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). The natural outcome will be the bearing of much fruit. The Lord has given us His Holy Spirit—the “power from on high” (Lk 24:49)—to renew us so that our lives can become more abundant (Tit 3:5; Jn 10:10). But if we depart from Him, we will not be able to achieve anything. Therefore, we should learn from Paul, who

was able to say with confidence, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13).

#### **D. What is the fruit of the Spirit?**

Paul says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal 5:22–23). Here, he uses the Greek word for “fruit”, *karpos*, which is “the singular form, suggesting the unity of the character of the Lord as reproduced in them”.<sup>1</sup> It is singular because there is only one Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4; Eph 4:4), and His fruit is a complete and single entity. Just like the “cycle of grace” described in 2 Peters 1:5–7, the whole depends on the sum of its parts. From this, we understand that Paul did not mean that a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit must bear nine different kinds of fruit; rather, he should bear one fruit with nine attributes. These attributes are grouped into the following three categories:

##### **(i) Love, joy and peace**

This category represents the most basic characteristics of a Christian. They can be likened to the parts of a house, where love is the foundation, joy is the upper level and peace is the roof. From the foundation to the roof, the parts of the house are all firmly fitted together to give protection to the inhabitants.

#### **Love**

The Greek word for “love” in Galatians 5:22 is *agape*<sup>2</sup> and is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 13. It refers to the love which comes from God and which issues out of faith from those who are reborn in Christ. Of the nine attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, love comes first. This tells us that the other attributes are all closely linked to love.

<sup>1</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G2590.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Strong's reference no. G26.

Loving God and loving man is the summary and fulfilment of the law and the prophets (Mt 22:37–40; 1 Tim 1:5; Rom 13:10). If we look at the ten commandments, we see that the first four centre on our love for God, while the latter six centre on our love for man. These two principles are intertwined: a person who loves God will love others; and he who loves others will love God (1 Jn 4:20). Love combines all the various virtues and is “the bond of perfection” (Col 3:14). It is the symbol of Christianity (Jn 13:35) and the evidence that a believer has passed from death into life (1 Jn 3:14). The Bible says that love triumphs over judgment (Jas 2:13; 1 Jn 4:17–18).

The noblest type of love is that for an enemy and entails being considerate of his ignorance (Mt 5:44; Lk 23:34). God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and His love is the highest standard we can attain to. It entails loving those who are just, along with those who are unjust (Mt 5:45) and, likewise, the righteous, along with sinners (Acts 10:35; Rom 5:6–8). Paul says, “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5). Therefore, a person who is constantly filled with the Holy Spirit will be able to manifest God’s love. We have a noble example in Stephen who, prior to being killed, was able to pray for his persecutors and to ask God to forgive them (Acts 7:55, 60).

## Joy

The words used for “joy” in the Bible are *simchah* in Hebrew<sup>3</sup> and *chara* in Greek.<sup>4</sup>

At the height of his glory, King Solomon had everything his eyes desired and indulged in all manner of pleasure (Eccl 2:10). His life of luxury was totally unprecedented. But when he reached old age, he lamented, “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity” (Eccl 5:10). He finally realized that the happiness derived from material things is empty and short lived. Like drinking from Jacob’s well, one will thirst again (Jn 4:13). In contrast, the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit

3 *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1994). Strong’s reference no. H8057.

4 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G5479.

is true and everlasting (Rom 14:17; Jn 15:11). God's Spirit is like a fountain of living water that never runs dry (Jn 4:14; 7:37–39).

The Bible tells us that the joy of the Lord is our strength (Neh 8:10). We can obtain it by being anointed by “the oil of gladness”, which is the Holy Spirit (Heb 1:9). It is neither affected by adverse circumstances, nor dimmed by suffering (Rom 5:3; 1 Thess 1:6). Examples of those who experienced this spiritual joy include the apostles, who were often persecuted for the sake of the gospel, but rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord (Acts 5:40–41; 13:50–52); and Paul, who was imprisoned and afflicted, but could still rejoice and praise God (Acts 16:25; Phil 1:17–18).

Moses, the man of God, prayed to God saying, “Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil” (Ps 90:15). Like Moses, we should understand that when God gives us His joy, we will be buffered from the trials of life.

## Peace

The word for “peace” is *shalom* in Hebrew and signifies “completeness”, “welfare” and “health”.<sup>5</sup> Jewish people use this word to bless others. The Greek word *eirene* refers to “harmonious relationships between men”, “harmonized relationships between God and man, accomplished through the gospel”, and a resultant “sense of rest and contentment”.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible describes Jesus Christ as the “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6), and the gospel which He preached is termed the “gospel of peace” (Acts 10:36; Eph 2:17). Jesus’ mission was one of reconciliation: between God and man, and between man and man (Eph 2:13–19). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9), who gives us unity with one another in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3; Ezek 11:19). He helps us to be one in the body of Christ, so that there is no demarcation on the grounds of race, status or gender (1 Cor 12:12–13; Gal 3:27–28). Therefore, a person who is filled with the Holy Spirit is able to live harmoniously with others and with God; he is not likely to murmur or

5 *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1994). Strong's reference no. H7965.

6 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G1515.

bear grudges. Where the Holy Spirit is allowed to reign, there will not be any divisions or dissensions.

The peace which the Lord Jesus offers is unique and precious; it is not of the world and transcends human understanding (Jn 14:26–27; Phil 4:7). It is a peace that can sustain believers in times of difficulties and tribulations (Jn 16:33). We see the effects of this peace on the workers of God in the apostolic church: in Stephen, who asked God to forgive his persecutors (Acts 7:55, 59–60); in Peter, who slept soundly, despite being imprisoned and chained (Acts 12:1–6); and in Paul, who, while facing dangers at sea, could comfort his companions (Acts 27:18–25).

## (ii) **Longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness**

This second category of attributes demonstrates a person's love for others. They show that a person who has love can endure hurt, be kind, and even do good to those who wish him harm. A person with love can treat others with sincerity and honour his obligations. He will also be able to speak and behave with gentleness, and not be easily provoked.

### **Longsuffering and kindness**

Longsuffering and kindness are the virtues of God (Ex 34:6; Rom 2:4). For example, we see Him patiently bearing with the sins of humankind—to the point of sending us His only Son (Ps 103:8–13; Jn 3:16; Eph 2:7).

The Hebrew word “longsuffering” is made up of two words: *arek*, meaning “long”,<sup>7</sup> and *aph*, meaning “suffering”, or, literally, the “nose” or “nostril”.<sup>8</sup> The allusion to the nose is particularly apt, as it conjures up an image of a deep and calming intake of breath, as opposed to the quick breathing associated with the venting of anger. In the Old Testament, this word is used to describe God's slowness to anger (Ex 34:6; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Nah 1:3).

<sup>7</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1994). Strong's reference no. H750.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* Strong's reference no. H639.

The Greek word for longsuffering is *makrothumia*, which signifies “forbearance” and “patience”. It comprises two words: *makros*, meaning “long”, and *thumos*, meaning “temper”.<sup>9</sup> In the New Testament, it is used to describe God’s forbearance towards sinners (Rom 2:4; 9:22; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 3:9, 15). A similar word is *hupomene*, which means “patience” and “endurance” (2 Cor 6:4; 12:12; Col 1:11).<sup>10</sup>

As Christians, we need to be longsuffering in the face of opposition. We can take courage from the example left to us by the Lord Jesus (1 Pet 2:19–24), who teaches us to forgive unconditionally, just as God forgives us (Mt 18:21–33). Therefore, there may be times when others misunderstand, slander, or even persecute us, but if we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will have the ability to forbear. The Bible reminds us that, when we are slow to anger, we can prevent contention (Prov 15:18).

The word “kindness” is *chrestotes* in Greek, which means “goodness of heart” and “kindness”.<sup>11</sup> In parts of the Bible, it is translated as “good” (Rom 3:12), “goodness” (Rom 2:4; 12:2; Gal 5:22), or “kindness” (1 Cor 13:4; 2 Cor 6:6; Eph 2:7; 4:32; Col 3:12; Tit 3:4). The word encompasses the meanings of affection, mercy and good intention. Kindness is the virtue of treating our neighbour with consideration and offering help when needed. A “neighbour” could be someone who is lonely, weak or suffering (Lk 10:27–37). The Bible exhorts us to “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15), as well as to “please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification” (Rom 15:2).

Longsuffering and kindness are the best means of defence against our enemies. Paul, for example, reminds us not to repay evil with evil, but to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:17–21). We should strive to be longsuffering in the face of opposition and use kindness to deal with our enemies. Like our heavenly Father who is gracious, even to those who are evil (Lk 6:35), we are encouraged to receive our enemies with food and drink, and so heap burning coals upon their heads (Rom 12:20). In other words, kindness has the power to turn enemies around.

9 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G3115.

10 Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G5281.

11 Ibid. Strong’s reference no. G5544.

## Goodness

The Hebrew word for “goodness” is *towb*.<sup>12</sup> In the Old Testament, this word means “mercy” or “grace” (Ex 18:9; Ps 23:6; Jer 31:14; Hos 3:5). The Greek word is *agathosune*, meaning “good” or “good virtues” (Rom 15:14; Eph 5:9; 2 Thess 1:11).<sup>13</sup> While kindness (*chrestotes*) can be regarded as a kindly disposition towards others, goodness (*agathosune*) refers to an actual act of kindness.

We often have a misconception that the gospel is solely about the saving of souls and does not address the matter of people’s physical needs. In fact, the gospel teaches us about goodness (Rom 12:9–10, 13; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Tim 6:18; Tit 2:14) and the need to be aware of the needs of the poor (1 Jn 3:17). The Bible gives us good examples to emulate, including Dorcas whose life was filled with charitable deeds (Acts 9:36–39). Also, Paul reminds us not to lose heart in doing good, for we will have a reward (Gal 6:9–10).

Paul remarked that before he was reborn through Christ, nothing good dwelt within him: he often wanted to do what was right, but did not have the strength to do it (Rom 7:18). But after converting to Christ, he changed when he resolved to walk in the Spirit (Rom 8:1–4). Goodness is a divine virtue; no one is inherently good, except God (Mk 10:17–18). However, when we live a new life through Christ, we, too, can manifest His goodness.

## Faithfulness

The Hebrew word for “faithfulness” is *emunah* (Deut 32:4; Ps 33:4; Hab 2:4). It also carries the meaning of “truth”.<sup>14</sup> The Greek word is *pistis* and means “belief” (Acts 17:31), “faith” (Rom 14:22; Heb 11:1) and “being faithful” (Mt 23:23; Tit 2:10).<sup>15</sup>

Isaiah 42:3 prophesies about Jesus’ faithfulness to humankind: “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench”.

<sup>12</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1994). Strong’s reference no. H2896.

<sup>13</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong’s reference no. G19.

<sup>14</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1994). Strong’s reference no. H530.

<sup>15</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1992). Strong’s reference no. G4102.

This verse describes Jesus' confidence in His chosen people's ability to repent and turn back to Him. It is based on the love described by Paul, which bears all things and believes all things (1 Cor 13:7). God is one who keeps His covenant and showers us with His steadfast love, such that, even when we are faithless, He remains faithful (2 Tim 2:13; Rom 3:3–4; 2 Cor 1:18–22). We can learn much from God's nature: to be trustworthy, reliable, and to honour any obligations we have to God and others.

### Gentleness

The Hebrew word for “gentleness” is *ani*, meaning “poor” (Job 24:4; Ps 9:12, 18; Amos 8:4) or “humble” (Ps 22:26; Prov 3:34; Isa 11:4; Zeph 2:3).<sup>16</sup> *Ani* in Isaiah 61:1 encompasses both these meanings. The Greek word for “gentleness” is *praotes* (1 Cor 4:21; Gal 5:23; Eph 4:2; Col 3:12; Tit 3:2).<sup>17</sup>

Gentleness is often mistaken for a sign of weakness or passivity. In reality, it takes great strength of character and self-control to manifest this virtue (Prov 16:32). Both the Lord Jesus and Moses were testimony to this: while they were gentle and humble (Num 12:3; Mt 11:29), they had the tenacity to endure wrong (1 Pet 2:23; Heb 11:26) and the resolve to uphold what was right (Jn 2:13–16; Ex 32:19–21).

