

THE GIFT AND GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

You may or may not know that the book we call Acts, referring to the acts of the Apostles, at different times in history has also been called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. That isn't too surprising when you read through the pages of this book. It is filled with references to the Holy Spirit and to his work at the beginning of the Christian age.

The Holy Spirit of course is the third member of what Acts 17:29 and Colossians 2:9 calls "*the Godhead*" or "*deity*." When you speak of God, you speak of a Being that words cannot fully explain because He is an infinite being. We are not even sure of what that means, that He is *infinite*. We can only imagine what that means. There is a scripture found in 1 Corinthians 2:9, that says that *no eye has ever seen, nor has any ear ever heard nor has it ever entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love Him*. Well if that is true about the things God has prepared for us, what do you think it tells us about God Himself?

There is a great mystery surrounding the very being or personhood of God.

- He calls Himself the "*I am*."
- Scripture describes Him as "*eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God*" (1 Timothy 1:17)
- We know from Deuteronomy 6:4, that there is but one God.
- Isaiah writes, "*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."*" (Isaiah 44:6)
- Ephesians 4:6 says, "*There is one God*," but then it goes on to identify him with the "*...Father who is over all, through all and in all*."
- That same text says that there is one Lord, and one Spirit, and thus we have what is a true mystery.
- God who is one, exists as three persons; God the Father, God the Son or Lord, and God the Holy Spirit.
- In other texts, which I don't have time to get to this morning, the Father is called God, the Son is called God, and the Holy Spirit is called God. All three are called God, and yet there is but one God.

Some people foolishly reject the doctrine of the trinity simply because they do not and cannot understand or explain it. But think about it! Does it seem reasonable or logical to you that we with our very limited mind and understanding would be able to fully understand and explain everything about One who is infinite?

Just because one cannot fully explain something doesn't mean that it isn't real or true. No one has ever really explained electricity, or magnetism. There are things we can say about it, but no one can fully explain either of those two phenomena, and yet we do not doubt that they are real. Interestingly, God may be like both of those. In **Acts 17:28**, the apostle Paul said, "*In Him we live and move and have our very being*." Whether you accept it or not, the truth is, the very fact that we are alive is evidence that God exists!

The word trinity is derived from the two words “tri” meaning three, and “unity” meaning oneness. So the Godhead is one, a perfect unity of three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As I said, this is a great mystery, but perhaps there is more mystery surrounding the Holy Spirit than either of other two.

The Holy Spirit is spoken of in the Old Testament a number of times, but only a few times is He referred to as the Holy Spirit (Psalm 51:11, Isaiah 63:10, 11).

- Most of the time he is simply referred to as “the Spirit,” or “the spirit of God,” or “the spirit of the Lord.”
- The Holy Spirit is there at the very beginning of the Bible, **Genesis 1:2** *“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”*
- We know from **2 Peter 1:21** that He was active in causing the prophets to speak and write. Peter says, *“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*
- David said, *“The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue.”* (2 Samuel 23:2)

He is present in the Old Testament, but it isn’t until we come to the NT that the Holy Spirit takes on so much of a role and prominence.

- He is mentioned in the 1st chapter of all four of the gospels. He is mentioned at least a hundred times in the four gospels and Acts;
- 37 times in the book of Acts alone as “the Holy Spirit.”
- He is referenced hundreds of times in epistles of Paul and Peter, James and Jude, 1 John and the book of Revelation.
- The only place in the NT where no direct mention of the Holy Spirit is in the 2nd and 3rd letters of John.

Thus with all of this attention and mention given to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, it is no wonder that there is so much interest in Him today. Part of that interest, however, is due to some of what I would label as false or mistaken teaching concerning the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that is why I wanted to briefly share with you this lesson on “the gift and gifts of the Holy Spirit.”

This, of course is something very much a part of what we have been reading about in Acts this past week. You will remember that when we were reading **Acts 2, that in verse 38**, the apostle told the people who had asked what they needed to do by way of being forgiven of their sins, including the sin of having put their Savior to death, they were told, *“And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

I want to draw your attention to that phrase, *“the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* There is a difference to be observed between the “gift of the Holy Spirit” and the “gifts of the Holy Spirit.” The first is singular, the second is plural. The first is associated with something every Christian receives, the second with something that only a few Christians received in the apostolic age. I believe both of these assertions are easily established by a look at what the Bible has to say about both types of gifts.

Let’s begin with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Notice, that Peter said that when a person repented of their sins and was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, they would receive two things: 1) the forgiveness of their sins, and 2) the gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit spoken of in that text refers to the Holy Spirit Himself. We know that is what it means because just a few chapters over, in **chapter 5, and verse 32**, the same apostle, Peter, said the Holy Spirit is given—which makes Him a gift—to those who obey God.”

