

The Holy Spirit— Its Definition and Purpose

*“Behold, I send the
promise of my
Father upon you:
but tarry ye in the
city of Jerusalem,
until ye be endued
with power from
on high.”*

—*Luke 24:49*

FIFTY DAYS FOLLOWING

the resurrection of Jesus, an event of great importance to the Christian church took place. It was the Day of Pentecost, at which time the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples of the Master that were gathered together in Jerusalem, according to his instruction found in our opening text: “Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” According to Jewish calendar reckoning, the anniversary of this day falls each year sometime during the period from mid-May to mid-June—and this year it will be June 5. Nowhere in the New Testament are we asked to especially commemorate the Day of Pentecost as we are the “Memorial” supper which our Lord instituted the night before his crucifixion. However, it is appropriate, we believe, to consider

the events of that important day, especially as it has to do with the work and purpose of the Holy Spirit in the life of God's people.

A number of questions may come to the mind of those diligently inquiring concerning this subject. What is the Holy Spirit? Is it the third person of a trinity with God and Jesus? Is it some form of "ghost," as translated in numerous scriptures? What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian? What does it mean to be "born" of the Spirit, "baptized" of the Spirit, and "filled" with the Spirit? What is God's ultimate purpose with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit in his human creation? These are all valid questions, and ones which we believe are answered, not by the traditions and creeds of men, but by the Scriptures themselves. Let us examine this subject, then, in the light of the unerring and harmonious testimony of God's Word.

MISTRANSLATION

Through mistranslation and otherwise, many have been led erroneously to believe that the Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of a trinity. However, the Scriptures, when properly understood, do not warrant this thought. One of the mistranslations contributing to this misunderstanding is where the Greek word *pneuma* is rendered by the English word "ghost." This makes the Holy Spirit to be a Holy "Ghost."

This is a gross mistranslation, and is so recognized by nearly all Bible scholars. In nearly all translations of the Scriptures other than the *King James Version*, the word "Ghost" has been correctly changed to "Spirit." The *King James Version* was translated

at a time when superstition was rife, hence the word "Ghost" would command a great deal more respect and reverence than it does today. At that time, ghosts were very real in the minds of many people, yet very mysterious. They were always associated with the thought of personality, and the translators, believing in a "personal" Holy Spirit, conceived the idea of calling it a Holy "Ghost."

INVISIBLE POWER—NOT A PERSONALITY

In the Old Testament, the word "spirit" is a translation of the Hebrew word *ruach*. The primary significance of this word is wind. We do not mean to imply by this, however, that the Holy Spirit is a holy wind. This is merely the root meaning of the word. Wind is both invisible and powerful, hence the ancients applied this word to various invisible and powerful influences. Since divine power is exercised through channels and by agencies beyond human sight and understanding, this word *ruach* came to be applied more and more to all of God's dealings.

The word *ruach*, in addition to being translated "spirit," is also translated in the Old Testament by the English words "blast," "breath," "tempest," "mind," "smell," "wind," and "windy." It will be seen that in each of these translations the thought behind the word is that of invisible power, or influence. There is power in the mind, for example, but it is a power that is invisible to the eye.

As already noted, in the New Testament the Greek word translated "Spirit" or, incorrectly, "Ghost," in the expressions Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost, is *pneuma*. The primary meaning of this word is also wind, or air. It is the word from which our English

word “pneumatic” is derived. In addition to being translated Spirit and Ghost, it is also translated in the New Testament by the words “life,” “spiritual,” and “wind.”

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The likening of God’s Holy Spirit to the invisible power of the wind is appropriately brought to our attention as we note what occurred on the Day of Pentecost, the very day that God’s Spirit was given to the disciples gathered in Jerusalem. The account states: “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit].”—Acts 2:1,2,4

The “rushing mighty wind” which filled the house was powerful, yet invisible. The disciples could see its effects and hear the resulting sound as it roared through the trees and blew through the house. Its force perhaps was seen in curtains which were moved violently, or household items that were jostled and fell to the floor. It was in the midst of this literal demonstration of the power of the wind that the Holy Spirit—also a mighty, invisible power—came upon the Lord’s disciples.