The Bible speaks of blessings for those who are meek. It says that they will inherit the earth (Mt 5:5); find rest in Christ (Mt 11:29); be able to accept the gospel (Isa 61:1); hold onto the implanted word (Jas 1:21); be shown favour by God (Prov 3:34); be guided by Him (Ps 25:9); be exalted (Ps 147:6); and be delivered in times of oppression (Ps 76:9).

A gentle nature stems from love (1 Cor 13:5, 7). It enables us to admonish others in humility when they go against the truth, and to urge them to repent and escape from the devil's snare (2 Tim 2:25–26). It is also the attitude that we must have when bringing back a fellow brother who has trespassed, in fulfilment of the law of Christ (Gal 6:1–2). Gentleness is the hallmark of a godly Christian (Gal 5:23; Eph 4:2;

<sup>16</sup> Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. H6041.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* Strong's reference no. G4240.



Col 3:12; 1 Tim 6:11; Tit 3:2–3) and is a quality that is precious in the sight of God (1 Pet 3:4).

### (iii) Self-control

This is the last attribute of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. While patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness are ways of directing love toward others, self-control is an act of love directed at oneself. Loving others is important, but loving oneself is equally so; and both indicate a love for God. We can love ourselves by being mindful that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit—it does not belong to us because we have been bought at a great price (1 Cor 6:19–20). So we need to cherish our body, by exercising self-control in all matters.

The word for “self-control” is *egkrateia* in Greek, from the root *kratos*, meaning strength.<sup>18</sup> The latter denotes the presence of strength, rather than its exercise. *Egkrateia* also means “temperate” (Acts 24:25; Gal 5:23; 2 Pet 1:6). The antonym is *akrates* (2 Tim 3:3), which means “without strength” and “unable to govern one’s appetite.”<sup>19</sup>

Self-control comes from a personal resolution that is made through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When we are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, we can restrain our desires and bad habits. The phrase, “If they cannot exercise self-control” in 1 Corinthians 7:9 can therefore be rendered, “If they cannot restrain themselves.”

To have self-control also means restraining our emotions. In Genesis 43:31, the word “restrained” refers to Joseph’s conscious effort to control his emotions after being reunited with Benjamin (v. 30). In the Book of Esther, we read about Haman, who was filled with anger against Mordecai, but “restrained himself” and went home (Est 5:9–10).

The way we live our lives is important, including how we make choices. We can choose to succumb to our weaknesses, or we can overcome them. Faced with the challenge of taking the bitter cup or giving into His fears, the Lord Jesus chose to submit to the will of the heavenly Father (Mt 16:23; 26:39). Paul also had personal struggles, but resolved to discipline his body and to subdue it so that he could present it as a slave to righteousness (1 Cor 9:27; cf. Rom 6:17–20).

<sup>18</sup> *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, ed. Zodhiates, S. (Tennessee: AMG International, 1992). Strong’s reference no. G1466.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Strong’s reference no. G193.

#### (iv) **Summary**

In summary, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are the nine attributes of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Only when we are filled by the Holy Spirit can we walk by the Spirit and bear spiritual fruit for the glory of God (Jn 15:5; 1 Cor 12:12–13; Gal 5:25).

### **13.4 How can we be filled by the Holy Spirit?**

We have looked at the definition of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and also the effects of being filled by the Spirit. Next, we shall look at how we can pursue the infilling of the Spirit.

#### **13.4.1 Thirsting for the Holy Spirit**

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God promised the Israelites, “I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring” (Isa 44:3). When ministering on earth, Jesus proclaimed, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:37–38).

A person without the Holy Spirit is likely to be familiar with the feeling of spiritual thirst. It is best described as a thirst of the heart, arising from the absence of true peace and joy. A person may have access to an abundance of material possessions and pleasurable pursuits, but like drinking from Jacob’s well, these cannot satisfy him, and he will soon thirst again (Jn 4:13). Similarly, if a person has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but does not lead a Spirit-filled life, he will thirst again. If we are to obtain the infilling of the Holy Spirit, we need to be aware of the signs of spiritual thirst and take action.

The Lord Jesus encourages us, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Mt 7:7). Here, He mentions three actions: praying, seeking and knocking. In the parable of the persistent friend, the person obtained the loaves that

he needed because he made his request with importunity (Lk 11:5–8). The moral is that we need to pray with an attitude that reflects our yearning. God will not impose His Spirit on those who do not have the heart to receive Him (cf. Mt 7:6).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a promise: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Lk 11:13). If we have not yet received the Holy Spirit, we should continue praying with faith, believing without doubt that God will grant our request in time. We must remember that God came to the world so that we can have an abundant life (Jn 10:10)—one that is made possible through the baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit (Jn 4:14; 7:38).

From the time of Pentecost, when the early church started expanding rapidly, the devil did his utmost to disrupt the ministry by making use of the Jewish leaders to oppose the truth. The apostles responded by praying earnestly and with one accord: “Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29–30). The result was that God filled them with the Holy Spirit to enable them to speak His word boldly (Acts 4:31). There is a lesson here for the true church today: we need to earnestly desire the infilling of the Holy Spirit, just like the apostolic workers. We need to pray for God’s power so that we can overcome the schemes of the devil, and have the ability to proclaim the gospel with courage.

When He was delivering the Beatitudes, Jesus made a specific point of teaching: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mt 5:6). His words challenge us to avoid complacency in our spiritual lives and encourage us to yearn for God’s righteousness. We must not emulate the Laodicean church members, who regarded themselves as prosperous and lacking in nothing, not realizing that they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked in the sight of God. They had a lukewarm faith—neither cold nor hot. Hence, God threatened to spew them out (Rev 3:14–17).

Our desire for God should be as described by the psalmist—like a deer panting for the water brooks (Ps 42:1). When we yearn for God with this type of heart, we will touch Him, and He will quench our thirst with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

### 13.4.2 Departing from evil

Before the chosen people of the Old Testament entered into the land of Canaan, God spoke to them through Moses by the river Jordan on the plains of Moab:

When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you... But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.

Numbers 33:51–52, 55

God told them to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan: the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—seven nations larger and stronger than the Israelites (Deut 7:1–3). When Moses died, Joshua took over this mission. He led the people over the Jordan and onto the boundary with Canaan (Josh 1:1–9; 3:14–17). God assured them that He would be with them, and so the morale of the people was greatly boosted. Later, they did not even have to engage in battle to conquer Jericho—all they had to do was to raise their voices in a great shout (Josh 6:1–21). With God on their side, no one was able to oppose them. If only they had continued following God's commandments, they would have wiped out all of the seven mighty Canaanite nations. Unfortunately, history tells us that they disobeyed God's instructions, choosing, instead, to spare their enemies (Deut 7:2; 20:16; Josh 13:13; 15:63; 16:10).

When Joshua was old, he reminded the Israelites:

And the LORD your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight.... Therefore be very courageous to keep and do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it... and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you.... For the LORD has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day. One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, as He has promised you. Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the LORD your God. Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations—these that remain among you—and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides

and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.

Joshua 23:5–13

However, the Israelites' greed and desire for comfort were too much for them to overcome. They continued to accommodate the remaining Canaanites and even intermarried with them (Judg 1:19, 21, 28–33; 3:1–6). Therefore, the warning came true: the remnants of the inhabitants became thorns in the eyes of the Israelites and a scourge in their sides; they would be a constant source of harassment (Judg 1:34; 2:1–5; cf. Ezek 28:24).

The Israelites in the Old Testament prefigure the chosen people of the New Testament (Deut 14:2; Jn 15:19). The land of Canaan can be likened to our hearts, and the Canaanite inhabitants, to our lustful desires. Our journey of faith is often like one long ongoing battle (Eph 6:12; Heb 12:4), with the greatest enemy being our own lusts (Gal 5:17). If we compromise and fail to nail them to the cross, they will become as thorns in our eyes and a scourge in our sides, troubling us, until we are finally destroyed (Rom 8:6a, 13a). The Bible reminds us that a little leaven leavens the whole dough, and so we should not allow any sin to remain in us (Eccl 10:1; 1 Cor 5:6): we need to remove them by relying on the Holy Spirit. Only then, can we become truly victorious (1 Cor 9:27; Rom 8:13b; Gal 5:16).

### 13.4.3 Repentance

No one can claim to be perfect (Mt 19:17). Elder James says that we all make mistakes, especially in our speech (Jas 3:2). Even though we may strive to rely on the Holy Spirit, we can sometimes become weak and prone to sin. But what matters is whether we sin deliberately, and whether we are willing to repent. We know that our God is a jealous God (Ex 34:14). So if we, on the one hand, ask Him to fill us with His Holy Spirit, but on the other hand, maintain a life of sin, He will refuse to listen to our prayers (Ps 66:18). However, if we do sin, we should confess, and resolve to change and return to God. He will show us mercy (Job 22:23; Prov 28:13). The Bible says, “The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit” (Ps 34:18).

The writer of Proverbs talks about the call of wisdom to all who are willing to listen: “Turn at my rebuke; surely I will pour out my spirit on you” (Prov 1:23). Here, “Wisdom” is an allegory of Jesus Christ (Prov 8:22–30), who promises to pour out His Holy Spirit on those who turn back at His reproof. And when we are ready to turn back, we can learn from David’s prayer:

Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin is always before me.

Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Psalm 51:1–3, 11

Paul says, “Do not quench the Spirit.” (1 Thess 5:19). Here the word “quench” alludes to the extinguishing of a fire. The same word is used in Matthew 12:20. Fire is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Hence, He is called the “Spirit of burning” (Isa 4:3–4). He has the power to remove the uncleanness of the church and make her holy. He burns inside the believers, urging them to repent and depart from sin. Therefore, we should always be alert to the danger of sin, however trivial it may seem. We should never allow ourselves to reach the point where we fail to repent; otherwise, we will quench the Holy Spirit, and sin will take root within us once again.

After the fall of humankind, man lost the nature of God and committed ever more serious sins. Even the sons of God conformed to the world (Gen 4:8, 19–24; 6:1–4). There came a point when God could bear it no more and declared, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh” (Gen 6:3). His words indicate that before man’s moral decline, the fire of the Holy Spirit had burned within the hearts of the sons of God. But, because they now chose to follow in the footsteps of the people of the world, they were quenching the Holy Spirit. The outcome was that God gave them up to their own lustful desires.

The lesson for believers today is that we need to understand that God is holy, and His will is for us to be holy (1 Pet 1:14–16). Therefore, we must not emulate the people of the world, who do not know God and who freely indulge the flesh (2 Cor 6:14–18; 1 Thess 4:3–7). Moreover, we need to be aware that if we do stray from God, the fire of the Holy Spirit will burn inside of us to purge away all the uncleanness (cf. Isa 1:25). But should we stubbornly refuse to repent, we will quench this fire, and the Spirit of God will no longer strive with us.

#### **13.4.4 Obedience**

Paul referred to the Corinthian church as “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19) because the members had received water baptism through the Spirit and had drunk of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). However, he had this against them: they were not led by the Holy Spirit and so were unable to lead Spirit-filled lives. They still belonged to the flesh and were babes in Christ because they harboured jealousy and strife. They had not grown up spiritually and did not manifest the image of Christ. Paul pointed out that they were no better than unbelievers (1 Cor 3:1–3).

The condition of the church in Corinth confirms that receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit does not equate to being filled with the Holy Spirit. Today, there are Christians who can be likened to the members of the Corinthian church: they have the Holy Spirit, but are spiritually immature (Eph 4:13). Instead of following the will of the Holy Spirit, they follow the desires of the flesh (Eph 2:3). God laments over such people on account of their “necks of iron sinew” (Isa 48:4). Obedience to God is both a requirement for receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32) and for His infilling.

