

Understanding Theology in 15 Minutes A Day for 40 Days

Day 24

How Does the Holy Spirit Help Christians?

Because the Holy Spirit is fully God, he is omnipresent and has always been active in the world. However, Pentecost marks an expanded work of the Spirit for the benefit of those who have believed in Christ as Savior.

Jesus anticipated this when he told his followers to return to Jerusalem after his ascension and wait for the coming of the promised Spirit, who would enable them to be his witnesses (**Acts 1:4–8**). That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit “filled” the believers (**2:1–4**). Peter links that occasion with a prophecy in **Joel 2:28–32** of the pouring out of the Spirit (**Acts 2:14–21**). This expanded ministry is vitally important, so let us look at some of the Holy Spirit’s ministries discussed in the New Testament.

Baptism of the Spirit

Both John the Baptist (**Matthew 3:11; John 1:33**) and Jesus (**Acts 1:5**) predicted the *baptism of the Spirit*. Peter understood that this was first fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 11:15–16**). The one reference in the epistles is **1 Corinthians 12:13**: “*We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*” Paul implies that this is true of *all* Christians, since he said, “we were *all* baptized” and used the past-tense verb. So this is not something Christians should seek, for it is already true of all. Furthermore, the result is that the believer is identified with (the meaning of *baptize*) the body of Christ, that is, all other believers corporately.

Indwelling, Sealing, Filling

All Christians also benefit from the *indwelling of the Spirit*. He is given as a gift of God (**Acts 1:4; Romans 5:5**) to actually live within the believer. And this becomes a defining characteristic of those who belong to Christ:

You ... are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.

Romans 8:9

This is also significant because Christians become the very temple of God (**1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19**). What a reality—the God of the universe dwells within us through his Spirit!

The *sealing of the Spirit* is another benefit to believers (**2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13–14; 4:30**). A seal is a mark of ownership and authority. So the Holy Spirit living within the Christian is God’s mark of ownership and authority over that individual.

More than that, a seal is a mark of security. You don’t mess with a seal. The point is that one should not mess with those upon whom God has placed his seal; those who do will suffer the consequences.

One more associated idea is that this is “*a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*” (**2 Corinthians 1:22; see also Ephesians 1:14**). Think of this as a “down payment,” a partial disbursement giving assurance that the rest will eventually come. As we will see later, God has promised us wonderful things. *Some* of those are a part of the believer’s present experience, but the rest will be experienced in the future—our inheritance in Christ. The sealing of the Spirit is God’s absolute guarantee that *all* he has promised us *will* ultimately be ours. One practical application of this ministry of the Spirit is to give us an assurance of our salvation. No one can break God’s seal or frustrate him from fulfilling his promises to his own.

There are many New Testament references to the *filling of the Spirit* (e.g., **Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Act 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5**). We are commanded to be filled with him: “*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit*” (**Ephesians 5:18**).

Notably, it’s instructive to compare two other references that link drinking or drunkenness with this idea (**Luke 1:15; Acts 2:4 and 13**). Both have to do with an influence upon a person resulting in a significant character change. A drunken person is easily identified by acting in an uncharacteristic way; similarly, the Spirit transforms the Christian with the character of Jesus Christ.

Also, both influences are related to choices made. A person chooses to consume alcohol excessively to become drunk. In the same way, Paul putting this in the form of a command implies that being filled with the Spirit is a choice we make to yield ourselves to his *positive* influence.

Finally, both influences can “wear off.” The drunken person eventually sobers up, unless he takes in more alcohol. And since Christians are still sinful, we tend to turn away from the Spirit’s positive influence and seek control of our own lives. That is why, based on the grammar of this command, we really are to “*keep on being* filled by the Holy Spirit.” This is not a once-for-all occurrence, but something we need to do *continually*. The filling of the Spirit, then, is relying upon his indwelling influence to empower us to live like—to be like—Jesus Christ.

Three Divine Directives

There are three other New Testament commands linked with the Spirit.

First, earlier in **Ephesians**, Paul wrote, “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*” (**4:30**). In the context, “grieving” is done by mistreating or having bad attitudes toward other Christians. But it likewise seems correct to say that *any* form of sin—any *unholiness*—would grieve the *Holy Spirit*.

Second, Paul also says, “*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt*” (**1 Thessalonians 5:19–20**). Fire is a biblical symbol of power; to quench the Spirit, or put out the Spirit’s fire, is to disturb his work. In the context, this is done by regarding the means by which the Spirit communicated to God’s people (through prophecy) with contempt or disdain. And again, it seems correct to assume we can douse the Spirit’s fire if we resist his work by any means.

These are sobering realities. We can actually bring a strong negative emotion upon the Holy Spirit (*grieve* him), and we can actually frustrate the power of omnipotent God (*quench* him)! This demonstrates sin’s utter sinfulness—it shows just how seriously we should take sin.

The third command is this: “*Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh*” (**Galatians 5:16**). The previous verse adds the related idea, “*Let us keep in step with the Spirit,*” that is, follow his leading.

If we obey this order, what will result? Negatively, we will not indulge the cravings of our sinful impulses. Positively, the Spirit will produce his “fruit” in the believer’s life! These qualities—“*love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” (**vv. 22–23**)—are the Spirit’s responsibility to produce, not ours. If we live (or walk) by the Spirit, he *will* produce this fruit within us.

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, living by him and following him, we will not grieve him or quench him. Rather, he will give us the power we lack in and of ourselves to be Christlike in our actions, attitudes, and character.

INTERESTING FACT

But wait—there's more! The Spirit also reveals truth, specifically about Christ and his teachings (**John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13**). He assures us we really are God's children (**Romans 8:16**). He helps us in our weakness and prays for us when words fail us (**vv. 26–27**). What an amazing gift he is for believers. Let us take full advantage of all he was sent to provide for us.