

The Holy Spirit

I grew up in the Lord's church and for more than twenty-five years I can honestly say I cannot remember ever hearing one meaningful, in-depth, scriptural sermon on the subject of the Holy Spirit. There were lessons on the promises of Christ to the disciples in [John 14-16](#); on the outpouring of the Spirit upon the apostles in [Acts 2](#); the Holy Spirit falling on the Gentiles in [Acts 10](#); and the limitations of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit in [1 Corinthians 13](#). But when it comes to the deeper, more "difficult," texts and issues I cannot remember a single discussion.

Before entering full-time ministry almost twenty years ago I started an in-depth examination of the Holy Spirit and the contended issues and passages. It seemed to me then, as it does now, that the debate centered on "the gift of the Holy Ghost" ([Acts 2:38](#)) and that I needed to come to some educated position on this passage in order to build a starting point in order to be able to sort out the Spirit's function in the Christian's life today. After much study I came to a conclusion but then in September 1995 I heard brother Robert R. Taylor, Jr. speak on the subject at a lectureship in Steubenville, Ohio and the scholarship, historicity, and clarity of the message had an indelible and decisive effect on me. From that initial period of study, brother Taylor's lecture, and ongoing extensive study, preaching, and teaching on the subject I have learned much.

While there are numerous views about the "gift" in [Acts 2:38](#) the two most prominent are that it either refers to either the "ordinary measure" of the Spirit (i.e., the literal personal indwelling of the spirit) or the "secondary measure" (i.e., the miraculous gifts that were given through the laying on of the hands of the apostles). It is this later view that I have come to hold and while I believe that the gift of the Spirit in [Acts 2:38](#) is the miraculous it is not the same as the baptism (or outpouring) of the Spirit upon the Apostles earlier in the chapter. I also do not believe that the outpouring of the Spirit in [Acts 10](#) was exactly like that upon the Apostles in [Acts 2](#) for the Gentiles in [Acts 10](#) did not have the ability to pass on gifts by the laying on of hands like did the Apostles.

In the past fifteen years I have preached and taught on [Acts 2](#) and the Holy Spirit on numerous occasions. In 2011 I preached a seven lesson series on the Holy Spirit of God. What I learned overall was that I did not know as much as I thought I had known and my previous study had left me wanting more as well as the need to formulate arguments

that would allow me to retain more of the information needed to make a coherent, biblical argument about the operation, personage, and historicity of the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the position that the “gift” is the Spirit Himself there were a number of objections that came forth from my study. For one the verb is transitive, and the direct object is gift, not the Holy Spirit (dorea). The phrase, “of the Holy Spirit” is in the possessive case (i.e. “...the book of Tim Dooley”...Tim Dooley’s book”). So “...the gift of the Holy Spirit” does not mean the Holy Spirit Himself, but the Holy Spirit’s gift. Compare this with the “gift of God” in [John 4:10](#) and “the gift of Christ” in [Ephesians 4:7](#).

Secondly, since the Word is said to do everything for the Christian that the Spirit does and if the Spirit literally dwells within the Christian, but does not operate separate and apart from the Word, then the natural question to me was, and is, “What is the Spirit doing in the Christian?” This leads to another of my objects to this position, that is, it can be a dangerous position to take for only one who takes a literally indwelling position ever crosses the line to a miraculous, supernatural, present-day operation of the Spirit on the heart of man.

The third reason I rejected the literal indwelling position was due to the argument that the promise was to everyone who is baptized into Christ. The argument based upon [Acts 2:39](#), I believe, is a fallacious argument. It just does not say that the promise is for everyone. However, the promise is limited to “you” (current generation), to “your children” (next generation), and “to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Gentiles). This is consistent with the teachings of Christ and the Apostles as to the universal nature of the calling ([Matt 11:28-30](#); [John 10:16](#); [Eph 2:17](#)).

The events of the Day of Pentecost were extraordinary! It made sense to me to ask how those who were there on that day would have understood the promised gift more so than how men today might see it. We have in Acts two the fulfillment of the promise of Christ “baptismal measure” of the Holy Spirit ([John 14:26](#); 15:26; 16:13; [Luke 24:49](#)). We have the results of this outpouring, that is, each one of the apostles speaking in a different language as the Spirit gave them utterance. The people are “astonished” (v 12). Peter and the others are speaking by way of inspiration. Would the audience have concluded that it was the “ordinary measure” of the Spirit in the midst of so many miraculous activities?

The facts became clear, the provision of miraculous endowments was the main operation of the Spirit in the early days of the church prior to the completion of the inspired Word. Since there was no written revelation the work of the apostles and the functioning of a congregation depended upon miraculous gifts. The gospel was not only revealed but it was also confirmed by miraculous operations. Since the miraculous operation of the Spirit was necessary for the revelation of the gospel and its confirmation, what would be the most likely meaning of the gift of the Spirit in [Acts 2:38](#)? Would it be possible for the gift of the Holy Spirit to refer to miraculous gifts? Would the idea that the gift of the Holy Spirit was miraculous contradict anything the Bible teaches?

We then turn our attention to two other passages that are of paramount importance in understanding the “gift.” In [Acts 8:14-20](#) the apostles heard that Samaria had received the word of God and sent Peter and John to them who, once arriving, prayed for them, “that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.” And when Simon the Sorcerer saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, “he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” They had been baptized but they had not yet received the Spirit (vv 15-16). So the apostles laid hands on them, “and they received the Holy Spirit” (v 17). What did they receive? Verses 18-20 make it clear that it was the miraculous that they received through the laying on of the apostle’s hands.

In [Acts 19:1-6](#) we a similar situation where Paul comes to Ephesus and finds disciples who had not yet received the Holy Ghost. Once baptized with a proper baptism Paul lays his hands upon them, “the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spoke with tongues, and prophesied.”

It seemed only logical and biblical then to conclude that the “gift of the Holy Spirit” in [Acts 2:38](#) refers to the miraculous manifestation of spiritual gifts bestowed upon baptized believers through the laying on of the apostle’s hands. And this was not (nor is it) a novel idea, but one that bible scholars have affirmed for years (David Lipscomb, T. W. Brents, Alexander Campbell, H. Leo Boles, Franklin Camp, Guy N. Woods) and many still do.

One other point I recently came to was, while teaching the book of Romans, I concluded that it is not the Holy Spirit Himself that makes intercession for us but the one who “who searches the hearts” ([Rom 8:26-27](#)). Namely, and biblically, Jesus the Son who “always lives to make intercession” for us ([Heb 7:23-25](#)). Obviously this essay is not exhaustive of what I have learned nor what I still may need to learn.

While over the years there has been much controversy in the church on the meaning of “the gift of the Holy Spirit” it should not be a matter of fellowship! So long as our view of the operation of the Spirit does not violate the Scriptures the manner of indwelling should not cause division. *“In essentials, unity; in opinions, liberty; in all things love.”*