Even though Jesus was God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16), He had to learn obedience. On the night that He faced capture, He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane to be spared from the impending suffering on the cross: “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Lk 22:42). Jesus understood the nature of this cup: He would become the Paschal Lamb which would be sacrificed (Ex 12:1–9; 1 Cor 5:7). He was aware of the

agony He would have to suffer, for the Scriptures had long prophesied:

I am poured out like water,  
And all My bones are out of joint;  
My heart is like wax,  
It has melted within Me.  
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
And My tongue clings to My jaws;  
You have brought Me to the dust of death.  
Psalm 22:14–15

Despite knowing the fate that awaited Him, Jesus deferred to God's will. And so He prayed, "Not My will, but Yours, be done." This was the turning point—He resolved to submit to God's will, even though it meant death on a cross (Phil 2:8). God responded by sending an angel to strengthen Him (Lk 22:43). From this biblical account, we learn that when we make a decision to obey God, He gives us sufficient strength to follow through.

Before Paul came to Christ, he was a man bound by sin. But after he was reborn, he was set free from the law of sin and death to become a new person, and was empowered by the infilling of the Holy Spirit to live a victorious life (Acts 9:17; Rom 8:1–2; Phil 4:13). Hence, he teaches: "Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). He also encourages us to imitate him, as he imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1), in doing all things for the glory of God.

Humankind has the choice of two allegiances: Adam or Christ (1 Cor 15:22). Those who follow Adam belong to the world, rebel against God, obey the devil, and are devoid of spiritual life (Gen 2:17; 3:22–24; 1 Jn 5:19). In contrast, those who follow Christ are free from sin and the bondage of the evil one, and have passed from death into life (Rom 8:1–2; Jn 5:24; 2 Cor 3:17).

### 13.4.5 Diligence

The Lord Jesus says, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mt 11:12). These words remind us that we must go through many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). We must therefore strive to be continually filled by the Holy Spirit.



He also says, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:62). If we want to enter the heavenly kingdom, we must leave everything of the world behind (1 Jn 2:15–17).

When we realize that nothing is as important as the kingdom of heaven, we will do our best to pursue it. Paul had this understanding and was confident that he would be able to enter into the heavenly kingdom one day (2 Tim 4:18). He said that he forgot what lay behind him and simply pressed ahead for the goal, like an athlete running for the prize (Phil 3:13–14; 1 Cor 9:24). His whole life was Spirit-filled: he imitated Christ, he fought the good fight, he finished the race, and kept the faith (Rom 8:1–2; Gal 5:16; 1 Cor 11:1; 2 Tim 4:7–8). Paul also talked about the importance of putting on the armour of God (Eph 6:11–17). As Christian soldiers, who are in the line of attack, we must march forward for victory and not shrink back, or else we will be defeated by the devil.

In the Bible, we find examples of people who strived forward and those who retreated—each reaping different outcomes:

- Abraham and his family left their homeland to look for a better one. Although Abraham did not physically receive what was promised to him, he saw it from afar and maintained his confidence until the day he died (Heb 11:13–16).
- Lot lived a luxurious life in the city of Sodom. When the angel urged him to flee for his life, he was reluctant to do so, and the angel had to lead him and his family out forcefully. Unfortunately, after leaving the city, Lot’s wife could not help looking back, and was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen 19:15–17, 26).
- The Israelites left Egypt for Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. But, in the wilderness, they rebelled against Moses and craved for the former pleasures of Egypt (Acts 7:39; Ex 16:2–3; Num 11:4–6). As a result, God prevented that generation from entering the promised land (Num 14:22–23), with the exception of Joshua, Caleb and the Levites (Num 14:30).

These examples remind us of the need to follow the Lord wholeheartedly, if we are to enter heaven. We must be willing to endure hardships, make sacrifices, and strive forward (Lk 9:57–62). We can only do this if we are continually filled by the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we cannot reach our destination (Mt 7:21–23).

Elder John said, “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). This Jerusalem was not the earthly city, which would soon be destroyed at that time. Rather, it was the spiritual Jerusalem coming down from heaven. The angel revealed that this holy city was the bride, the wife of the Lamb (Rev 21:9–10). This vision reminds us of the words of Paul, who says that the church is the Jerusalem from above, the bride of Christ (Gal 4:25–26; Eph 5:31–32). It is the true church which shall, one day, be married to Christ and be with Him forever. The true church now has to prepare herself to become fully adorned—to be holy and without blemish—and to put on fine linen garments, which are her righteous deeds (Eph 5:26–27; Rev 19:7–8).

Elder John saw this vision of the true church—a Spirit-filled church, perfect and above reproach (1 Thess 3:12–13). As we reflect on this picture, we cannot help but compare it to the reality of the situation today. It makes us realize how far we have to go, and how we should endeavour to be filled by the Holy Spirit so that we can be renewed and have the nature of true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:23–24). Only then can we wait for our Lord’s second coming with confidence and joyful expectation.

### **Review questions**

1. Define the infilling of the Holy Spirit.
2. Outline the effects of being filled with the Holy Spirit.
3. Outline the requirements for the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

# Chapter 14

## DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EVIL SPIRIT

### 14.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, we have seen a plethora of misconceived ideas about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These have led to erroneous advice on the part of some church leaders, who tell their members that there is no need to pray for the Holy Spirit, that receiving the Holy Spirit is not necessarily accompanied by spiritual tongues, and that a person receives the Holy Spirit when he converts to Christ.

Compounding the confusion, from the early twentieth century onwards, there has been a lack of awareness about how to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit. For this reason, some ministers have discouraged believers from praying for the Holy Spirit in case they inadvertently receive the evil spirit. Worse still, others teach that the speaking of tongues is evidence of possession by the evil spirit.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are leaders of some Pentecostal churches, such as Morihiko Yamada,<sup>1</sup> who argue that God would never allow the evil spirit to come upon those who pray for the Holy Spirit, and advise believers not to be concerned about the matter.

There are, in fact, problems with all of the aforementioned beliefs, which simply serve to mislead and confuse people. What we need to do is return to the Bible to see what it teaches us about matters of the spiritual realm—particularly, the respective manifestations associated with receiving the Holy Spirit and the evil spirit. Importantly, we also need to ask God for the gift of spiritual discernment so that we can tell the difference between the spirits (1 Cor 12:10).

<sup>1</sup> Yamada, Morihiko, [The Secret of Receiving the Holy Spirit] (Japan).

## 14.2 Manifestations associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit

Firstly, we shall look at what the Bible has to say concerning the manifestations associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, so that we can differentiate between biblical truths and misconceptions. In this way, believers can pray for the Holy Spirit with faith and confidence.

### 14.2.1 Praising God

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunders, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

Revelation 19:6

This verse mentions the word "Alleluia" (i.e. "Hallelujah"), which is a Hebrew word meaning "Praise the Lord" (Ps 104:35). This is a fitting word to use in worship because God is truly worthy of our praise. His angels and all creation praise Him because He made them by the power of His command. A person who is filled by the Holy Spirit will praise God from his heart and will exalt Him with "Hallelujahs" (Ps 148:1–14).

### 14.2.2 Speaking in tongues and singing spiritual songs

I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

1 Corinthians 14:15

Where Paul says, "I will pray with the spirit", he is referring to praying in tongues (1 Cor 14:14); his words, "I will sing with the spirit", refer to spiritual tongues (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). The Greek word for "spiritual song" is *odais pneumatikais*, from *ode*, meaning "song",<sup>2</sup> and *pneumatikos*, meaning "spiritual".<sup>3</sup>

2 Vine, W. E., Unger, Merrill F. and White Jr., William, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Atlanta, London and Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). Strong's reference no. G5603.

3 Ibid. Strong's reference no. G4152.

Paul also talks about spiritual songs in his letter to the Ephesians (5:18–20). Here, he links spiritual songs to the infilling and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

References to spiritual songs are also found in the Book of Revelation. It describes a new song that was sung by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders: “And they sang a new song” (Rev 5:9). This song was unlike any earthly song and was only known to a special group of people: “No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth” (Rev 14:3).

### **14.2.3 Feelings of joy**

The Book of Acts records how the disciples responded to various trials during their ministry: “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52). From this verse, we see a clear link between the infilling of the Holy Spirit and the experience of joy. This is not surprising, when we consider that joy is one particular attribute of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

The Holy Spirit is also called the “oil of gladness” (Heb 1:9). Long ago, Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ would come to the world to give out the “oil of joy” to those who mourn (Isa 61:3). The Holy Spirit works today to lift us up and comfort us in times of suffering (1 Thess 1:6). When the Holy Spirit fills a believer during prayer, the overflowing of joy can manifest as spiritual laughter.

### **14.2.4 Bearing fruit of the Spirit**

The Lord Jesus says:

Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.  
A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit....  
Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Matthew 7:17–18, 20

He also says, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things” (Mt 12:35). In other words, the way to determine

whether something or someone is good or evil is by looking at the outward results. People can put on a disguise and pretend to be good for a time, but eventually they will reveal their true nature.

The Holy Spirit is the “power from on high” (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:8) which can free a person from the law of sin (Rom 8:2; 2 Cor 3:7) and renew him (Tit 3:5; 2 Cor 5:17; 2 Thess 2:13). The outcome is that he will be able to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control” (Gal 5:22–23).

### **14.3 Manifestations associated with receiving the evil spirit**

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4:1

We should not take for granted that all spirits are from God, or that there is no possibility of believers receiving the evil spirit. In fact, where there is a lack of knowledge and discernment, the devil has the opportunity to confuse people, especially if their faith is immature. We need to look at the evidence from the Bible and also learn from the experiences of members in the True Jesus Church to distinguish between the work of the Holy Spirit and that of the evil spirit.

#### **14.3.1 Failure to acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh**

By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

1 John 4:2–3

When Elder John wrote 1 John, a heresy called Gnosticism was prevalent. Gnostics believed that all physical things are inherently evil, and that only God is good. They theorized that since God is good, He cannot, or would not, come into contact with the physical realm. This meant that they did not believe the “Word became flesh” (Jn 1:14), or

that it was possible for the Son of God to die on the cross. Such ideas were contrary to the gospel of salvation and were manifestly the work of the evil spirit.

Today, there are similar concepts, so-called “new theology”, which are spreading rapidly throughout the world. In reality, they are not really new, but more of a revival of past heretical teachings. For example, some Christians today argue against the divine nature of Jesus, the authenticity of His miracles, His resurrection, ascension, and the reality of His second coming. We must be careful of such ideas.

### **14.3.2 Speaking as of the world**

They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.

1 John 4:5

Jesus says that it is the Spirit who gives life, and that the flesh profits nothing. He also says that His words are “spirit, and they are life” (Jn 6:63). Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit is to make known the gospel which is spiritual and is based on the wisdom of God, as opposed to the wisdom of man (1 Cor 2:1–7). On the other hand, the devil, who is the god of this world, is working hard to prevent people from receiving the light of the true gospel (2 Cor 4:4). To this end, he will make use of people to spread messages that are based on earthly wisdom, and which serve to attract the people of the world (2 Tim 4:3–4); such messages have no power to give life. Sadly, some present-day churches have fallen into the trap of propagating them.

### **14.3.3 Not listening to the true church**

We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

1 John 4:6

Elder John points out a clear way of telling if a person belongs to God—by observing whether he listens to the true church or not (1 Jn 2:18–19). Jesus Himself teaches that the sheep who truly belong to Him will listen to His voice and come into the one fold (Jn 10:16).

This tallies with Paul's teaching that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Cor 14:32).

During the apostolic period, there was only one true church which had proof that she belonged to God: the abidance of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9); a foundation that was built on the truth (Eph 2:20–22); and the testimony of signs and miracles (Mk 16:20; Heb 2:4). The present-day true church has the same criteria. Importantly, like the apostolic church, she is singular in nature. The Bible is clear there is only one body of Christ and one Holy Spirit (Eph 4:4). It is not possible for Christ to be divided, as the nature of the Holy Spirit is to unite (1 Cor 1:13; Eph 4:3). In the same vein, the true church preaches one truth (2 Cor 1:18–19); it is simply not logical for different conflicting beliefs to emanate from the one Spirit (Eph 4:5).

#### **14.3.4 Whisperings and mutterings**

And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?

Isaiah 8:19

Here, the prophet Isaiah talks about the mediums and wizards who practised their evil arts during the Old Testament period. Their whisperings and mutterings were manifestations of the evil spirits which took possession of them. Far from being consigned to history, these signs have been witnessed in demon-possessed people brought to the True Jesus Church for deliverance. When ministers cast out the evil spirits in the name of Jesus Christ, these disturbing sounds cease.