In **John 7, verses 37-39**, we have an interesting passage involving something that Jesus said. John tells us,

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

That, of course, was spoken before Christ died and prior to the time Peter made the promise that he did in 2:38.

The Holy Spirit is given to each person who becomes obedient to the gospel. I had a friend one time in California who came to my office. He was a brother in Christ but he was a relatively new Christian. He came into my office, tossed his Bible down on my desk and said, “Prove to me that I have the Holy Spirit.” He had been talking with someone from a Pentecostal background who believed that speaking in tongues proved that one had the Holy Spirit. So this brother wanted some assurance that he really had the Holy Spirit because he had never spoken in tongues. So I said to him, “Well John, open your Bible to Acts 2:38. So he did. I said read that verse. So he did. I said, read it out loud. So he did. What does God tell you to do in that verse? He said, *“repent and be baptized.”* I said, if a person does that, what did God say he would receive? He said, *“remission of sins.”* I said, “What else?” He said, *“the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* Then I said, John did you do what God told you to do? He said, “Yes.” Then I said, “Do you think God did what He said He would do?” He looked at me, kind of smiled, picked up his Bible and said, “Thank you” and walked out.

The Holy Spirit is given to each person who obeys the gospel. That’s a promise from God. And it wasn’t limited to the apostolic times, the first century. Peter told the people on Pentecost *that promise was for them and for their children and for all who are far off, even as many as the*

Lord shall call. When we obey the gospel, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gift is the Holy Spirit.

Again, we know that is true because of what is said in **Romans 8**, beginning in **verse 8**: the apostle Paul writes:

“Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

The Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of every true Christian, and the purpose of that dwelling in us is a subject for another lesson, or really a series of lessons at another time. Suffice it for now to say, He dwells in us and His purpose is to assist us in living the Christian life.

- We can't see Him but we know from Scripture that He is there.
- We can't hear Him—but we know from Scripture what He wants us to hear.
- We can't feel Him, but we can know His power by the effects that He produces in us.

In John 3, in his discussion with a Jewish ruler named Nicodemus, Jesus compared the Holy Spirit to the wind. He said you hear its sound and you see the effect that it has on things, but you cannot tell where it came from or where it is going. The Holy Spirit is like that. You can see the effect He is having in your life by the changes you are making. In **Galatians 5:22-23**, Paul wrote about what the Holy Spirit does in us. He says: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

Now, that's a quick overview of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit, given to persons who obey the gospel of Christ, and He dwells in our hearts to assist us in living the Christian life.

On the other hand, the Bible also speaks about gifts—plural—of the Holy Spirit. That is something altogether different in nature from the gift—singular—of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit refer to a number of different gifts, or abilities given to individual Christians who lived in the apostolic age. They were called “spiritual gifts,” 1 Corinthians 12:1. Now, I say that these were given to Christians in the apostolic age because we need to understand that they are not given to Christians today. I know there are many people who claim to have one or more of those gifts, but they are mistaken and living with an misconception. The reason I know that and the reason I can say that is because of what the New Testament reveals about spiritual gifts.

We read about those gifts this past week in our New Testament Studies, and again, if you are not participating in this study with us, you are missing on a great opportunity to work your way through the entire New Testament.

We read about those gifts in **chapter 2, and verse 43**. The scriptures say: *“And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”* Did you notice that? *“Many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”* The apostles, of course, received many of those gifts, and as we shall soon see, they also had the ability to bestow those gifts to others through the laying on of their hands.

We read about those gifts again in **chapter 4, verses 29, and 30**. There we read a prayer offered by the apostles: *“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*

In **chapter 5:12**, Luke gives us this glimpse into the activity of the early church: *“Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles.”* Who was doing the signs and wonders? The scripture says it was the apostles.

We next read of these gifts in **chapter 6**, in connection with the appointment of the seven servants who were selected to serve the Grecian widows in the daily distribution of food. When the problem over neglecting the Grecian widows became known to the apostles, they told the Christians to find seven men whom they could appoint to take care of that responsibility. Such men had to be men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. So seven men were found, the apostles prayed over them and laid their hands on them. Two verses later we read where one of those seven, a Christian named Stephen was *“doing great wonders and signs among the people.”* And of course we know that Stephen became the first Christian martyr for the cause of Christ.

