

# THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

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The message on the T-shirt said, "It's a Holy Spirit thing—you wouldn't understand." There can be little doubt that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been the seedbed for an enormous amount of misunderstanding during the last 35 years, and it's a subject every Christian needs to understand.

Clearing away some of the current confusion is our goal as we look at our Lord's promise of the Spirit in John 14. His words provide answers to such questions as: Who is the Holy Spirit? Is the Spirit a person or a power? Why did the Spirit come? What difference does all of this make to me?

As we turn to Jesus' words for answers, it's my desire that we will not only understand the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, but that we will embrace His presence in our lives.

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## WHERE CAN WE TURN?

A well-used bag of golf clubs slouches at the bottom of the stairs, just where he left it. She had given it to him for his 50th birthday. How can she part with something he enjoyed so much? And what should she do with his wallet and clothes? And what about the lawnmower? How will she pay the bills he always paid, or run the business he knew inside and out? Whom can she turn to now that he's gone? Will she ever be able to trust anyone again?

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*Will she ever  
be able to trust  
anyone again?*

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Some of her questions are similar to those being asked by the grieving followers of a rabbi whom many believed

to be the messiah of Israel. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson was the leader of the Lubavitch movement (a global Jewish revival) for 44 years. To many Jewish people he was a living symbol of hope. The Rebbe, as he was affectionately known, became the embodiment of the hopes and dreams and aspirations of thousands.

The Rebbe of Brooklyn, New York, died at age 92 in June 1995. At his funeral, some of his followers celebrated and awaited his resurrection. But his grave remained silent. The devotion of his disciples was so deep that the loss of the Rebbe left them feeling profoundly distraught. One grieving follower wrote a tribute to the teacher who had given his life meaning and hope. In it he lamented, "I will miss the Rebbe for all of my days, but I shall not for a moment forget him.

And I shall long to be reunited with him with the coming of the Messiah. Until then, I shall look to the heavens every morning, peering deep into the soul of the Creator, and ask, "Where is my Rebbe, and why have You taken him away? We are all so impoverished without him."

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Thousands of e-mailed and faxed prayers are brought daily to the Rebbe's grave in Brooklyn. Every day hundreds visit the cemetery. One of the graveside hosts said of these people, "They don't understand why they come. They're looking for

direction, for a way to channel their spiritual reawakening to service for God."

The emotions of the widow and of Rebbe's followers must be similar to the emotions experienced at the death of Jesus Christ. The disillusioned followers of the Teacher from Nazareth had staked everything on Him. They had left their professions, their families, and their sins to follow Him. They had given up their own independence to rely on Him for every need of their life. He had given them hope, inspiration, and a sense of eternal dignity.

Yes, Jesus died and was buried. But then, like no other spiritual leader who has ever lived, He rose to assure His disciples that even though He was leaving, He was not leaving them abandoned and alone. Before leaving, He gave them a promise.

# THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

**T**wo vivid images come to mind when I think of promises. One is the picture of Joe Namath sitting poolside in Miami prior to the 1969 Super Bowl and promising (actually guaranteeing!) that the upstart New York Jets would defeat the mighty Baltimore Colts—a promise he kept several days later to the shock of the sporting world.

The other image is of an incident that occurred a few years ago as I sat in a meeting with the president of the Baptist Union of Russia. He said that in the last few years, hundreds of Christian leaders had come from the West offering promises of help (both spiritual and financial), and that only one percent of those leaders had kept their promise.

The simple reality is that

a promise is only as good as the willingness and ability of the one making it. What a comfort to know that when the Lord Jesus Christ makes a promise, He not only has the willingness to make the promise but also the eternal integrity and ability to keep it.

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***A promise is only as good as the willingness and ability of the one making it.***

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Of the many profound and significant promises our Lord made during His life on earth, few have more day-to-day potential for impact on us than His promise of the Spirit.

In His final words to the disciples before His crucifixion (Jn. 13–16),

Jesus made a dramatic announcement of His soon departure. He was about to leave these friends with whom He had invested 3 years of His life. His words shocked and disturbed them. But He did not leave them without comfort. In response to their apprehension, He gave them a promise. He said, in effect, “Although I’m going away, the Holy Spirit is coming to minister to you in My place.” It was a promise that unfolded in layers that began with what sounded more like a threat than a promise!

## **A SURPRISING DEPARTURE**

***“I go to My Father”*** (Jn. 14:12). To the puzzlement of His disciples, Jesus had earlier spoken of going away (13:33,36). The fact that they could not follow was troubling to them. Later they would

understand what He was sparing them from. For now, His words bewildered them.

