

Bible study on the Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is as much a part of God as Jesus and the father. You will see through scripture references to God as three persons is quite common. The earliest reference to the Holy Spirit is found at the beginning of Genesis-Chapter 1v2 reads like this:"And the earth was without form and void and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the spirit of god moved upon the face of the waters."

Before looking back to other parts of the Old Testament I want to go on to St Johns Gospel and to chapter 14 where we learn more about the Holy Spirit. Jesus is talking to his disciples about what is going to happen to him very soon, but does not want them to feel they will be left alone. Verse 16 of this chapter gives just one example of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. "And I will pray the father and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever".

Clearly then, the Holy Spirit is given to us that we may receive comfort when we go through bad times and get discouraged. Another reason that the Holy Spirit is given to mankind is shown in verse 26 of the same chapter. "The comforter - whom the father will send in my name. He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said" Notice that in these verses the Holy Spirit is referred to as a person.

The word "whom" in the English language can only be used when speaking of a person. The verse continues "He shall teach you"-person reference again. You must understand that this does not mean person as human being but definitely a person of the spiritual realm. Angels are also persons. Here we see another of the purposes for which god has given us the Holy Spirit, that He might be our teacher, and to remind us of all that Jesus has said and prophesied. Further, because the Holy Spirit is part of God he will lead us into all truth.

Therefore whatever anybody says, however famous or clever the person is, however good it sounds, check it out with your teacher, ask the Holy Spirit to show you the truth or otherwise of what has been said or written. Wonderfully, in teaching us truth, as we study scripture, the Holy Spirit will sometimes bring us to an understanding of some of the parts we are reading, which we have never learned or been shown before. Then you are knowing the Holy Spirit as your teacher.

Verse 17 of this chapter shows Jesus revealing something to his disciples which they had no understanding of at the time. "For he dwells in you and shall be shown in you" Later we will look at this verse in more detail, but for now let us move on to look at an aspect of the holy spirit that we need very much to know about. Matthew 3v16 describes Jesus at the time of baptism by St John in the river Jordan. "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went straightway out of the water, and the heavens opened and the spirit of god descended upon Him like a dove." In understand that a dove, apart from being a very gentle creature, is also very sensitive and will not settle anywhere it is not completely comfortable and happy. Therefore if we are to walk alongside the Holy Spirit throughout every day of our lives then we must be sure to get out of our lives everything that would cause Him offence.

We must seek to do away with everything in our lives that is wrong. Now let us go forward again to the Acts of the Apostles where we will see why this last point is so important.

Chapter 1 v8 says this, quoting Jesus to his disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you ". Power for what? Effective witnessing and demonstrating to the world the signs and wonders which will show the world that Jesus really is who you proclaim him to be.

The power that is available to you here is far, far, far greater than all the power of the enemy used against you personally at any one time. More about this later. Jesus is here talking about a few weeks ahead, and the coming day of Pentecost, when the disciples and all in the upper room experiences the Holy Spirit in a very different way than they had before. If you look back to St John's Gospel, chapter 22v22 records Jesus breathing on his disciples and saying receive the Holy Spirit.

I believe Jesus indwells every believer the moment he or she receives Jesus Christ into their lives as Lord, Saviour and god. Clearly what followed this on the day of Pentecost was very different again. It is a subject I shall be writing about next time.

(2) The Holy Spirit throughout the Old Testament

The following is just a brief look at a few very clear references to the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. You have seen from Genesis chapter one that the Holy Spirit was present at the earliest moments of creation. Since there are so many references I have chosen just a few. Numbers 11 v 17 -Here Moses has complained to God that the burden of trying to guide, encourage and pastor more than half a million people is too much for him.

God therefore agrees that he will give a portion of the anointing that is upon Moses to a selection of others, to help Moses in his work. Numbers 11 v 26-Is another illustration of what happened in Old Testament days when the Holy Spirit came upon a person. This sometimes happens today. Numbers 11 v 29 -Moses expresses a wish which actually came into effect some 3000 years later. Judges 6 v 34 - is an example of a man of God being empowered for the service which he would not otherwise have done.

A divine enabling. Judges 13v 25- shows the raising up and training of a man of God, in service. This is what we should always encourage amongst us.1 Samuel 16v 13- shows how the Holy Spirit anoints someone for a work of service, enabling and empowering him. After this David experienced many a hardship but stuck through and saw the success that God brought him. Ezekiel 3v4 -here the prophet Ezekiel tells of the Holy Spirit coming upon him and what happened as a result of this. People receiving visions and special and specific words from God in equally dramatic ways is nothing like as rare as many think it to be. It is happening often.

Ezekiel 36v 27 -this is a promise of God I shall be referring back to in the next of these studies. Moses had earlier expressed a wish that everyone would be able to prophecy- this is another promise from God that the day Moses so longed for is indeed to come. Joel 2v8-many believe that this promise has not quite been fulfilled.

I believe we are very soon to see a great move of God amongst Hindu, Moslem, Buddhist and other peoples brought about not through missionaries but through prayer and a sovereign act of God. Often now I am hearing of strong Moslem groups whose leaders have been given a divine revelation of who Jesus is and have brought their entire congregations to know Christ

Jesus and receive him into their lives as Saviour, Messiah and Lord. I believe this is going to happen more widely and more often in these final days.

Finally a very important scripture showing how all things will be done. Zechariah 4 v 6 says "Not by might, not by power but by my Spirit says the Lord" Just as the people of God in the Old Testament days needed the empowering and anointing of the Holy Spirit, so do we in these last days. How we can receive it I will show you in our next study.

3) The Holy Spirit in the New Testament

At least five different ways of describing the work of the Holy Spirit are found in the New Testament.