In **chapter 8**, we find a very interesting passage in connection with this subject. Persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem had caused most of them to scatter, but verse 4 tells us that those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Verse 5 begins telling about one of those, a man named Philip, who also was one of the seven appointed back in chapter 6. Philip went to the city of Samaria, and **verse 6** tells us, *“And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did.”* Luke informs us that a couple of those signs included casting out demons, and healing those who were sick. Who was doing the signs? Philip, one of the seven who had had the apostles lay their hands on them.

Philip was having a successful time preaching the gospel in that city, and a large number of people became obedient to the gospel. **Verse 12** says, *“But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.* One of the people baptized was a man named Simon who had been a magician, or sorcerer. He was a person who for a long time had amazed the people with

his magic. But when Philip arrived and began preaching the gospel, and working great signs, the people began listening to Philip, and even Simon himself was converted and was baptized.

All of this was very good and according to verse 14, the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God. What had the people in Samaria done? They had received the word of God. Because that was happening, the brethren in Jerusalem decided to send Peter and John up to Samaria. I want you to notice the reason why they did that according to **verses 15 & 16**: It says, Peter and John “...*came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” **Verse 17** continues: “*Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.*”

Now isn't that interesting? What does that mean, “they received the Holy Spirit?” When did they receive the Holy Spirit? Apparently it was when Peter and John laid their hands on them. Now think about that; what did Luke mean by that? If he meant that these people were receiving the gift—singular—of the Holy Spirit, then we would be forced to conclude that until the apostles arrived and laid their hands on them, these people had really not been saved. Even though they had received the word of God, and even though they had been baptized, they were not really saved yet—IF Luke was referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Remember, Acts 2:38 said two things would happen when a person repented and was baptized. They would be forgiven of their sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is safe to assume that if one thing is true, the other is also. If people are forgiven of their sins, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. If they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, then they have also had their sins forgiven. But the opposite would also be true. If one does not receive the Holy Spirit, they also do not have their sins forgiven. We know that conclusion is valid because of what we read in Romans 8 a few moments ago. Paul said, “*Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ [in him] does not belong to him.*”

The context there in Acts 8:17 constrains us to understand that Luke was not referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit which these people had not yet received. Luke was referring to “the gifts—plural—of the Holy Spirit.” That understanding is reinforced by what is said in the next verse—**verse 18**—where we read: “*Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hand, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'*”

Of course we recall that Peter sharply rebuked Simon for having that ungodly desire. But notice, Simon had *seen* something. He had *seen* that through the laying on of the apostles' hands, the spirit was given. Obviously, the giving of the Spirit being spoken of in this passage was not simply the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Think about it. When you and I were baptized, were there any visible phenomena that people could see? Did someone “see” the Holy Spirit being given to you? On the other hand, when Peter and John laid their hands on those people Simon saw something. What do you think it was? Remember when the apostles laid their hands on those seven men back in chapter 6 and

they began to perform signs and wonders—those were things people could see. That’s what Simon saw. He saw that through the laying on of the apostles hands (notice, “the apostles’ hands”) the Holy Spirit was given; meaning “the gifts—plural—of the Holy Spirit.”

Now that was something that only the apostles could do and since all of the apostles died some 2000 years ago, we have no one on earth today who has the power to impart the gifts of the Holy Spirit to other men.

Furthermore, we have no need for those gifts. I know some people think it would be nice if we could throw in a little miracle from time to time, but we have to keep in mind the purpose behind those gifts, which was to prove, or confirm that the message being preached by the apostles, and others who were entrusted with these gifts was from God. That job was done. According to Mark 16:20 and Hebrews 2:3,4, that was done. Thus the gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer needed.

Someone has compared the spiritual gifts that were present in the first century to the scaffolding that is used when a building is built. When the building is completed, the scaffolding is no longer needed. The gifts were needed as the gospel age got under way and the church was beginning, but we no longer need such gifts today.

I hope this brief study about this matter will be helpful to you. If I have raised more questions than I have answered, that’s okay. I don’t feel bad. It will do you good to study these things for yourself. Please give this matter some serious thought and study. Don’t just take my word for it, but be like the noble Bereans that we read about in the 17th chapter of Acts, who searched the scriptures to see whether those things were so or not.

The gift, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Even though the apostles are no longer with us, and we no longer have access to those spiritual gifts, we still have the Holy Spirit inspired message that they preached. We can still proclaim the message today.

- Thus men can still hear the gospel of Christ,
- They can still be convicted by the gospel of Christ,
- They can still obey the gospel of Christ by repenting of their sins and being baptized for the remission of those sins.

And when they do that, God has promised them a very special gift—the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Invitation

(Delivered May 12, 2013, Hartford Avenue Church of Christ, Ponca City, OK)