Then He said it again (14:1-3). He told them He was going to the Father to prepare a place for them. It was becoming clear. He was going away. It was the fulfillment of His mission. How His heart must have ached for these dear friends, who were troubled and confused because they felt He was abandoning them!

### **The Big Picture.**

What Peter and company failed to see, of course, was the larger picture of the work of Christ. And no wonder. For 3 years they had been together. The group had shared experiences that went beyond their ability to fully understand or describe. Much of the significance of these events would not be clear to them until after the resurrection. John 12:16 tells us, “His disciples did not understand these things

at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him.”

But with miracles still in their memory and with the thunderous shouts of the “Palm Sunday” crowd still ringing in their ears, all they could see was the moment. All they could do was stare at the One who, at His greatest moment of recognition, seemed determined to walk away from it all.

### **The Divine Mission.**

Jesus alone could see beyond the agony of the next few hours. He alone could see why it was so important for Him to die and then to return to the right hand of the Father (Mt. 26:64). There are a number of reasons why the Lord Jesus had to return to the Father:

- He had to return to the Father to be our great

Mediator and Advocate (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Jn. 2:1).

- He had to return to the Father so that He could prepare the eternal home He has promised us (Jn. 14:2).
- He had to go to the Father so that He might enter the heavenly sanctuary and be our Great High Priest (Heb. 6:19-20).
- He had to go to the Father to receive the glory due Him as the obedient, victorious Son (Jn. 17:24).
- He had to go to the Father so that He could gloriously return to establish the kingdom (Mt. 26:64).

When Jesus said He must go to the Father, it was not just a matter of a change of location—it was a change of operation. The plan of the Godhead for our redemption, and for the glory of God, was never

less than the work of Christ on the cross—but it was eternally *more*.

## **A SERIOUS REQUEST**

**“I will pray the Father . . .” (Jn. 14:16).** The wonderful priestly ministry of Christ was promised as He prayed to the Father on behalf of His own. This is not something to take lightly. Such intercession is what He is now doing for us. As He prayed for His disciples, He is now praying for all those who are His.

**Christ As Our Priest.** The book of Hebrews has often been called the “Fifth Gospel” because it describes not only the past earthly ministry of Christ but the present heavenly one in which He acts as our Priest. The role of a priest in the Old Testament was to serve as the representative of man to God—and that is exactly

what Jesus is doing for His own. He perpetually represents us before the Father in His ongoing work of ministry. The writer of Hebrews said:

*He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:25).*

When Jesus said, “I will pray the Father” (Jn. 14:16), it was the first hint of this priestly ministry for us. Although He was implicitly speaking of His intercessory ministry as Priest, He was explicitly speaking of one request in particular—and what a request it was! He must go to the Father specifically to request the dispatch of the Holy Spirit into the lives of believers.

**The Holy Spirit’s New Work.** The sending of the Spirit would mark a powerful juncture in the dealings of God with man.

Although the Holy Spirit had been active throughout history (Gen. 1:2; Ex. 31:3; 1 Sam. 19:23; 2 Chron. 24:20; Mt. 1:18; 12:28), He was about to do a new work in and among all who would be baptized into the body of Christ.

In the Old Testament, God the Father is portrayed as the member of the Godhead who plans and provides for His family on earth. In the incarnation, Christ is portrayed as the Son of the Father who comes to our rescue. Now, the Holy Spirit was about to become the One who would bring the life of the Godhead to those whom the Son brings to the Father.

**How Does The Work Of The Spirit Fit Into The Eternal Plan?** The day of the Spirit is very significant. It shows a transition in the work of the Godhead, as the Triune God continues to unfold

the divine plan. Later, we will more fully explore the purposes for the coming of the Holy Spirit. For now, it's important to recognize that each member of the Trinity, working together in perfect union, carries out a distinct role for the accomplishment of the eternal plan.

In this eternal plan, God the Father decreed the creation of man, decreed to allow sin (not cause it), and decreed that only by a perfect sacrifice could the penalty of sin be avoided.

In the eternal plan, God the Son is the Creator (Gen. 1; Jn. 1:1-3), the source of His people's provision, and ultimately the perfect sacrifice for sin. He became our Redeemer by becoming a man and sacrificially dying in our place.

