

The Holy Spirit

Hello and welcome back to The Little Church World!

Now, this week I want to turn my attention to the Holy Spirit and look at four specific aspects: First, who is He? Secondly, how do we gain access to Him? And thirdly, what effect does the Holy Spirit have on us? And finally, what is the result of having the Holy Spirit reside in us? However, before we go any further into the subject, I want to reinforce a point I made in last week's message about the nature of the Trinity; namely, that the three persons of the Trinity are unified in purpose but they also are distinct in the roles they play. This is made clear by Jesus in the following statement, recorded in John 16 verse 7 which he made to his disciples. *But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.*

It will become clear to you as we move through this message that the advocate referred to by Jesus is the Holy Spirit. What is significant in Jesus' statement is that the condition necessary for the Holy Spirit to enter into the hearts and minds of his disciples was the physical departure of the Lord Jesus Christ in human form around AD33 by virtue of his saving death on the Cross. His distinct role was to bring about the salvation of mankind by his sacrifice on the Cross and according to the book of Hebrews, to now be interceding with God on our behalf.

I've just mentioned that the Holy Spirit enters the heart and minds of Christ followers. This leads me to the first question posed earlier, namely: Who is the Holy Spirit? Those of you who watched last week's message will know that He is a 'He' not an 'it', a distinct person sharing the full attributes of Godliness with God and Jesus. I've also now reinforced the fact that He has a distinct role to play which is to dwell within the Christ follower. However, what I am asking here is: What is the nature or essence of this person that is sent by Jesus to dwell in the Christ follower?

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Let's look at who is the Holy Spirit. Now, with a subject of this nature or with any other Christian subject it's important to go to the source, namely, the Word of God to gather information, knowledge and meaning, and the Bible is not silent on the nature and essence of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26, for example, Jesus states to his disciples: *But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.* This verse, like many of the other verses in the Bible, has a rich meaning conveyed in an economy of words. First, we learn from this verse that the Holy Spirit is an advocate. The Greek word 'parakletos' that is used in the early translations of the Scriptures means, as we would expect, 'one who speaks in our defence' but the Greek word also has a broader meaning that takes

in the notions of 'advisor' and 'comforter'. In addition, we learn from this verse that He is a teacher and a reminder of God's words. Many Christ followers will be able to recount times when they've opened the Bible and, just as if a light is being shone on a particular passage, supernatural insight is given on the meaning of the Biblical sentences; in other words, Christians are being tutored by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Christ followers are being constantly reminded of God's words as they pursue their Christian walk. These words can be a great source of comfort when they comprise God's promises to those who are faithful and obedient, but of course, they can also be calls to repentance when they are reminders of how we have strayed from His path for our lives.

In John 14 verses 15-17, Jesus states again to his disciples (and remember Christ followers today are no less his disciples than the original twelve): *If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.* This passage adds more information because, here, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of Truth'. Therefore, what Christ followers are being taught by the Spirit is the truth. Given that the Holy Spirit is fully divine, the truth that is being conveyed to those willing to listen is absolute truth not a partial view or an opinion but ultimate truth! We also learn that the Holy Spirit is not a 'fairweather friend' to coin a Western idiom, meaning someone who is only with us when things are fine and departs when things get tough. No, the Holy Spirit dwells with the Christ follower as defender, advisor, comforter and friend, through good times and bad, through 'thick and thin'; that is forever!

Accessing the Holy Spirit

Now, the second question is, How do we actually access the Holy Spirit? Well first, we need to recognise that the Holy Spirit is a gift from God, freely given by Him. Luke 11 verse 13 conveys this in the following words of Jesus: *If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!* In addition, this verse confirms that accessing the Holy Spirit is just a matter of asking for this 'good gift'. However, let's not be misled by the 'freely given' aspect of this gift, which is really one manifestation of God's goodness and Grace. This gift is freely given only to those who ask for it and who are followers Christ. It is not available to those who have yet to take the leap of faith and give their lives to Him. The following verses make this quite clear. First, we have John 7 verses 37-38 which state: *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.'*

Now, by this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Later we learn from Acts 2 verse 38 (NIV) *Peter replied, '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.'*

Finally, in Acts 5 verse 32 (NIV), we read: *We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.*

These three extracts from the Bible make it crystal clear that only those who repent, ask Jesus Christ to forgive their sins, and give their lives over to Him in total belief and obedience are the ones who have access to the Holy Spirit. These are the necessary conditions.

What Effect Does the Infusion of the Holy Spirit Have on the Christ Follower?