The Comforter (John 14v16)

With Jesus about to be physically withdrawn from the world and the presence of the disciples, clearly some other way would be needed for God's people to know the reality of God; otherwise they would be totally at a loss without Jesus. As is shown by them locking themselves away in an upper room for fear of the Jews before Jesus re-appeared to them after his resurrection.

They thought things had come to an end; they were weak, discouraged and mournful. When the Holy Spirit came upon them and began to dwell within them at Pentecost they were changed men. Strong in faith and confidence (boldness) in God, powerful (literally power full) and well aware of God in their lives through their deep personal relationship with him.

The Spirit of Truth (John 14v16)

It is the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth and away from falsehood. He does this by giving our minds discernment so that we can check out what we hear to see if it is truth or not. With God there is nothing false. He will not try to persuade us of anything that is not wholly the truth. God does not change. His standards do not change and his word does not change either. Even when we feel we feel far away from God we can know the truth that he is with us always. When we feel we are being treated unfairly we can know the truth that he will more than make up for any injustice we might suffer. When we feel ridden with guilt we can know the truth, that God will never love us any the less than at the time we reach our best. If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (Not next week, not next month, but immediately).

The Teacher (John 14v26)

When we have a real relationship with God through Jesus, the Holy Spirit will Himself teach us many wonderful things. Sometimes when we get alone with him in prayer, or personal bible study, the Holy Spirit will teach us things, just he and you. Sometimes through the preaching and teaching of the bible in a meeting the Holy Spirit will cause you to permanently remember a phrase, a Bible passage or perhaps even a summary of all that was said. I say again, whatever is said and whoever is saying it, check it out with God to see whether it is truth or not.

The Revealer (John 16v13)

Sometimes when you study the bible or are alone with God and in prayer, God will begin to show you how he feels about a particular situation, or show you something of what he is going to do in the coming days. If this happens to you, check it out with someone trustworthy. Often God will reveal the same things to more than just yourself. Maybe as you

speak, the person listening will recognise it as a genuine revelation from God, or maybe God has shown them the very same thing.

For example, a British person thought he was being told to go to a certain point on the arctic circle and pray for the release of captives and the oppressed in eastern block countries. Feeling this was a very strange thing to do (why could he not do it from home?) he never-the-less set off to obey. He prayed for approximately 8 hours and then feeling rather foolish, headed back to the hotel via a different way. Half a mile down the road he saw a man standing alone, facing away from the North Pole and looking in a South- Easterly direction.

What neither of them knew was that every half mile for more than fifty miles stood a person alone, feeling rather foolish but with the same burden to pray. None of them knew at the time that they in fact formed part of a human prayer chain. A matter of months later and the communist regimes fell in Poland, Germany (East) and Russia. God had revealed his heart for the oppressed in the eastern block countries and sent them out to pray so that this people would have the opportunity of choosing to be free.

Other times after years of wondering what a certain bible passage really meant, you will suddenly come to understand it because it has been revealed to you. Revelatory gifts include: prophecy, words of knowledge and wisdom.

The Empowerer (Acts 1v8)

At Pentecost the disciples were empowered to do mighty works and miracles because they followed the teaching and prompting of the Holy Spirit as he enabled them to do the miracles that Jesus had been doing during his life on earth. Many thousands of churches are re-discovering miraculous healings and huge numbers of conversions as they allow the Holy Spirit to have His way in their churches and meetings. Don't be afraid of what might happen, for God is gentle, generous and kind.

Ask and he will give you discernment as to those things which are of God and those things which are not, and the wisdom to know the difference and how you should handle those things which are not of God. Are you willing to stand back from the lime-light and let the Holy Spirit have his way in your meetings? He'll come if you ask him with all of your heart!

What is the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

In Ezekiel 36 v27 God promises that the day will come when he will put his spirit within his own people. Joel the prophet said a time would come when God would pour out his spirit on all flesh. We have seen through our study of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament what a difference it can make when the Holy Spirit comes upon a person. In Acts 1 v 8 Jesus promises his disciples "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you"

Power to do what? Demonstrate by signs and wonders and miracles that Jesus is all that the scriptures show Him to be, and power to witness to many and preach with great power and effectiveness when we proclaim biblical truths to the world. Even today, the same power for witnessing and signs and wonders is available to us just as freely if we will only open ourselves up to Him.

The word baptism means to immerse, to completely soak (someone or something) from the outside (possibly also inwardly). St John the Baptist is recorded in St Johns gospel chapter 1

v 34 as having described Jesus as the one who will baptise you with the Holy Spirit. Once you have received this baptism and the power, you will have to learn to use it in the way God intended it to be used.

In Ephesians 5 v18 Paul urges us to be filled with the Spirit. I am reliably told that we can tell from the original translation that this instruction was written in what is known as the continuous sense. In other words, Paul was urging Christians to continually be filled with the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) day by day. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is the beginning, thereafter you should look to God day by day to continually be filled with the Spirit.

In many parts of the world God has brought the attention of many Christians back to his instruction to continually be filled with the Spirit by pouring the Holy Spirit upon and into people in such a way that what many would regard as "unusual" things happen during meetings. How then do we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit to begin with and thereafter be filled with the Spirit? In St Luke's Gospel chapter 11v11, Jesus says "How much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? That's how you receive it- you just ask father to do it and He will, through Jesus. Just be willing to let God have complete control as to how you respond when you receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit or are continually filled with the Holy Spirit thereafter. Many people ask "How do we know that these strange things are of God?" The answer is simple. In Luke 11 God promises that if you ask to be baptised with the Holy Spirit or again filled with the Holy Spirit then he will grant that request. We should have more faith in God's ability and willingness to answer than the devil's ability to deceive.