In the same eternal plan, it became the role of the Spirit to apply that rescue to the lives of all who would believe in the Son. First,

the Spirit would provide the divine strength that would enable the Son to be our example and Savior. Then, when the Son returned to the Father, the Spirit would begin baptizing people of all nations into the body of Christ on earth. Once Christ returned to the Father, the Spirit would come in His place to bring to completion God's wonderful plan for all who would receive forgiveness and new life in Christ Jesus.

Jesus' promise of the Spirit is all wrapped up in His declaration that He would "pray the Father." It is the opening of a new chapter in the dealings of God with mankind, in which the Holy Spirit is profoundly at work in people of all nations for the glory of the Son and to the worship of the Father.

## **A POWERFUL CONFIDENCE**

*" . . . He will give you . . . "* (Jn. 14:16). This is the promise fulfilled. Notice again the relationship in the Godhead. Although absolutely equal to the Father, the Son submits to Him a request for His will to be done. The same is true of the Holy Spirit who, though absolutely equal to the Father, is sent forth by the Father to accomplish the Father's will. This is the wonder of the Trinity—one God manifesting Himself in three equal Persons who have varying roles for the purpose of accomplishing the eternal plan of God. The Son makes the request and the Spirit is dispatched, but it is the Father who gives the Spirit to men and women.

**Confidence In Relationship.** Notice the confidence of Christ's statement, "He will give you." It shows that He

knows the answer will be given. It shows the confidence of the Son in the eternal plan that is yet unfolding. It shows His assurance in the ability of the Spirit to care for His children.

**Confidence In The Divine Plan.** As confident as Christ was of His impending death (Jn. 13:21), He was equally confident that the Father who decreed the cross to redeem a people for Himself would send the Spirit to care for those redeemed people. It was confidence in the eternal plan of the Father that enabled the Son to be willing to entrust those He had purchased with His own blood to the care and presence of the Spirit.

**Confidence In The Need Of The World.** The promise of the Spirit is for Christ's sake. It is for the care of those who are His. And it is for the sake of the

whole world as well. In John 16, Jesus made it clear that when the Spirit came, He would not only work in the hearts of believers but also on the hearts of those who do not yet know Christ. Jesus described the work of the Spirit in calling men and women to redemption when He said:

*When He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged (Jn. 16:8-11).*

The Spirit would have a scope of ministry larger than just to those in the family of God. The Holy Spirit, grieved by sin, would seek the rescue of lost sinners and cause them to be conscious of their need of eternal life.

## THE PERSON OF THE SPIRIT

**W**e live in a culture that puts a high value on what is genuine. The largest selling soft drink company in the world refers to its product as “the real thing.” And people are continually urged to “get real” by a sports clothing manufacturer. We are told to accept no substitutes, beware of cheap imitations, and check the label to assure ourselves that we are getting the “genuine article.”

This is true even in other parts of the world. When shopping at the huge outdoor Moscow flea market in Ismailova Park, I saw at least five different kiosks displaying what were described as “handmade dolls,” bearing the personal label of the woman who made them in her home. At each of these stands, the label said “Handmade by

Tatiana.” And each man who was selling the dolls said that Tatiana was his own wife. In fact, one of the kiosks was operated by a woman claiming to be the actual Tatiana!

None of us want to be left with less than we think we are given. Being shortchanged is something we fear. I wonder if such fears could have entered the minds of the disciples when Jesus said He was going away and sending a substitute. I wonder if they were fearful of getting less than what they had with Christ—some kind of a “cheap imitation.”

**Genuine Article Or Cheap Imitation?** If there were any such fears in the minds of the Master’s men as they listened to the upper-room discourse, those concerns were addressed by Christ Himself. Even if the disciples could not yet understand, their fears would

be answered by the precise terminology our Lord used to describe the divine Substitute He would send in His place. As Jesus described the Person of the Holy Spirit, His words made it abundantly clear that His disciples would not get less of God than they had with Him. They would receive a full inner presence of the Lord Jesus who would not only be *with* them, but would be *in* them.

Our Lord's choice of words as He spoke to the disciples is most critical. Let's look at the passage and the significant terms that tell the story:

*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 significant terms in these verses deserve careful consideration if we are to understand the full impact of the Lord's words.

## **“ANOTHER”**

As a rule, some words and parts of speech give greater weight to the meaning of a text. For that reason, we almost always focus on nouns and verbs. Verbs relate the action of a statement, and nouns give and receive that action. So it is interesting when another part of speech takes a dominant role in how we understand a passage of Scripture. Such is the case here, where we turn to the adjective *another* to give clarity to the text.