#### **14.3.5 Shouting, convulsing, foaming and falling down**

And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him.

Luke 9:39

This verse gives a vivid description of people who are possessed by the evil spirit: they may shout, convulse, foam at the mouth, or fall down.



Alarming, these manifestations are witnessed in some charismatic churches, where people displaying such behaviour are mistakenly thought to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

#### **14.3.6 Losing consciousness**

The loss of awareness is common in someone who is demon-possessed. In such a state, he may do things that he does not realize. An example is the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1–15) who lived among the tombs (vv. 2–3); cried out day and night (v. 5); cut himself with stones (v. 5); exhibited supernatural strength (v. 3); and went about unclothed (v. 15).

Again, some of these manifestations can be seen in some charismatic churches which believe that their members have received the Holy Spirit. They do not realize that what they ought to do is to cast out the evil spirit in the name of Jesus.

#### **14.3.7 Arrogance**

Speaking through the prophets, God lamented over the rebellion of Satan which stemmed from pride:

How you are fallen from heaven,  
O Lucifer, son of the morning!  
Isaiah 14:12–15

You were the seal of perfection,  
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.  
You were in Eden, the garden of God;  
Every precious stone was your covering.

You were the anointed cherub who covers;  
I established you.

Ezekiel 28:12–14

Not surprisingly, when a person receives the evil spirit, he will exhibit this characteristic. It could manifest in a number of ways: as a desire for position, praise, and adulation by others; a refusal to submit to the truth or the guidance of others; the claim to have received a

personal revelation from God to initiate radical changes within the church; rebuking and judging fellow brethren; and claiming to be the Christ, a prophet, or an apostle.

### **14.3.8 Other signs**

Other signs of the work of the evil spirit within a person are: feelings of distress or disturbance (1 Sam 16:14–15, 23); irrational or incoherent speech, or the harming of others (1 Sam 18:10–11); incitement of dissensions, jealousies and general disharmony (Rev 16:14; Jas 3:14–16); uncleanness and licentiousness (Rev 18:2–3; 2 Pet 2:2, 18); opposition to the truth (2 Tim 4:1; Rev 2:24; 2 Pet 2:1); the manifestation of strange noises or physical distress, such as vomiting, paleness, and feeling cold.

### **14.3.9 Dealing with the work of the evil spirit**

When any of the aforementioned manifestations occur, the response should be to stop the person from praying (if he is praying). Where appropriate, the evil spirit should be cast out in the name of Jesus (Mk 1:25–26; 9:25–26).

However, the Bible indicates that the work of the devil can sometimes be hard to detect: “For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Cor 11:14; cf. Acts 16:10–18). His work can be so subtle and deceptive that we can only recognize it if we have the gift to discern spirits, along with experience of matters relating to the spiritual realm.

## **14.4 Experiences of people who have received the evil spirit**

In his book, “The secret of receiving the Holy Spirit”, Morihiko Yamada devotes one section to the testimonies of people who have supposedly received the Holy Spirit. In fact, if we look carefully at the reported manifestations, we realize that the people concerned were under the influence of the evil spirit. However, due to the lack of spiritual

discernment, these experiences have been mistaken for the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

By analyzing some extracts from the book, we notice the signs that clearly indicate the work of the evil spirit.

#### **14.4.1 Loss of awareness of the surroundings**

##### **Extract 1**

During a night service, I was sitting and praying together with the brothers and sisters. The service leader said, “Whatever we ask from the Lord, it will be granted and we have to receive with thanksgiving.” I believed in his words and so I said, “Hallelujah” softly and repetitively. Not long after that, I fell face up onto the bed... according to the others, I fell down, raised my hands, clapping and releasing them repetitively. Then suddenly, there was a loud voice and my hand started clapping while I praised God in spiritual tongues.

Morihiko Yamada (p. 263)

The words “according to the others” indicate that, after this person fell down, he was no longer aware of what he was doing.

##### **Extract 2**

I felt like dancing and wanted to fly. When I stood up, words of praise came naturally from my mouth. All I know was that my hands and legs were moving but I did not know what I was doing. After the prayer, someone asked me, “Have you ever taken dancing lessons?” I said, “No”. They said I had moved about, holding both my sleeves. I was singing spiritual songs and dancing round the church hall.

Morihiko Yamada (p. 266)

##### **Extract 3**

One night, on 29 of March, I was praying with Mr Yamada at the church of the Holy Book in Japan. During the prayer, I was suddenly filled with the spirit and controlled by the spirit. Then I spoke in tongues and I was not fully conscious of what I was doing. From what I heard from others, I prayed in tongues for more than an hour.

Morihiko Yamada (pp. 317–318)

In the above two extracts, the people were evidently unaware of their actions or that they were “speaking in tongues”.

#### **14.4.2 Foaming at the mouth**

##### **Extract 4**

Because foam was flowing from my mouth, two other brothers used a handkerchief to wipe it away.

Morihiko Yamada (p. 284)

##### **Extract 5**

After the prayer, a lady waved her hand at me from the ladies’ prayer room. So I went over there and saw my wife lying on the bed; her face was red and her eyes were closed. She spoke in tongues in a soft voice. A lady seated next to her used a handkerchief to wipe her mouth.

Morihiko Yamada (p. 285)

##### **Extract 6**

There was another lady who was initially praying very quietly, but at seven o’clock her lips lost control and foam started to come out from her mouth. Then at half past seven, she spoke in tongues and received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Morihiko Yamada (pp. 311–312)

In these three cases, the people foamed at the mouth—a sign they had received the evil spirit.

#### **14.4.3 Disorderliness**

##### **Extract 7**

According to the others, my body fell down and my whole body started spinning round in a circle like the needle on a clock. My neck was like a

pendulum, swaying rhythmically from left to right. My hands moved up and down and my mouth uttered some strange words.

Morihiko Yamada (p. 285)

### **Extract 8**

A woman was repeating the word “Hallelujah” softly. At seven o’clock she fell, facing upwards.... When she first fell down, her head was pointing west and her feet pointing east. As she spoke in tongues, she started to turn, facing south. With her head in the middle, her body spun around in a circle. At nine o’clock, her feet were pointing west, after making a 180-degree turn.

Morihiko Yamada (pp. 309–310)

Both these extracts detail behaviour that was disorderly, inappropriate and, most likely, embarrassing for the people concerned. In the first case, it was clear that the person was not aware of what was happening.

#### **14.4.4 Feelings of anguish**

### **Extract 9**

At that time [i.e. when praying in tongues], I felt a pain on my chest and it was unbearable. After the prayer, the pain gradually went away and by that time, I felt as if I had just woken up from a dream.

Morihiko Yamada (p. 318)

This is a description of someone who experienced pain and anguish. In other cases, people have been known to complain of difficulty in breathing or of general distress.

#### **14.4.5 Falling down**

Morihiko Yamada often describes people falling down when supposedly receiving the Holy Spirit. From accounts recorded in the Bible, we see that this is a clear manifestation of demon-possession (e.g. Lk 9:42). Unfortunately, the reason why the writer does not recognize the work of the evil spirit is because he does not have the gift to discern spirits and lacks experience of the spiritual realm. He

believes that it is not possible for a person who asks for the Holy Spirit to receive the evil spirit instead. Hence, on page 98 of his book, he refers to Luke 11:11–12: “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?”

It is true that God will not allow those who ask for the Holy Spirit to receive the evil spirit. However, the devil can sometimes disturb a person or even possess him, if he leaves room for him to work. We need to understand that Jesus told the parable in Luke 11 to indicate how much God loves us and delights in hearing our prayers, and to teach us about the need for faith when asking for the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:9–10; Mt 21:22).

It is important to know that it is not God who gives people the evil spirit, or allows him to disturb them—that is solely the work of the devil. However, the devil can work if he has an opportunity to do so.

## **14.5 How to avoid being disturbed by the evil spirit**

The devil is like a roaring lion, prowling around for someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8), as he does not wish for anyone to be saved. If given the opportunity, he will confuse or disturb those who are praying for the Holy Spirit. Fortunately, the Bible points out some safeguards to prevent this from happening.

### **14.5.1 Waiting and praying for the Holy Spirit in the true church**

When we read the Book of Acts, we learn that Jesus told His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit in a designated place:

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.

Luke 24:49

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” He said, “you have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

Acts 1:4–5

This place was Jerusalem, the holy city of God. It confirmed Zechariah's message that the people of the earth should come here to worship God, and that the consequence for going elsewhere would be the absence of rain (Zech 14:17). Jerusalem signifies the true church (Heb 12:22–23), the body of Christ, in which the Spirit of God dwells: "And gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:22–23).

There is only one true church (Eph 4:4) which has, as her main distinguishing feature, the complete and perfect gospel, which is based solely upon the teachings of the apostles, prophets and Jesus Christ (Eph 2:19–22). To receive the Holy Spirit, we must receive, accept, and obey the gospel of salvation that is preached by the true church; and we must pray for the Holy Spirit there.

In the Book of Acts, we note a distinct pattern emerging from the accounts of people who were baptized by the Holy Spirit: after the establishment of the church at Pentecost, those who received the Holy Spirit invariably did so after contact with the church, through the apostles. We see this in the case of the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17), Saul (Acts 9:17), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:44), and the Ephesian disciples (Acts 19:6). We do not see the believers receiving the Holy Spirit in isolation. In each case, the Holy Spirit worked to confirm the gospel that the apostles were preaching, or, additionally, to confirm the validity of the water baptism which they performed in the name of Jesus.

Why does it matter that one should accept the gospel preached by the true church, or that one should pray for the Holy Spirit there? Firstly, the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17). He can only be found in the church which preaches the complete and perfect gospel of salvation (cf. Mk 16:15–17). This is because God gives the Spirit to those who believe and obey Him (Acts 5:32)—as demonstrated by their acceptance of the gospel (Eph 1:13). God will not give this grace to someone who believes in teachings that differ from the Bible.

Moreover, where a person believes and accepts an erroneous gospel, the "spirit of error" may captivate him with strange spiritual experiences that attempt to mimic the work of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 4:6). This is because the devil can disguise himself as an angel of light to confuse and deceive people (2 Cor 11:14). The testimonies in section 14.4 of this chapter provide ample evidence of this.

### **14.5.2 Avoiding sin**

Paul also gives us the advice not to “give place to the devil” (Eph 4:27), meaning not to give way to sin in our lives. If we do, the devil has the opportunity to work. This can be likened to failing to lock a door and providing a way in for an opportunistic thief. We see examples of this happening to a number of people in the Bible. They include Saul, who transgressed the will of God and harboured jealousy against David, resulting in God’s Spirit leaving him and an evil spirit entering into his heart (1 Sam 15:23; 16:14; 18:6–10). Judas pilfered money, and later betrayed the Lord after Satan entered his heart (Jn 12:6; 13:27). Ananias and his wife acted dishonestly to keep back some of the money that they had pledged to the church, and allowed Satan to take control of their hearts to lie to God (Acts 5:1–10).

### **14.6 Summary**

In conclusion, it is crucial that we wait and pray for the Holy Spirit in the true church, where we can be assured that the Holy Spirit is graciously bestowed. We should also take care to obey the gospel and avoid sin. When we do all these things and pray with faith, we can be confident that Jesus will give us the very best, which is His Holy Spirit (Lk 11:11–13).

### **Review questions**

1. Describe the manifestations of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
2. Describe the manifestations of the evil spirit.
3. Explain how one can prevent disturbance from, or possession by, the evil spirit.



# Chapter 15

## PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

### 15.1 Introduction

The *Holy Spirit Times* is published by the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church in Taiwan. It includes a section entitled “My experience of receiving the Holy Spirit”, which features the personal testimonies of church members. This chapter presents a selection, to give readers an insight into the experiences of believers who have received the Holy Spirit.

It should be pointed out that every individual’s experience varies somewhat: some have more profound spiritual experiences bestowed upon them by God than others. However, the one consistent and common feature of all members’ experiences is that they speak in spiritual tongues at the point of baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is the mandatory evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Bible.