I'm going to use the word 'infusion' here to describe the entering of the Holy Spirit into the believer; in other words, what effect does the Holy Spirit have on the believer? The online Free Dictionary¹ defines the word 'infusion' in the following way: 'the act of infusing or introducing a certain modifying element or quality'. When we look at the effect of the infusion of the Holy Spirit into the life of a believer, we can fully appreciate the modifying element or quality that is part of the dictionary definition. Ezekial 36 verses 26-27 states the effect of this infusion very clearly, as follows: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*

The accounts of the change that takes place in non-believers when they become Christ followers frequently includes a general softening of the heart as observed in the behaviour of these new Christians by those who actually know them. Perhaps the most significant transformation of the heart recorded in the Bible is that of Saul, who was transformed from the murderous zealous Pharisee, hell bent on persecuting Christians, to the soft-hearted, long-suffering Apostle Paul who took the Word of the Lord to the Gentiles at great personal sacrifice, including martyrdom. Such accounts are not confined to the Bible and Biblical times because one can find many similar transformational accounts today.

The Biblical account of Paul's conversion shows that the inward change of heart brought about by the infusion of the Holy Spirit produces a radical change in outward behaviour. This change is recognized in the Bible by the term: 'The fruit of the Spirit' which is described in Galatians 5 verses 22-23 (NIV) in the following way: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

¹ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/infusion>

What is the Result of Being Infused by the Holy Spirit?

So what is the result of being infused by the Holy Spirit? The meaning of the Holy Spirit being a 'good gift' as described in Luke 11:13 is certainly reinforced when we examine Biblical references to the results of being infused by the Spirit. These benefits are many, and I'll briefly review them, now drawing on the relevant passages and verses in the Bible. In Romans 5 verse 5, Paul confirms that the Holy Spirit is the means by which Christ followers directly experience the love of God, in the following words: *God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.* In John 16 verse 15, Jesus tells his disciples that *The Spirit will receive from me what He will make known to you.* In other words, we Christ followers gain access to God's thinking through the Spirit. In Romans 15 verse 13, Paul states: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* This verse reinforces aspects of the fruits of the spirit already mentioned by associating the Spirit with hope, joy and peace, and I think I'm on safe ground to say that hope, joy and peace are valuable commodities in a world where all three seem to be in short supply.

In 2 Corinthians 3 verse 17, the following words confirm that the Spirit is also our source of freedom. *Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.* If we wish to know what we are freed from, Romans 8 verse 9 provides the answer: *But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you.* We're therefore freed from that part of our nature that homes into the realm of sin. In other words, the Spirit is the means by which we are freed from the power of Satan in our lives. It's hardly surprising then, that in view of all the benefits that are available to Christ followers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that the Bible confirms the association of the Holy Spirit with boldness. In Acts 4:31 we read: *After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.* An appropriate verse to conclude the many blessings deriving from the infusion of the Holy Spirit is from Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians in which he expresses a longing for heaven. In 2 Corinthians 5 verse 5, Paul states this: *Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.* The purpose God has fashioned us for is our entry into heaven and He has deposited the Holy Spirit with us to provide us with a taste of heaven whilst we remain in this world!

Summary

So, let's summarise. The Christ follower is qualified by virtue of faith in and obedience to Christ to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. When the person of the Holy Spirit infuses the Christ follower, a change of heart takes place which is manifested in good fruit. The

result of this Spirit infusion is love, joy, peace, freedom, courage, access to God's thinking and a little taste of heaven on earth.

Now, for the Christ follower, I trust this message has provided comfort and assurance through reinforcement, and for those who have not yet given their life to the Lord, I hope it has opened your eyes to just what you are missing by failing to take the step of faith. If you fall into this last category, as always, we are ready, willing and able to assist you, not only to take the step that will enable you to access all the blessings associated with the infusion of the Holy Spirit, but also to grow in Christ. All you need to do is to email admin@thelittlechurchworld.org. Have a blessed week and goodbye from me until next time. Goodbye.

Discussion Questions

1. If you have experienced the powerful working of the Holy Spirit within you, explain what it feels like?
2. The powerful working of the Spirit is generally not a constant experience in the Christian's life, i.e. sometimes the Spirit is powerfully at work and at other times seemingly not so. Why is this?
3. Linked to question 2, in your life, what circumstances seem to enlist the infusion of the Spirit in a powerful way i.e. what tends to be happening in your life when you experience the power of the Spirit?
4. One of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues. Is there any value to this manifestation?
5. This week's message mentions that two of the effects on the Christ follower of being infused by the Holy Spirit are peace and joy. How is the peace and joy experienced by the Christ follower different from the peace and joy that non-believers might claim to be experiencing?