**When Is “Another” Not Another?** The word *another* is found 233 times in the New Testament, but it is not always the same Greek word. Along with several less significant terms,

there are two primary Greek words that are translated *another*. One of these words is *heteros*, which means “another of a different kind.” From it, we get words like *heterosexual* (relating to a different sex), *heterogeneous* (containing dissimilar parts), and *heterodox* (describing a different doctrinal message that is not orthodox).

*Heteros* is used, for example, in Acts 13:35 to speak of “another Psalm” (different from the one just referred to), and in Acts 17:7 it is used to distinguish “another king” (Christ, as set apart and different from Caesar). In each instance, it is clearly describing that which is distinctive and different from what it is compared to.

**When Is “Another” Another?** In John 14:16, however, *heteros* is not the word Jesus used to describe the promise of the Spirit. To describe the Holy Spirit, our

Lord used the word *allos*, which means just the opposite of *heteros*. *Allos* means “another of the same kind.” When Jesus used this term, He was making a bold promise that the Comforter He would send would be a perfect Substitute. In His co-equal, co-eternal nature, the Holy Spirit would be *another* just like Jesus Himself.

*Allos* is the word used in the “one another” statements of the New Testament that challenge and encourage us to befriend other believers—those who are just like ourselves in our imperfect flesh and in our relationship to Christ. The trouble with us is that even though we are like one another in sharing the same imperfect flesh, we don’t like to admit it. We often disagree with, disregard, and condemn those who are just like ourselves. This is not true of the Spirit’s relationship to

the Son and the Father. The members of the Trinity are always in perfect harmony with one another.

The Holy Spirit is always in step with the desires and affections that Christ has for us. The Spirit cares for us with the same love, the same concern, the same grace, the same compassion, the same truth, the same justice, the same holiness, and the same power that the disciples saw in the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry during the 3 years He shared with them.

### **“COMFORTER”**

Not all of our understanding of the Spirit comes from the word *another*. We must also give consideration to the word it modifies—*Comforter*. Another of like kind besides Jesus is wonderful—but another what? Here our Lord used *parakaleo*, a very descriptive word that would have been familiar to the

disciples. It was used in a variety of ways in the culture of the day. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* tells us that this word was used to describe a legal assistant, advocate, or one who pleads another's cause. This describes the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, who becomes our Paraclete and Advocate with the Father—like Jesus, our Great High Priest and Mediator.

### **How Many Comforters Do I Need?**

When John's Gospel is compared with his New Testament letters, it becomes apparent that he dealt in some detail with the idea of dual Paracletes. He discussed the role of the Holy Spirit as our Comforter here in John 14, and the role of Christ as our Advocate in 1 John 2:1. In that passage he wrote, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have

an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Why two divine Paracletes? Greek scholar and New Testament commentator A. T. Robertson describes the difference of their function this way: “So the Christian has Christ as his Paraclete with the Father, the Holy Spirit as the Father’s Paraclete with us (Jn. 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 Jn. 2:1).”

**What Will These Comforters Do?** How does this work and what does it accomplish? Perhaps it is best to see these two ministries of advocacy as similar but accomplishing very different goals.

**The Role of Christ.** As our Advocate, Christ defends us before the Father to keep us secure. It is a part of His promise that “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (Jn. 6:37). What a rich promise! Christ

Himself serves as our Defender. He doesn’t defend our works, which are flawed and faulty. His defense of us is based on His perfect and completed work.

**The Role Of The Spirit.** The Holy Spirit as our Comforter works within us to declare to us the abiding presence of the living God in our lives. Romans 8 talks extensively about this wonderful work of the Spirit. Paul wrote, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 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” (vv.14-16). The role of the Spirit as our Comforter, in part, is to assure us of the wonderful position that is ours as the children of the living God!

## “THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH”

This final phrase that our Lord used to describe the promise of the Spirit has significant implications all its own. Jesus used it in John 14:17 to show another facet of the Spirit’s ministry. At the same time, He gave definition to the Holy Spirit’s character. Just moments before, Jesus had told His men that He alone was the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). Now He tells them specifically how the Spirit is “another of the exact same kind” by referring to Him as the “Spirit of truth.”

A. T. Robertson has an interesting note on the title “the Spirit of truth.” He says that it is appropriate because “the Holy Spirit is marked by it [truth], gives it, defends it, [and is] in contrast to the spirit of error.”