May God’s Spirit enlighten all the readers and inspire them to pursue after the Holy Spirit in the True Jesus Church, just like the following believers.

### 15.2 Unsurpassable joy (by Wuzhen Lin)

In 1929, I was still a stranger to Christianity. At the time, I was a doctor in Xikou, Taiwan. Nevertheless, I was unable to cure my wife who had been suffering for years from asthma.

One day, my brother-in-law, Haidao Tsai, told me, “The True Jesus Church is preaching in Dalin. It has the Holy Spirit, and anyone who

is sick can go there for healing. Take my sister there so that she can be made well.”

However, his advice annoyed me, and I promptly scolded him.

A few days later, I went to Dalin to visit a good friend and colleague, Zhu Kuo. When I arrived, I found him reading a copy of the *Holy Spirit Times*. He spoke excitedly: “Here’s some interesting news: this article talks about the True Jesus Church which originated in China and is different from other churches. Its members have the Holy Spirit and can speak in tongues. They can even cast out demons and heal illnesses. This church must be true.”

I responded, “You’re talking nonsense. How can an intelligent, philosophical person like you, who isn’t superstitious and doesn’t believe in gods, be as foolish as my brother-in-law, Haidao? Have you ever come across a florist shop that doesn’t try to sell its flowers? Even we, as doctors, tell others how good our medical skills are, and how much more effective our medicines are, compared to others. Religion is no different: which church doesn’t claim to be true or that it can save the world? I refuse to believe.”

But Zhu Kuo persisted, “The True Jesus Church is definitely different from other churches. Not long ago, I also refused to believe, but then I saw with my own eyes some of my patients believing and being healed. This is why I want to find out more.”

Feeling intrigued at this point, I responded, “Perhaps there’s something to this. Let me know when you’re going—I’ll go with you.”

Three days after returning home, on 8 April 1929, my brother-in-law, Haidao, brought along a Japanese minister, Elder Seiki Suda, and Brother Haiqing Tsai (later to become Deacon Shenming Tsai) to my house. The elder explained, “Mr Kuo told me you want to know more about the truth, which is why we’re here.”

Hearing this, I quickly invited a few friends to join us, to listen to their message. The elder proceeded to deliver a sermon in Japanese, while the deacon interpreted into Taiwanese. When they finished, they asked my wife and children to kneel on the bed to pray. He told them to believe in their hearts and taught them to say a simple prayer: “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord Jesus. We pray that the Holy Spirit fill our hearts.” The elder and deacon then proceeded to pray, speaking in words that I could not understand. Also, I saw that their bodies were shaking.

Five minutes into the prayer, I noticed that there seemed to be a force pulling my wife a few inches up from the bed. She was jumping up and down on her knees and was beating her chest. Her mouth uttered words that I could not understand. I was horrified—I thought that if she continued like this, she would damage her lungs and die. So I climbed onto the bed to stop her. Noticing how anxious I was, the elder put his hands on my wife’s head and said, “Amen.” My wife became still. She was sweating profusely, but was smiling. To my surprise, she did not appear to be in any pain and even looked refreshed and calm. She said, “While I was praying, I saw a bright, dazzling light shining on me.”

Deacon Tsai responded, “Thank God for His grace. She’s seen the glorious light.”

At that time I did not understand what he meant. What light had she seen?

Before they left, the elder and deacon told me, “If you sincerely believe in Jesus, you, too, can receive the Holy Spirit, even without our help through the laying of hands.”

That night, before we all went to bed, my wife and children prayed. Again, my wife was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in unknown tongues. And again, she was jumping up and down on her knees.

After the prayer, I said to her, “You’re not well. Why pray so much?”

She told me, “I want to pray because it feels good—better than taking medicine. I can also feel that I’m getting better.”

Before long, my wife and children received water baptism. I also started attending church services and studied the Bible fervently. Gradually, the love of God opened my heart to understand the truth. Then, on 20 May 1929, it was my turn to become a newborn person. That day, there were ten of us receiving water baptism, including my friend Zhu Kuo, my brother-in-law, Haidao Tsai, a number of school teachers, and patients with various illnesses. In addition, many curious villagers came along to observe. The latter mocked us, saying, “How can educated people like you believe in Jesus?”

After the baptism, we returned to the church to receive footwashing and holy communion. We all felt greatly touched by the love of God. Later, we prayed together for the Holy Spirit. During the prayer, Elder Gideon Huang laid his hands on my head, and I could feel a warm breeze blowing across my forehead. I felt joyful, but did not receive the Holy Spirit.

The next evening, at eight o'clock, we went out into the field behind our house to pray. The sky was dark because it had been raining. We could not kneel down because the ground was wet, so we remained standing. A few minutes into the prayer, while fully conscious, I could feel my feet moving and noticed a warm feeling inside of me. I knew that I was about to receive the Holy Spirit and purposely clasped my hands tightly together to stop them from moving. I also made a conscious effort to articulate the words of my prayer carefully, to stop myself from speaking in tongues. But I could not resist the power of the Holy Spirit—I began to speak words that I could not understand. At the same time, my body was being lifted up off the ground by the Spirit. I danced and turned, my hands spread out by my sides. In front of me, I could see a light as bright as day.

I have never experienced such joy as on the night when I received the Holy Spirit, and I would not exchange it for anything in the world.

### **15.3 Inspired by my husband's transformation (by Shuzhen Yang)**

There was a time when I did not know Jesus Christ and worshipped idols—a time when I lived a life of poverty in a village. My husband was in poor health and was unable to work. He also had a bad temper and would often hit me, making me unwell. I felt hopeless and alone. But I thank God for His grace, because under these circumstances, He saved both my husband (later to become Deacon Shenming Tsai) and myself.

In 1928, my husband went to Tainan (in Taiwan) to seek treatment. There, he was guided by God to attend services at the True Jesus Church. After studying the doctrines, he was baptized, leaving behind the Presbyterian Church he used to belong to. Soon afterwards, he received the Holy Spirit and became a new person. When he returned to our village, he started preaching enthusiastically about the work of the Holy Spirit in the True Jesus Church. However, I did not dare to believe that he had really changed and ignored what he was saying. Nevertheless, I observed his behaviour over several days and noticed a great difference.

One day, an elder from the True Jesus Church came to our village to perform water baptism. It was then that I decided to believe and be baptized. When my husband asked me the reason, I replied, “I want to have my sins washed away, to change, and to live a new life.” When he heard these words, he was so happy. During the baptism, I saw a glorious light shining in front of me. Afterwards, I felt as if the heavy burden that I had been carrying for so long had been lifted away. I felt so light, like a free person. I was very happy and kept saying “Hallelujah.”

On my way home that day, I prayed many times: five times on the side of the footpath; three times at home, in between washing the clothes; and five times in between cooking dinner. Finally, when I had finished cooking and was waiting for the family to come to the table, I prayed once again. This time, I received the Holy Spirit: I spoke in tongues loudly and my whole body shook. My husband could hear me from the other room and came in to pray with me. I was filled by the Holy Spirit. The joy that I experienced was like a living fountain, flowing from within me.

After receiving water baptism and the Holy Spirit, I felt released from my bondage of sin and unhappiness. Now, I felt joyful and contented. In addition, God gave me back my physical health.

I will never forget the time when I received the Holy Spirit. Thank God, He continues to live within me—constantly teaching me, comforting me and confirming my salvation. And I will continue to rely on Him and submit to His guidance so that I can walk in the way of the Lord, serve Him, and wait for His glorious second coming.

#### **15.4 The might of the Holy Spirit (by Yangzhen Chen)**

I was born into a family that practised a number of different faiths, but not Christianity. My home was originally in Putian, Fujian, in China, but my family and I moved to Shima in Longxi County to do business. In the winter of 1921, I returned home to get married. My wife was a Christian and a graduate of a Christian school. I recall how, at our wedding, she refused to bow down before the altar of our ancestors. However, over time, she became influenced by the religious observances of our family.

I ran a business selling dried fruit and candies. At the end of each year, I would travel to Shanghai or Hangzhou to settle the accounts. On these business trips, I often socialized in places associated with drinking, gambling and prostitution. I particularly enjoyed playing mahjong, and it was not unusual for me to gamble from dusk until dawn, for one or two days at a time. Despite sometimes feeling a sense of remorse, I could not free myself from this addictive activity. I also neglected my wife, who made her anger and disapproval known by maintaining a stony silence.

In January 1931, a few people from my village—Menglan Chen, Li Chen, Yuchun Ou and some others, who were heavily addicted to opium—received news about the True Jesus Church in Putian. They heard that people with all kinds of sicknesses and addictions were being cured. Desperate to be rid of their addictions, they made the long journey to Putian. A few months later, they returned home—totally transformed, looking healthy and jubilant. Accompanying them was Deacon Lucius Shiao, who came to preach the message of the True Jesus Church. They gathered daily to pray—often, very loudly. Their services sometimes continued until midnight. I personally considered their behaviour to be very strange and scoffed at the name of the church, especially the word “True”. In my opinion, they were just a group of bored people with nothing better to do. So I decided not to pay them any attention.

Some time later, my wife became seriously ill, due to complications after giving birth. Her condition grew worse, and she started feeling intense pain in her abdomen. She took medication for six months, but to no avail. She began losing weight and looking pale. I could do nothing for her. At the time, Deacon Shiao was in the locality, healing sick people through prayers. Neighbours urged me to invite him to pray for my wife, but I resisted. Finally, we held a family meeting in which it was decided that I and my brother-in-law, Tianyou Xu, a doctor and acupuncturist, would pay a visit to Deacon Shiao.

When we met with Deacon Shiao, I asked, “Is it true that you can heal sicknesses, Mr Shiao?”

He replied, “No, you’re mistaken, I’m not a doctor. It’s Jesus who heals.”

I was surprised at his answer and said, “It doesn’t matter whether it’s you or Jesus, I’ve someone at home who’s ill. Can you help?”

Deacon Shiao replied, “If you believe, then all things are possible with the Lord Jesus. I won’t even ask how ill your wife is, because if you believe, she can be healed.”

I said, “If she’s healed through your prayers, we’ll definitely believe.”

He responded, “You first need to have faith, then your prayer will be effective.”

When we returned home, we made a decision to invite Deacon Shiao to pray for my wife. He duly came to our house. Before the prayer, he asked me to bring a cup of cold water. This request worried me, as I had heard that cold water was bad for my wife’s condition. Nevertheless, I reluctantly poured a small cup.

During the prayer, I paid particular attention to Deacon Shiao, to see whether he was using any witchcraft. But all I noticed was that he was praying fervently. I heard him asking God to heal my wife so that many people would believe and the church could be established. His behaviour seemed very sincere and solemn.

After the prayer, Deacon Shiao gave the water to my wife to drink. He told me, “God will surely have mercy on your wife. He’ll take care of her and heal her.”

I asked, “How can you be so sure?”

He replied, “During the prayer, I saw a bright and glorious light; it proves that God has heard our prayers.”

I promptly turned round to ask the other people who had been praying with us whether they had seen any light, but no one had. I now began to worry that witchcraft was indeed somehow involved and regretted giving my wife the cold water. I continued feeling anxious after Deacon Shiao left.

That night, I expected my wife’s condition to deteriorate and was unable to sleep. But amazingly, my wife slept peacefully until seven o’clock the next morning. This was something I had not witnessed since the start of her illness. I asked her whether she felt any pain. She pressed her abdomen and told me reassuringly, “I’m much better. I’m not in pain anymore.”

I felt so happy that I rushed out to tell Deacon Shiao.

He said, “I told you yesterday that God would take care of her.”

I then invited him to the house to pray again. This time, when he asked me to fetch some cold water, I brought a lot more. Deacon Shiao smiled and said, “Your faith has grown.”

We prayed consecutively for seven days, after which my wife was completely healed and was able to get out of bed.

On account of this miracle, I no longer doubted God. Instead, I grew to respect and trust Him. Then, on 15 May 1931, my family and I were baptized into the True Jesus Church. That day, Deacon Shiao performed water baptism on thirty-three people. During the baptism, two sisters saw a vision of shining birds flying in the air, which disappeared when the baptism ended. Deacon Shiao explained that the vision indicated that the Holy Spirit would descend very soon.