**Integrity.** The Spirit is *marked by truth* because of His divine nature. As God

He has all the attributes of deity, one of which is truth. He does not have the capacity to lie and is therefore absolutely trustworthy in all He says.

In this truthfulness of the Spirit, it is apparent why those who want to be in step with the Spirit must long to be people of integrity. We cannot hope to be under His influence if we are consciously distorting the truth in a misguided effort to protect ourselves or someone else.

**Inspiration.** The Spirit *gives truth* in the sense of divine inspiration (2 Pet. 1:21). He is the dispenser of all biblical truth. The Word of God is reliable because it came to us under the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

**Invincibility.** The Spirit *defends the truth* by empowering the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, which proclaims the

truth and answers the arguments of the world against it. In the ministry of proclamation, the Word of God is not only announced but exonerated.

**Incompatibility.** The Holy Spirit of truth *stands in stark contrast* to our spiritual enemy. Satan, a mere created, fallen being, is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). Satan is in the business of deception and subtle trickery (Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11:3,14). The Holy Spirit deals in the truth. In fact, this is a large part of what He was sent into the world to do. As we saw earlier, the Spirit was sent to expose the truth to a lost world by convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:8)—a hard but eternally necessary truth about the world’s condition.

Occasionally in major dramatic plays and musicals, the star of the show (the lead) becomes ill, needs time away for another project, or

will be gone for some reason. In those times, a substitute steps into the lead role (a stand-in). When that happens and the stand-in is announced, there is generally a groan from the crowd. The stand-in will do his or her best, and may actually do a better job than the star, but it is still a disappointment to the audience.

It should be a great comfort to us that Jesus did not send an inferior stand-in or second-best. Our Savior sent in His place a co-equal, co-eternal member of the Trinity. He would perfectly represent Christ and the Father in the lives of God’s beloved children.

There can be no question about the divine nature of the Holy Spirit, and there can be no question about His perfect character. He is our Comforter, another of the exact same kind as Jesus, who gives and substantiates the truth.

# THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT

**E**benezer Scrooge is the notorious main character of Charles Dickens' classic, "A Christmas Carol." It is the story of one man's struggle to develop a heart for people. Behind all the action and teaching, however, are the three spirits (the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future) who maneuver Scrooge to his various destinations.

It is interesting to note the character of these spirits as they come and go, move in and out, appear and then just as quickly disappear. If we were truly dependent on such flighty characters for wisdom and direction and guidance and instruction, our lives would have the stability of jello.

By contrast, we have from Jesus the promise of a Spirit who abides with us

consistently, allowing us to live dependently on Him with great confidence. Notice how different the Holy Spirit is from Dickens' Christmas spirits.

## A PERMANENT HELPER

*" . . . abide with you forever" (Jn. 14:16).* By this statement, Jesus assured us of a New Covenant relationship to the Spirit. This relationship was both alike and different from the way the Holy Spirit had related to the people of God in earlier times.

**The Way It Used To Be.** In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was active in a variety of ways. He was active in creation (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4), in conviction (Gen. 6:3), in confirmation of the Word of God (2 Chr. 24:20), and in caring for the people of God (Ps. 51:12). This was all accomplished by the

Spirit as the agent of the Father, the One who is given primary emphasis in the Old Testament era.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was involved in empowering people for acts of service, which is similar to His role today. In Old Testament times, any good or honorable act had to be energized by the Spirit and grace of God. Man, in his fallen nature, has always been unable to do anything that would please God. But it is also true that in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit came upon the Lord's people as they needed Him or as He sovereignly chose to use them (as with Samson).

Throughout Old Testament history, the Spirit would come upon people for seasons of ministry and empower them for acts of skill, strength, or insight. The Spirit of God was described as coming upon them (see the messengers of Saul in

1 Sam. 19:20 and Gideon in Jud. 6:34), and then would depart (see the 70 elders of Israel in Num. 11:25).

Sometimes the Spirit's departure would occur because of sin. This was certainly the concern of David as he mourned the sin he had committed with Bathsheba. He prayed, "Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). David's fear seems to have been that the Holy Spirit might leave him because of his sin.

Sometimes the Spirit was said to depart because the task for which someone had been empowered was accomplished (Num. 11:25). This was apparently the case with several of the minor prophets, who were boldly empowered by the Spirit for very brief prophetic ministries and then went back to whatever their life had been previously. It most

certainly was the case with Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa until he was called to speak prophetic words from God (the book of Amos).

The ministry of the Spirit was described differently in the Old Testament than it was in the New Testament. For this reason Christ's disciples, still living in the Old Testament era, would see the Lord's declaration of a permanent abiding of the Spirit as a great contrast to their previous understanding.

**The Way It Is In Christ.** The promised permanent presence of the Spirit in John 14:16 would also be in contrast to their mere 3-year physical relationship with Christ Himself. He did not come to dwell permanently on earth in a physical body. He came to accomplish the plan of redemption and then return to the Father's presence. The Spirit's coming would be very different from His ministry in

the Old Testament and different from Christ's ministry in the Gospels, for His coming to indwell believers was promised to be eternal in nature.

## **A DISTINCTIVE PRESENCE**

**“. . . whom the world cannot receive” (Jn. 14:17).** This statement opens up an issue of enormous significance to the believer, for it sets us in contrast to an unredeemed world. In 1 Corinthians 2–3, we find the contrast of the natural man with the spiritual man:

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 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. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:12-16).*

**What The Spiritual Man Has.** It couldn't be more clear. Children of God are different from the unbelievers. We have the presence of the Spirit of God in our lives, an unbeliever (the natural man) does not. We are enabled by the Spirit to know the things given to us by God (v.12), to understand spiritual things (v.13), to have spiritual discernment (v.15), and to have the mind of Christ

(v.16). These rich blessings are not given to everyone who is born, only to those who are born of faith.

**What The Natural Man Doesn't Have.** The key to the contrast is in verse 14: "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." The natural man cannot understand what it means to live for the honor of Christ because he is not of the same spirit. He can study the Bible as literature, but he cannot see the wonder of God in Christ. He hears spiritual principles, but he cannot apply them in the love and faith of Christ. Why? Because he does not have the Spirit of God.

Jesus said that the world cannot receive the Spirit. This is undeniably revealed in the contrast of what the Spirit of God produces and what the

spirit of man (the world) produces. It is the difference between the wisdom that is from above and the wisdom that is of this world. James 3 delivers the contrast in clear-cut terms:

*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in*

*peace by those who make peace (vv.13-18).*

Although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned explicitly in James 3, it is obvious from 1 Corinthians 2–3 (as well as Acts 6:3,10 and Eph.1:17) that spiritual wisdom (James calls it “wisdom from above”) is imparted by the Holy Spirit and is very different from the wisdom displayed by the natural man, who does not receive the Spirit.

## **A RESIDENT WITHIN**

***“He dwells with you and will be in you” (Jn. 14:17).***

This is the final declaration of the significant way the Spirit’s presence is displayed in our lives. It is not only a matter of an eternal presence, or even a presence that displays itself in true spiritual wisdom. It is the amazing reality of the Spirit of the living God taking up personal residence *in* the lives of believers. Two great

realities flow from this wonderful truth:

**The Indwelling Of The Spirit.** Jesus introduced the subject here, and did so by setting it in contrast to the work of the Spirit in the Old Testament. The contrast is between “dwells *with* you” and “will be *in* you.” This proclaims that the promise of the Holy Spirit is not coming in some general way to the world, but specifically into the lives of believers. Paul echoed that same theme in Romans 8 in relation to our understanding of the Holy Spirit. Notice how clearly he described the indwelling of the Spirit in verses 9-11:

*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. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life*

*because of righteousness. 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.*

The Spirit has come to indwell us as the ultimate evidence that we have received eternal life through the resurrected Christ. To not have the Spirit is to not have Christ. To know Christ is to enjoy the blessing of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**The Filling Of The Spirit.** This is very different from the indwelling of the Spirit, but it flows from it. The filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) speaks of His control and influence in our lives. As the influence of alcohol has control over people for evil, so the Spirit's presence has influence and control over believers for good when we surrender our will to Him.

If the Spirit were not indwelling us, He could not continually fill us with His controlling power. Although indwelling is permanent and filling must be maintained moment-by-moment, they are still connected by the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

**The Point Of His Presence.** What's the implication? It is stated boldly by Paul in

1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

*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? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

The presence of the Holy Spirit should result in clearly seen holiness, for we are now His temple, where He abides continually—even forever. It is not just the

empowering we need to glorify God, it is our motivation as well.

The Holy Spirit lives within us. His presence is evidence of the price Christ paid to redeem us from the consequence of sin and secure us for all eternity. We are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Now we have the Spirit of God indwelling us.