Indeed, after we returned to the church and knelt down to pray, the Holy Spirit descended mightily. We could hear sounds like those of thunder and falling water, and could feel the floor shaking. So powerful was the experience that one of the believers, Yejiu Xu, thought the building was about to collapse and promptly fled outside. After the prayer, we learnt that about half of the people who had undergone water baptism received the Holy Spirit. We were overjoyed.

I was one of those who received the Holy Spirit. During that particular prayer, I had felt a slight jolt, as if an electric current was passing through my body, causing it to shake. I then spoke in tongues, uttering words that I did not understand. I felt so happy.

From that day onwards, I have continued to speak in tongues during prayer. Moreover, by relying on the Holy Spirit, I have been able to overcome bad habits, including a ten-year smoking addiction. I finally feel released from my heavy burden.

My mother-in-law also received the Holy Spirit. Prior to this, she had been addicted to opium for eight years and was frail and underweight. Afterwards, she was able to give up the habit and regained her health. She began attending church services fervently.

I thank God that He saved our family from sin and suffering. He has blessed us with both physical and spiritual peace. I will never forget His grace and love.



## **15.5 Gaining self-control through the Holy Spirit** **(by Jinkun Hsieh)**

When both of my parents passed away, I became very depressed. I also had a bad temper that I could not control. One day, a friend from the True Jesus Church told me, “When you believe in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit, you’ll be able to feel joy, whatever your circumstances.”

Though not totally convinced, these words inspired me sufficiently to attend one of the church services. When I got there, I noticed that the members prayed with words which I could not understand, and their bodies shook. I went home feeling puzzled.

Then came the school holidays in the summer of 1957, which gave me a break from my teaching work. I attended services at the True Jesus Church in Taichung (Taiwan) for two months, studying the truth and praying for the Holy Spirit. However, I felt that I was unable to find what I was looking for, and so, when the school re-opened in the autumn, I stopped attending services. What I did not know was that, when God has mercy on you, He will not forsake you, even though you stop searching for Him.

One month after school re-opened, I experienced some personal difficulties and decided to return to church. It was the time of the autumn spiritual convocation. I attended the morning prayer service, during which the minister encouraged the congregation with the words of Jesus: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:37–38). I wanted to receive the Holy Spirit, and felt something like a force compelling me to go to the front of the chapel to pray. Members of my family were also there. During the prayer, I was moved to tears. However, I realized that I had not yet received the Holy Spirit because I did not speak in tongues. But now, I knew what it was like to be moved by the Spirit.

From that time onwards, I started praying more fervently and would sometimes feel an energy emanating from within me, causing my body to shake. At church, I would make a habit of going into the prayer room to pray, where the ministers and elders would lay hands on me. But the time had not yet arrived for me to receive the Holy Spirit.

Although I was moved by the Holy Spirit during prayers, I found it hard to understand the sermons, even though they were based on the

Bible. Therefore, I decided to attend services and events organized by other denominations in Taichung, in an attempt to learn more about the Bible. But at the same time, I also kept up my attendance at the Wednesday night testimony services in the True Jesus Church.

On 8 June 1958, I decided to register for water baptism in the True Jesus Church. However, on the day prior to the baptism, a Christian friend from another denomination told me, “Baptism doesn’t wash away your sins—they’re forgiven when you believe.”

Hearing these words made me totally confused and I changed my mind about receiving baptism. Instead, I prayed to God for guidance, saying, “Merciful Lord Jesus, I believe that you can save me, but please give me a sign so that I know I can trust you. Guide me so that I can witness to my relatives. Have mercy on me.”

The next day, two brothers from the True Jesus Church came to visit me: Brother Kuo and Brother Lee. The latter shared a testimony about how he believed and received water baptism. He then encouraged me to attend the morning prayer service the next day, in order to pray for the Holy Spirit. At this point, I was still unsure whether the True Jesus Church was preaching the truth, but decided to go along anyway.

On 25 June, I attended the morning prayer service. There were around ten people, including Brother Lee. After the service, we went into the prayer room to continue praying for the Holy Spirit. Brother Tsai was already in there and he was singing a melodious song—a spiritual song. I had heard about spiritual songs before, but this was the first time that I heard one for myself. I did not understand what he was singing and could only discern a few “Hallelujahs”. It did not sound like Taiwanese, Japanese, Mandarin or English. It sounded what I imagined Hebrew to be like. From what I knew, Brother Tsai had not even attended high school—so how was he able to sing such a graceful Hebrew song? As I was pondering over these things, I was moved to realize that God must really exist after all. What I was witnessing was something truly amazing—proof that God is real. Why had I been doubting and resisting Him?

Tears of regret welled up in my eyes as I knelt down to pray. As I prayed, I could feel a warm energy inside of me. I continued praying for about twenty minutes, until I had no more tears left. I felt such joy in my heart—as though I was entering into the embrace of the

heavenly Father. After the prayer, Brother Lee said nothing, other than to encourage me to return to church after work, to pray again.

Later, I rushed to church to attend the evening service. When it ended, I went into the prayer room to pray. After the prayer, Brother Lee announced to the believers, “He’s received the Holy Spirit!” I realized then that I had received the Holy Spirit that morning, and now Brother Lee was confirming it.

Over time, I could see changes in myself: I was able to get up early to attend prayer services before work, whereas, in the past, I was habitually late for everything; I began to understand what I was reading in the Bible; my ears were opened to the sermons; and I was able to control my temper. Also, there came a time when, faced with a financial crisis, I was able to find comfort in the Holy Spirit. However, there remained one unresolved issue: I still had not received water baptism. This was because I did not know how to resolve the potential conflict with my family’s practice of ancestor and idol worship.

In mid–August, during a student spiritual convocation, Elder Lin asked me, “Are there any personal problems that you’ve not been able to resolve? Because, if you don’t get baptized soon, the Holy Spirit will leave you, as He’ll not stay indefinitely within a person whose sins are not yet forgiven.”

I did not know what to say. All I could think of was what would happen if I ever became angry and depressed again.

Thank God for His grace, I finally received water baptism in the True Jesus Church in Taichung, on 16 November. I could now truly begin a new life in Christ.

### **15.6 Praying with persistence (by Aher Zhu)**

Hallelujah! Thank God, I received the Holy Spirit in 1954, when I was sixteen years old.

I was brought up in the True Jesus Church and grew up in the love and grace of God. As a child, I listened to Bible stories and sang hymns. I also knew the importance of the Holy Spirit—that without Him, one cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. I often witnessed the joy of the brothers and sisters in Christ around me when they received the Holy Spirit. Therefore, I resolved to pray for the Holy Spirit and to

take hold of opportunities, such as spiritual convocations, to do so. But despite praying hard, I did not receive Him.

Beginning in the autumn of 1954, the True Jesus Church in Meisan, Taiwan, started holding Friday night prayer services, where members could pray especially for the Holy Spirit. By the grace of God, in every service, members would receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. On one particular night, many children received the Holy Spirit—they spoke in tongues and their bodies shook through the inspiration of the Spirit. They were all so happy. I wondered when it would be my turn. On my way home that night, I resolved to pray hard the following Friday, and not to go home until I received the Holy Spirit.

On Friday, 27 November, I went to church excitedly, feeling like a soldier on a mission. When I knelt down to pray, I told myself that I would not get up until I had received the Holy Spirit. With this heart, I prayed persistently for about two hours. By then, the church services had ended, and everybody had gone home. I was the only person left in church. With tears falling down my cheeks, I asked God for His mercy and His Holy Spirit. Hallelujah! God answered my prayer: I started speaking in tongues and my body began to shake. As it was late, I concluded my prayer, feeling joyful. The next day, I went back to church to pray. After kneeling down for about five minutes, I was again filled by the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues.

Since that time, I have become more zealous for God, and my faith has grown stronger. These days, I love praying—even several prayers a day do not seem enough. I feel that I am enjoying the spiritual water which flows from the Lord: it nourishes me and makes me feel as if my soul will never hunger or thirst again. The Holy Spirit is also guiding me in my daily life: He helps me through difficulties, and to overcome sin and weaknesses.

I thank God for His grace and hope that other brothers and sisters can also share my experience.

### **15.7 A shining light (by Donghao Zhen)**

I grew up in a family that worshipped idols. My father was particularly zealous and attended various religious ceremonies. As a child, I followed him to do the same. At the time, we lived near a local True

Jesus Church, which I did not know much about, other than the fact that the members prayed very loudly. However, my aunt and uncle were members of the True Jesus Church and would often witness to my father about Jesus Christ. As a result of their preaching, he went to the church to find out more, and I accompanied him on these visits.

One day, an elder from the church came to visit us at home. When he saw my father smoking, he told him that the Christian way of life entailed giving up smoking and drinking. My father did not take kindly to these words and stopped attending the church. I did not know the reason at the time; all I knew was that I could not go any more.

Some time later, I contracted malaria and became seriously ill. My father was very worried and looked for a doctor to treat me. At the same time, my aunt prayed for me. Soon I recovered from my illness. I personally believed that my recovery was on account of my aunt's prayers; however, my father attributed it to the care of the doctor and did not acknowledge the work of God.

A neighbour who was a member of the Presbyterian Church came to our house one day to preach to my mother. My mother became interested and decided to attend the church services. Before long, both of my parents were baptized into the Presbyterian Church. The minister would often come to visit me at home to invite me to the church, but, being shy, I did not go. My mother would also urge me to go with her to the church, but I always refused.

One day, I said to my mother, "As you want me to go to church so much, will you let me go to the True Jesus Church? It's near home, and aunty and uncle will be there."

She replied, "Very well. After all, every church is the same."

And so, from then on, I started attending services at the True Jesus Church.

On 22 November 1953, I received water baptism during the spiritual convocation. My aunt gave me a Bible and advised me to pray for the Holy Spirit. That day, and in the days following, I prayed hard, but did not receive the Holy Spirit.

Then, a few days after the spiritual convocation, I overheard an old neighbour commenting, "The people in the True Jesus Church pray so loudly and their bodies shake: they must all be hypnotized by that old person."

I had heard this type of remark many times before; the “old person” they were referring to was Deaconess Cheng. But I could not help mulling over these words and even started feeling a bit scared each time I knelt down to pray.

The following year, on 5 March 1954, a sister in the church became ill, and the members started praying for her. During one particular prayer, I saw a flash of light and began speaking in tongues, while my body began to shake. I felt so happy—it was indescribable. At the time, Deaconess Cheng happened to be away, working in another locality. It made me realize that what the neighbour had said was not true, after all. I went home, full of joy, to tell my mother the news. What I did not know was that I would soon face opposition and problems at home.

When the minister from the Presbyterian Church found out that I was attending services in the True Jesus Church, he said to my mother, “Why do you let your son go there?”

And so, from then on, my mother became angry whenever I went to church and would try to stop me from going. I tried to ignore her anger, thinking it would soon pass, but it only got worse.

One day, when my aunt came to visit, my mother said to her angrily, “If your church is true, does that mean our church is false?”

However, this opposition did not stop me from praying to God for my family, often with tears. It took several years of persistent prayers, but, finally, God answered my prayers—my whole family eventually came to the True Jesus Church.

These days, I feel full of the joy and comfort of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 9:31; Heb 1:9), even in times of difficulties or illnesses. I just want to thank God for His grace and His Holy Spirit. May all glory be given to Him.

### **15.8 Receiving the Holy Spirit moved me to be baptized (by Xiansheng Lin)**

I grew up in a family that worshipped idols. My mother was especially devout. However, I also had a lot of contact with Christians while I was growing up: my uncle was an elder of the True Jesus Church; our neighbour was a Christian, who would often invite my mother and myself to attend family services at his house; I attended Sunday School

with my cousin at a Presbyterian Church in Jiayi; and I also attended a Japanese church when I was later a student in Tokyo. After completing my studies, I returned to Taiwan to work as a teacher.