We must give the Spirit control over our lives for Him to do His work in us, for we desperately need Him. The work that He lives in us to do is the work we could never do for ourselves. It is divine enablement that comes by the will of the Father, to the honor of the Son, by the immediate and direct empowering of the Spirit. It is work that we can prayerfully ask for, inviting Him daily, hourly, and even minute by minute to have His wonderful way in our lives.

# THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

The first winter that my wife Marlene and I were married was marked by severe blizzards. I can vividly remember one Sunday when we awoke to find that the electricity had been knocked out by an ice storm. Huddled around a battery-powered radio for news on that frigid Sunday, we heard a most unusual announcement. The announcer, before giving the list of church services canceled due to the ice storm, said, “The following churches will be closed due to lack of power.” What an interesting comment! I knew what he meant, but I was struck by what he said.

The idea of churches closing due to lack of power conjures up some spiritual parallels that directly tie into Jesus’ promise of the Spirit. Just prior to His ascension,

Jesus told His men in Acts 1:8, “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.” He directly attached the coming of the Spirit to the empowering of believers. This gives us reason to examine some important issues in this concluding section.

**What Is Power?** The word *power* used by Jesus in Acts 1:8 is the Greek word *dunamis*. It is defined variously as “strength, power, or ability.” Specifically, it refers to “inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth.” This spiritual power is not inherent to the believer, however. Notice very carefully that it is inherent to the Person of the

Holy Spirit who resides within the believer. How does this power manifest itself in our lives? I would suggest that there are at least three (though probably more) clear ways the Holy Spirit expresses His power in the lives of the redeemed.

**Power For Life.** How does the Spirit express life in us? By causing our lives to be profoundly different from the hopeless world that surrounds us. Notice Paul's words in Romans 15:13, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

The power of the Holy Spirit provides for us the things that human effort and human religion and human righteousness could never achieve. He is there to empower our living with a glorious sense of joy, peace, and hope that can carry us through the trials and

hardships that are the inevitable by-products of life in a fallen world.

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***The power we need is found in a Person who has been sent by the Father to bring fullness to our lives.***

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The power we need is found in a Person who has been sent by the Father to bring fullness to our lives.

In a world that is in mad pursuit of happiness, we can have joy by the power of the Holy Spirit. In a world that is crying out from the grief of constant conflict, we can have true peace. In a world that is filled with empty despair and a bleak future, we can have a bright hope. Why? Because the power of the Holy Spirit can equip us for life in a way that the

world cannot grasp. His power can enable us to experience the things that the world craves and cannot secure, but are ours by the Spirit. This is the abundant life Jesus spoke of—a life that is full and rich and deep and lasting. A life that is lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The hymnwriter Thomas Chisholm expressed the joy of this when he wrote:

Pardon for sin  
and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence  
to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today  
and bright hope for  
tomorrow—

Blessings all mine,  
with ten thousand beside!  
Great is Thy faithfulness!

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### ***Power For***

***Outreach.*** This, of course, is specifically what is in view in Acts 1:8. But the power of the Holy Spirit in

evangelism and missions is not limited to that text. Notice two great statements by Paul on this subject:

*My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor. 2:4). Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake (1 Th. 1:5).*

In both of these texts, Paul was writing to churches he had established. He made it clear, however, that it was not by his wisdom or cleverness or ability to craft words. It was only by the Holy Spirit that they had been brought to saving faith.

In a day of cleverly packaged, methodically dominated, and man-centered evangelism, it is

refreshing to be reminded that only by the power of the Spirit can true evangelism be accomplished and the mission of the church to reach the world with the gospel be performed.

**Power For Ministry In The Church.** True ministry within the body of Christ is not achieved by human brilliance or skill but by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives special abilities (spiritual gifts) to believers “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12; cp. 1 Cor. 14:26; 1 Th. 5:11).

**What Are The “Greater Works” That Jesus Promised In John 14:12?** Notice the words of Christ, “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.” The problem is that this verse has been used to validate all kinds of activities today by calling them “greater works.” The question that must be carefully examined is how should the word *greater* be defined? Greater in power? Greater in scope? Greater in effectiveness? What are “greater works”?

Is it reasonable to think that we will be enabled to accomplish works of greater power or quality than Jesus did? Think of the nature of His miracles—feeding the multitudes, raising the dead, healing the incurable, controlling the forces of nature by the power of His word. Now consider why He did these things. John 20:30-31 gives us the motive behind the miracles.

*Truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that*

*you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*

The purpose of the wondrous things that Jesus did was to reveal the uniqueness of His Person as the Son of God. Certainly we do not seek to accomplish such a goal, for we do not have the right to make such a claim.

No, we are not to do works greater in quality or power, for He alone is Christ. What then are the “greater works”? The best understanding of it, and one commonly held by many respected Bible teachers, is that the phrase speaks not of the *quality* of the works but of the *scope* of the works. Think about it.

Such an expectation [greater works] seems impossible in the light of His character and power; yet, through the power of

the Spirit whom Jesus sent after His ascension, there were more converts after the initial sermon of Peter at Pentecost than recorded for Jesus during His entire career. The influence of the infant church covered the Roman world, whereas Jesus during His lifetime never traveled outside the boundaries of Palestine. Through the disciples He multiplied His ministry after His departure. The book of Acts is a continuous record of deeds that followed the precedent that Jesus had begun. As the living Lord He continued in His church what He had Himself begun. He expected that the church would become the instrument by which He could manifest Himself to all people (Merrill C. Tenney, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan

Publishing House,  
©1981, Vol.9, pp.145-  
146).

We should be humbled by the glorious promise that by the power of the Spirit we can be used of God to perform His work on a broad scale—even to the ends of the earth.

**What Are The Implications?** Perhaps the verse that captures the implications of these truths is 2 Corinthians 3:18, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that spiritual transformation takes place. This involves every area of our spiritual lives.

**Spiritual Growth.** It is the Spirit that matures us into the image of Christ so that we can give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:1-

5). We are called to be submissive to His control in our lives. That is our responsibility. But the Holy Spirit is the One who produces the image and likeness of Christ in us.

**Spiritual Gifts.** We are personally enabled by the Spirit to perform various kinds of spiritual ministry (see 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). It is not by our own seeking or determination (1 Cor. 12:11). Notice that spiritual gifts are not given for personal edification or glory. These gifts are given for ministry to the body of Christ, the church (1 Cor. 12:7). They are not to be exercised in pride, but in spiritual humility (Rom. 12:3). Spiritual gifts have not been given so that we all fall in step with a common experience. Because of diversity in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-6), its many unique and varied

members can contribute to the building up of the body (Rom. 12:4-8). It is helpful to be reminded that spiritual gifts are tools to be worked with, not toys to be played with. They are the instruments by which we perform our spiritual service, bearing fruit to the glory of the Father.

***Spiritual Worship.*** It is by the Spirit that we are able to give true worship to the living God (Jn. 4:24). This worship, however, is always protected by the authority and guidelines of the Word of God. This is stated directly in John 4 and reinforced in the guidelines for gifts in worship in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

Jesus called His disciples to glorify the Father by bearing much fruit (Jn. 15:8). At the same time, the Lord made it clear: "Without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). How can these two directives be resolved when

He had just said that He was going away? Jesus resolved them in the promise of the Holy Spirit.

It is Jesus' desire that we glorify the Father, so He gave to His followers the indwelling Holy Spirit to make it possible. How tragic that so often we live life totally oblivious to this wonderful Comforter in our lives! We often ignore His enabling by which we give glory to God in our spiritual growth, in our worship, and in our service to Him.

We live in a society that truly needs to see the glory of God expressed in a spiritually mature and empowered church. May we submit to the ministry of the One who has come to magnify God in Christ and see His great work among the people of God. Let's pray with Paul, "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

# LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

To experience Jesus' promise of the Spirit, two foundational truths must be acknowledged. The first is that those who are in Christ must submit to the Spirit if they are going to grow in Christlikeness. Galatians 3:3 asks, "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" As the work of the Holy Spirit is a necessary part of our salvation, His work is also vital to our Christian living.

In this light, will you as a believer give careful thought to the extent to which you consciously submit to the control of the Spirit and allow Him to guide your life? Will you consider what kind of temple you are providing for His dwelling place? Will you acknowledge that He is the *Holy Spirit*, and allow

Him to produce godliness in your life? This is essential to living the Christian life. And as we experience this wonderful reality, we can know the joy of Christ and intimacy of fellowship with Him.

If you don't yet know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, your need is different. You are still in your sins and apart from the Spirit of God. But you don't need to stay there. You can find hope in the simple but profound truth that Christ died for your sins and will bring those who believe in Him to the Father.

He is the Savior who gave Himself in sacrifice for your sin. And He gave His Spirit for your comfort and strength. His cross provides forgiveness, and His Spirit offers His presence. Accept Christ by faith as your Savior, and allow the Spirit of God to begin His wonderful work in your life today!

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