During the summer holidays in 1937, I returned home to Jiayi. One evening, my cousin and I walked past the local True Jesus Church and we decided to go inside to join the service. After singing a hymn, the congregation knelt down to pray, while we sat and observed. When I was younger, I had thought that the prayers in the True Jesus Church induced hypnosis, and so I had avoided attending services. However, as I observed the members now, I saw that some were praying in tongues, while others were praying in words of understanding. Some of the members were shaking as they prayed, but others were kneeling in a still manner. I realized that I had been mistaken all along. At that moment, I felt a force from above, compelling me to kneel down to pray, and so I did. After that experience, I started attending church services every day. I also began praying for the Holy Spirit.

After the summer, I went back to work at the school. One evening, on 5 October, a brother from the True Jesus Church came to visit me. He had heard from one of my colleagues that I had been attending services at the church. He suggested praying together in the dormitory. After praying for about five minutes, I felt a power coming down from above, and I started speaking words that were neither English, nor any other language that I knew. Elder Wuzhen Lin had earlier shared with me some testimonies about receiving the Holy Spirit, and now I was having this experience for myself. After the prayer, I wrote a letter with a thankful heart to Deacon Shenming Tsai, to let him know that I had received the Holy Spirit and to request water baptism in Jiayi. Thank God for His love and guidance, I was baptized by Deacon Tsai the following Saturday, in a small river at Bazhang.

My experience makes me think of the believers in the apostolic period. Some received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues before undergoing water baptism (Acts 10:44–48); others received water baptism before receiving the Holy Spirit, through prayer and the laying of hands (Acts 8:15–17; 19:1–7). Both these types of experiences are seen in the True Jesus Church today. I thank God for His grace, that He gave me His Spirit first. He knew what was in my heart: if I had not received the Holy Spirit, I may not have believed and would still be wandering on the wrong path.

On 1 October 1941, I offered myself up as a full-time minister, fulfilling a vow I had made after receiving water baptism. Thank God, this has been the happiest and most honourable calling. Hallelujah!

### **15.9 Becoming a new person (by Yangdao Wu)**

The Bible teaches us that receiving the Holy Spirit signifies: a) the old Adam, belonging to the flesh, becoming the new Adam who belongs to the Spirit (1Cor 15:22; Jn 3:3,5; Col 3:9–10); b) that we are set free from the bondage of Satan, and now belong to Christ (1 Jn 5:19; Rom 8:9-10); c) that we are no longer slaves to sin, but have become the children of God (Gal 4:4–7); d) that we have the guarantee of the heavenly inheritance (Eph 1:13–14). These biblical teachings show us how vital a role the Holy Spirit has in the life of a Christian. The most important teaching of all is that He is necessary for our salvation.

My father passed away at a young age, followed by five of my brothers. My childhood was one of poverty and hardship. Our family worshipped idols, and so from a young age, I accompanied my mother and my sister to the temple during the festive seasons. As I grew older, I pursued after fame and fortune, to the detriment of my health. Paul's words describe well the life that I lived before I came to Jesus: I was "dead through the trespasses and sins in which [I] once walked, following the course of this world" (Eph 2:1, 2).

When I was twenty-nine years old, I came across one of my colleagues, Dr Jiang, reading the Bible. I teased him, saying, "You're a highly educated person. Why are you interested in the Bible?"

He answered, "You should try reading it yourself; then, you'll realize how wonderful it is."

After hearing these words, I started to read the Bible, beginning from the Book of Genesis, up to Romans. Thank God, He opened my heart to understand what I was reading. I was especially struck by particular verses. For example, when I read: "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Rom 7:19), I could recognize my own personal struggle, and it helped me to know that someone else shared my experience. I also came across the verse: "But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were



still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8), which opened my eyes to the greatness of God’s love and moved me to believe in Jesus.

Also during this time, I became intrigued by a passage in the Bible which talked about the Holy Spirit: “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him” (Jn 14:16–17). I believed in the Holy Spirit and the words of Jesus; but the question in my mind was, *How can a person know that he has received the Holy Spirit?* I decided to ask Dr Jiang, but he admitted that he did not know the answer.

I later asked the same question of some Christian friends, and their explanation was: “When you understand the Bible and do good deeds, this shows that you have received Holy Spirit.” I listened to what they had to say, but was not entirely satisfied. But thank God for His arrangement, He soon led me to discover the right answer.

One day, I was sitting on a train, when I noticed two passengers discussing the Bible. I saw that they had lots of underlined verses in their Bibles, which gave me the impression that they had been Christians for some time.

I asked them, “Today’s Saturday, where are you going?”

They replied, “We keep the Sabbath on Saturday—we’re going to church.”

We started talking about the Sabbath, and I soon realized that they were very familiar with the Bible.

I asked, “Have you received Holy Spirit?”

One of the men, Brother Xu, answered, “Yes, I received the Holy Spirit after praying for three years, following water baptism. If you want to receive Him, come to the True Jesus Church with us to study the truth.”

When I received this invitation, I was extremely happy.

I went with the two brothers to the True Jesus Church in Lisan, where I met and talked with Deacon Chen. He helped me to understand that receiving the Holy Spirit is an experience that can be seen and heard (cf. Acts 2:33; 8:17–18; 10:46). I asked to be baptized, but he encouraged me to study the Bible further.

Finally, on 5 August 1951, I received water baptism. Afterwards, I started praying earnestly three times a day for the Holy Spirit, using

the words, “Hallelujah! Praise our Lord Jesus” (cf. Rev 19:5–6). But after one month, I still had not experienced anything. Each time that a preacher visited me, I would ask, “Why haven’t I received the Holy Spirit yet?”

Some time afterwards, I attended a spiritual convocation led by Elder Jian and Deacon Yang. They encouraged me by saying, “We’ll help you to pray, but it’s the Lord Jesus who gives the Holy Spirit. So you’ll need to pray earnestly.”

Hearing this, I decided to pray in the prayer room during the lunch breaks. In one of the prayers, I could feel a warm gust of wind blowing past me, very briefly.

One evening, at six o’clock, two preachers prayed with me. Elder Jian proceeded to lay his hands on my head, and I suddenly felt a power coming down on my head and going through my body. I felt so happy, as if I was in heaven. I could also feel what seemed like a gush of water flowing inside of me. Then my tongue started to roll, and I spoke words that I could not understand (cf. Jn 7:37–38; 1 Cor 14:2). I was hot and sweating, and my body shook under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But all the while, I was fully conscious and knew what was happening. I realized that I had received the Holy Spirit.

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). After receiving the Holy Spirit, I started to become a new person. The first thing I noticed was that I now had joy in the Spirit. This joy was beyond compare—better than passing exams, getting married, or even becoming a father for the first time. It was truly profound and did not change with circumstances (Acts 16:25). You can only understand it when you experience it for yourself.

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (Jn 16:13). The second change was a zeal for the word of God. I studied the Bible and, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, began to understand the difference between the word of God and the teachings of man (Mt 15:8–9). With this zeal, I started witnessing for God at every given opportunity.

“That I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:16). The third

change was in my character. In the past, I had lots of weaknesses: a bad temper, an unwillingness to admit being wrong, lying, worrying and a lack of peace. Thank God, after receiving the Holy Spirit, I put all these things aside and started bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22–23).

There is a saying: “Science is based on experiments, while faith is based on experience.” We need to experience the Holy Spirit for ourselves, to taste this heavenly gift (Heb 6:4)—a gift that can only be found in the True Jesus Church.

### **15.10 Shutting the door (by John Yang)**

At around the age of five or six years, I decided to follow my sister-in-law, a member of the Presbyterian Church, to believe in Jesus. I admired her because she was particularly loving and kind. One of her sons was a church minister, while four of the girls in her family were married to ministers.

When I reached the age of eighteen, I went to Shanghai where I attended a church—but more to meet girls than to study the word of God. After a few years, I returned to Taiwan.

I planned to travel again: this time to Guangdong. But in the time leading up to the departure, a friend from the True Jesus Church invited me to attend a service. When I got there, I was amazed by how the sermon was so much more powerful than any I had heard before, and was stuck by how the speaker continually referred to the Bible.

After that, I attended more services as I enjoyed them. However, there was still one thing I could not grasp, which was the prayers. In church I observed well-known and highly educated people kneeling down to pray, speaking words that I could not understand, and whose bodies shook. Some were even singing (what I later learned were spiritual songs), while others clapped their hands, and they all prayed so loudly. I found it both strange and amusing at the same time.

One Sabbath day, Deacon Huiming Zhu from Taichung was preaching in the church. I was moved by his sermon and knelt down to pray with the congregation for the first time. Suddenly, I felt a power coming down on me from above, and my body started to shake, while my hands started clapping of their own accord. At the same time, I

noticed that my tongue was rolling. I shed tears of joy because I now understood what it was to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

After receiving the Holy Spirit, I realized my past wrongdoings and the fact that I was a sinner. So, I asked to receive water baptism. I talked with Deacon Zhu, who proceeded to explain the basic Bible doctrines, including the correct mode of baptism, the Sabbath and footwashing. After hearing these teachings, I asked to be baptized so that my sins could be washed away and I could belong to Christ and become His son (Acts 2:28; Gal 3:27). Deacon Zhu happily agreed.

The next day, I received water baptism in the local river. Afterwards, I felt that my burden of sin had been lifted, and that I had been cleansed. However, to my surprise, when I returned to the church to pray, I no longer experienced the Holy Spirit as before. Anxiously, I consulted Deacon Zhu. He told me: “Some people believe in Jesus after studying and understanding the truth, while others believe on account of their sicknesses being healed. As for you, you neither fully understood the truth, nor had you been healed of any sicknesses. But the Lord wanted you to come to Him, which is why He let you experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit first (cf. Acts 10:44–47). I suggest that you pray fervently, and you’ll surely receive the Holy Spirit again (cf. Lk 11:13).

I took Deacon Zhu’s advice and started to pray earnestly. But twenty–five days after receiving water baptism, I still had not received the Holy Spirit. I began to examine myself in an attempt to understand the reason. I came to the conclusion that I was not concentrating properly in my prayers. This was because I was sharing a house with other people, and when I prayed in my room, I did not dare to pray out loud, in case the other people found out. I would often stop praying each time I heard anyone approaching the door. I decided to lock the door in order to concentrate fully (cf. Mt 6:6).

Thank God, in the following prayer, I was filled by the Holy Spirit—this time, even more powerfully than before. I was lifted up from the mattress where I was kneeling and was moving around. I also began jumping up and down on my knees. I could feel a power flowing from inside of me. I spoke in tongues and sang spiritual songs.

Elder Lingquan Yang, who lived next door, heard the sounds and came to see what was happening. People in the house also started

knocking on my door, wanting to come in, but Elder Yang asked them not to disturb me so that I could be filled by the Holy Spirit. I was aware of all this going on around me and what the people were saying. I prayed for an hour and felt extremely joyful and contented.

From that day on, I prayed constantly, never wanting the Holy Spirit to leave me ever again. Life also changed. I was once a sad and pessimistic teenager, due to my mother's death when I was only nine years old, and had even contemplated suicide. Now, I felt comforted by the great love of the Lord Jesus. Most importantly, I had received the Holy Spirit, who became my guarantee of eternal life. I felt like the happiest person in the world.

I decided not to travel abroad and, instead, chose to live a peaceful life in the country where I felt it would be easier to maintain my faith. Later, my father and my brother (the latter, a preacher in the Presbyterian Church for some twenty years), along with his family, came to the True Jesus Church. They, too, all received the Holy Spirit.

Later, I felt God calling me to take up the most meaningful work: to become a minister of the gospel of salvation. This was because I understood that the gospel preached by the True Jesus Church is the truth which "was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3; cf. Eph 1:13–14; cf. Mk 16:17–20), and which is accompanied by the testimony of signs and miracles.

I hope and pray that the Lord will reveal His salvation grace to my friends and relatives, and to the readers. The last days are here. While the Holy Spirit can still be found, we should seek after Him in the true church.

### **15.11 Healed through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (by Yizhen Jian)**

In 1928, I was working in Jiayi, Taiwan. Following the example of my friends, I indulged in gambling and drinking. As a result, my health suffered. Initially, I had asthma, but a year later, I was afflicted with tuberculosis. Despite spending lots of money on Chinese and western medicine, my condition worsened over a period of three years. During this time, I visited a Buddhist temple and also consulted a sorcerer, but

no one could help me. I became so ill that I could not get out of bed or eat and drink. My body started wasting away, and I lost money and friends. All I could do was to wait to die.

At this bleakest of times, a member of the True Jesus Church approached my wife and told her, “The True Jesus Church has the abidance of God. He has the power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons. It doesn’t matter how serious the illness is—all you need is to have faith and pray.”

When my wife repeated this information to me, I found it hard to accept. But I realized that she was also suffering, because she had to look after me day and night. So I agreed that she could contact the church.

On the evening of 1 December 1931, about eight members of the church came to our house. I was lying on the bed, but they told me to close my eyes, clasp my hands together and pray, by saying, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord Jesus.”

I prayed in this way, and after the second prayer, I was able to fall asleep comfortably. But suddenly, in the middle of the night, two hands appeared, covered in hair: one pressed against my back and the other, against my chest.

A voice said, “I told you not to believe, but you still went ahead.” This happened three times, and each time I could not move.

I finally cried out, “Hallelujah!” and the hands disappeared. I woke up sweating. I understood that it was the devil trying to stop me from believing in Jesus, and this made me realize that the message preached by the True Jesus Church was the truth. After this, the members came to my house each night to hold family services. Gradually, I began to recover; after one week, I was able to get out of bed.

On the tenth day, I asked Brother Kuo, one of the elderly members who came to visit: “When you pray each night, I notice that you speak in words that I can’t understand and I see your body shaking. What’s happening?”

He answered, “This is what happens to a person who has received the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus promised that those who believe in Him will receive the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is the evidence” (cf. Jn 7:38–39; Acts 10:44–46).

I asked, “Can I receive the Holy Spirit?”

He replied, “If you pray earnestly, you’ll receive the Holy Spirit. Also, when someone who’s filled with the Spirit lays his hands on your head, you’ll receive the Holy Spirit more easily” (cf. Acts 8:17–18).

I thought about his words, but decided that I did not want anyone to lay hands on me. Besides, I had heard that Brother Kuo had certain powers which caused people to shake whenever he laid his hands on them. I needed to pray for myself—in this way, I would not doubt God.

Brother Kuo added, “You can pray for the Holy Spirit yourself, but you’ll need to be persistent.”

As soon as the visiting brethren left, I told my wife, “Tonight I’m going to pray for the Holy Spirit, so don’t interrupt me, even if you see something unusual happening. Can you help me to pray, as well?”

She agreed, and so I went into my room to pray on my bed. As I did not have the strength to kneel upright, I knelt down in a sitting position. I started by praying softly because I felt weak, but ten minutes into the prayer, I started praying loudly. After twenty minutes, I experienced a power coming down from above, like an electric current, touching my head. My hands started to shake, and I could feel a warm sensation inside of me. Then my tongue started to roll, and I began speaking in spiritual tongues. Also, my whole body shook, and I began jumping up four or five inches into the air from my kneeling position. I continued praying for about twenty minutes.

My wife was terrified when she saw what was happening. It made her recall some comments made by a neighbour a few days earlier: “Why do you want to believe in the True Jesus Church? There have been so many people who, before conversion, were perfectly normal, but later became mad.”

My wife thought I had literally gone mad. Still, she was too afraid to stop me.

By now, the clothes I was wearing had become soaked through with sweat, and I felt a need to stop praying to get changed. When this thought came to my mind, my body stopped moving—the Lord obviously knew what I was thinking.

After the prayer, rather than getting changed, I rushed out to look for the church brethren, to tell them I had received Holy Spirit. When they heard the news, they gave thanks to God and came back with me to the house to pray. Again, I was filled by the Holy Spirit.

They told me, “You’ve indeed received the Holy Spirit, just like we did,” and praised God. From that day onwards, we held family services in my house every evening.

After one month, on 9 January 1932, I went to the True Jesus Church in Dalin to receive water baptism in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. My sins were washed away that day, and I was able to give up my old life of gambling, drinking and smoking. Also, I was healed of my tuberculosis. I had discovered the truth of the Lord Jesus’ promise: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest” (Mt 11:28).

Even though I was only thirty years old at the time, I did not expect to live very long, because my body had been weakened by illness and malnutrition. One day, I prayed to God to let me live until the age of fifty so that I could witness for Him. Thank God, He heard my prayer and gave me the peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:6–7). At the time of writing, He has given me another thirty-five years of life, and my health during these latter years has been better than my earlier years. This, again, is the wonderful grace of God.

How can I thank God adequately for all that He has done for me? And how can I praise His name?

Bless the LORD, O my soul;  
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!  
Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
And forget not all His benefits:  
Who forgives all your iniquities,  
Who heals all your diseases,  
Who redeems your life from destruction,  
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,  
Who satisfies your mouth with good things,  
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Psalm 103:1–5

### **15.12 Learning about prayer from a pamphlet (by Lingshi Lee)**

One day in 1935, a neighbour, Mr Su (Deacon Lingan Su), gave me a gospel pamphlet to read. It was entitled *Preaching the Good News* and was published by the True Jesus Church in Taiwan. It talked about the Holy Spirit. I read it carefully and was deeply moved. Receiving the



Holy Spirit seemed to be such a wonderful experience, that I wanted to believe in Jesus too.

I had never actually attended a church service in the True Jesus Church before and had never seen anyone praying for the Holy Spirit. But now, I had a strong urge to pray. The pamphlet suggested a prayer: “Hallelujah, praise the Lord Jesus. Please fill my heart with the Holy Spirit.” I made my first ever prayer using these words, praying secretly in the store room at home. The next day, at about five o’clock in the morning, I prayed again softly for about an hour, but nothing happened. However, I was not discouraged and I resolved to pray three times a day: in the morning, at noon and at night. Three days later, and with swollen knees, I still had not received the Holy Spirit. But, wonderfully, on the afternoon of the fourth day, I finally received the Spirit.

During that particular prayer, I kept repeating “Hallelujah, praise the Lord Jesus. Please fill me with the Holy Spirit.” Suddenly, I felt a warm current coming down onto my head and going through my body, making my whole body shake. At the same time, my tongue started to roll, and I spoke words that I did not understand (cf. 1 Cor 14:2). I felt happy and excited, and so light and comfortable. However, all around me, I could still hear the sounds from the house, and so I knew that I was fully conscious and alert. I continued praying for about an hour.

After receiving the Holy Spirit, I secretly attended church services at the True Jesus Church in Jiayi, and later at Minxiong. I also bought myself a Bible so that I could study the words of God. Unfortunately, when my grandmother, father, uncle, and the rest of the family found out that I had become a Christian, they became very angry. My grandmother was a devout Buddhist, who objected strongly to Christianity. As the eldest grandchild, what I had done was totally unacceptable. What followed was criticism and immense pressure to give up my faith. All that I could do was to pray hard and rely on the Holy Spirit to open a way.

Praise and thank God for His mercy, my family finally accepted my faith. Moreover, some two or three years later, my grandmother even agreed to pray and, subsequently, received the Holy Spirit. She saw a glorious light and was filled with joy. From that time onwards, she decided to believe in Jesus and asked my father and uncle to burn

all the idols in the house. Some time later, my whole family, which comprised twenty members, came to believe in the Lord.

It is by the grace of our Lord Jesus that He has guided someone like me, who had never been to church before, to believe in Him and to receive the Holy Spirit—all on account of a gospel pamphlet. Not only that, but He brought my entire family into the faith. As I look back on the past events, I see how wonderful God is. I hope that He will guide others also, as He has guided our family.

### **15.13 From challenger to preacher (by Shun Dao Hsieh)**

I am currently an elder in the True Jesus Church in Taiwan. Before I was ordained as a preacher, my name was Dongbi Hsieh.

Back in June 1947, my eldest sister preached to me, saying, “Jesus is the ruler of the universe. He’s the true God whom we should worship.”

I could not accept her words and retorted, “Have you never studied history? Don’t you know that Jesus was a Jew? Why do you say that He’s the ruler of the universe? Which existed first: the universe or Jesus?”

My sister did not know how to reply, and so I pressed on: “Even if there is a god of the universe, how tall is he and how much does he weigh?”

She answered, “God is invisible. How can you expect me to describe Him?”

I said, “God doesn’t exist as He hasn’t been proved by science. If there is a god, then it’s probably only our conscience. Still, I only believe in myself.” By now, I was feeling pleased with myself, thinking that I had won the argument.

A few days later, my sister said to me, “I haven’t been studying the Bible for very long, so I can’t answer all your questions, but there are ministers in my church who can. Why don’t you attend the service tonight?”

On hearing these words, I decided that this could be an interesting experience, and so I agreed to go. If the ministers could not answer my questions, I would feel all the more happier, knowing that I had refuted their superstitious beliefs.

That evening, I decided to listen carefully to the sermon, in an attempt to find fault with the message. However, my plan failed: the preacher's sermon was based entirely on the Bible—a book that I was not at all familiar with. Nevertheless, I persisted in my endeavours, attending services every night, with the intention of finding some reason to challenge the ministers.

Thank God for His love, the more I attended the services, the more I could feel His Spirit guiding me. To my surprise, I discovered that the sermons were actually quite interesting. So, in the end, I no longer felt the need to challenge the speakers. At the time, I could not decide whether this change in myself was good or bad; all I knew was that I felt different, but I could not explain it. I concluded that it must have been a miracle on account of God's love and grace, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, during this time, I found all the answers to the questions I had challenged my sister with.

However, one thing continued to intrigue me, which was the way the True Jesus Church members prayed. I thought to myself, *If they are not mad and they are not acting, why do their bodies shake, and why do they speak in words that no one can understand?*

But the church members supplied the explanation: "This is what happens when the Holy Spirit fills a person. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God; He guarantees our inheritance of the heavenly kingdom. When one receives the Holy Spirit, he feels joy."

Then came the day of my water baptism. It took place on 5 July, at the True Jesus Church in Huwei. Altogether, there were twelve of us. Before the baptism, we stood to pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Then we sang the hymn, *The Wonderful Grace of Redemption*, as we entered the water, one by one. After I was baptized, I felt so free, relaxed and happy. I was aware that my new life as a Christian had truly begun. When we returned to the church, a newly baptized sister mentioned that she had seen blood in the water, and someone explained that this was a vision from God. This testimony left a deep impression on me and added to my faith.

After water baptism, I started praying fervently for the Holy Spirit, both at church and at home, sometimes with fasting. I noticed that many of those who had been baptized with me had already received the Holy Spirit. I started to worry, but held on to the belief that God

is just, merciful, impartial, and will not disappoint anyone who seeks after Him. With this thought in mind, I continued praying.

After the evening church service on 14 July, when most of the members had gone home, I went into the prayer room to pray. I clasped my hands together and prayed, saying, “Hallelujah, praise to the Lord Jesus. I pray that the Lord will give me the Holy Spirit.” I resolved not to get up until I had received the Holy Spirit. After two hours of praying, I could feel a power coming down from above. My heart felt warm, my body started to shake of its own accord, and my tongue started to roll. I was filled with the Holy Spirit.

When some of the others saw this, they said, “Dongbi’s received the Holy Spirit!”

One of the deacons came over and laid his hands on my head, and the Holy Spirit filled me even more. I spoke in tongues loudly, and my body shook forcefully. I also saw rays of bright light passing before me. All the while though, I was aware of my surroundings. I felt so free and happy, having tasted God’s peace and joy.

My experience of praying and receiving the Holy Spirit brings to mind the parable spoken by the Lord Jesus, in which He spoke about a friend who asked for bread at midnight:

I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

Luke 11:8–13

Also, there is an article written by Elder Elisha Huang, in which he says, “I wanted to approach faith with a rational mind, but faith needs to be experienced personally.” His words describe well what I have experienced in my own faith journey. I hope that all those who are praying for the Holy Spirit will continue to pray with faith so that they can likewise taste the joy which comes from receiving the Holy Spirit. All glory be to the name of Jesus!

### **Review questions**

1. What are your reflections on this chapter?
2. If you have already received the Holy Spirit, write an account of your experience.

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