In noting God’s use of the natural, invisible power of the wind on the Day of Pentecost to illustrate the similarly invisible power of the Holy Spirit, we see that there is nothing in the scriptural account which states that the disciples saw any form of apparition, or “ghost-like” being, in conjunction with the wind or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them.

Surely, on such a momentous occasion as this, when they were to receive “power from on high,” if the Holy Spirit was indeed a personal being—part of a trinity—or a mysterious “ghostly” personality, there would have been some visible indication given to the disciples of this fact. No such sign was given.

EVIDENCES OF GOD’S POWER AND INFLUENCE

While the account in Acts 2 of the Day of Pentecost gives no indication that the Holy Spirit was a personality or a ghost, there were clear evidences of its invisible power and influence upon the disciples—power which had not before been present with them. Verse 4 states that they “began to speak with other tongues [in other languages], as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The Holy Spirit, God’s power and influence, provided the disciples with the mental ability to speak in other languages. This was very important at the time, because there were in Jerusalem “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (vs. 5), gathered for the purpose of keeping one of the required feasts under the Mosaic Law arrangement. These multitudes spoke the various languages of the nations from which they had travelled. In order for them to understand the message which God intended to have given that day, there was a practical need for the disciples to speak in the languages which the people could understand. Thus we see the first manifestation of the invisible power of God—the Holy Spirit—as it worked in the minds of the disciples, giving them the ability to speak and be understood in the native languages of those gathered there.

The second demonstration of the invisible power of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was a direct outgrowth of the foregoing. Once those who were gathered heard the words being spoken in their own language, the Holy Spirit provided enlightenment to the minds of the disciples concerning the purpose of the events surrounding Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father—even the events of that very day. The disciples began to share this message of “the gospel” with all there. As the crowds listened, “they were all amazed, . . . saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.”—vss. 12,13

Peter, as the spokesman for the disciples, stood up and said boldly, “Hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, . . . But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass, . . . saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit: . . . and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” (vss. 14-17) The word “prophesy” as used here has the thought of teaching. Indeed, through the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, Peter began to teach in a way never seen before in any of the Lord's disciples. This was the same Peter who, just a few weeks earlier, confused and disappointed, denied the Master three times and, even after Jesus' resurrection, had seriously considered going back into the fishing business with others of the Lord's disciples. Now, as recorded in verses 22-36, Peter gave a discourse in which he outlined the entire plan of God and clearly explained the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection as the centerpiece of that plan. What a demonstration of the invisible power and influence of the God's Holy

Spirit we see as it opened up Peter's mind, and as it gave him the ability to teach the Gospel message to those gathered there.

The foregoing demonstrations of the power and influence of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost were provided in a miraculous fashion. Yet, we note again that in none of these is there any indication that the Holy Spirit was a personality, an apparition, or any sort of "ghost." It was simply the invisible power and influence of God, as manifested in various ways—such as the example of the invisible power of the wind. Later, after the work of the Apostles was finished, and the Early Church was well established in the Gospel, miraculous demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's operation such as occurred on the Day of Pentecost were no longer needed. However, the work of the Holy Spirit as an invisible power in the lives of the followers of the Master was only beginning. This work has continued to our very day. Those who have fully consecrated their lives to do the Lord's will rely daily on the promised assistance of God's Holy Spirit in their lives.

The Holy Spirit then is, simply stated, the invisible power of God, a power that is manifested in a variety of ways. Speaking of God's creative power, we read that his Spirit "moved upon the face of the waters." (Gen. 1:2) It was a mighty, invisible power, used in preparing the earth to be a life-sustaining home for plant and animal life, as well as for God's crowning creation—man. The influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives as Christians at the present time is primarily that which relates to God's mind and character attributes—the power associated with the development of these in us.

HOLY VS. UNHOLY POWER

It helps us in our understanding of the Holy Spirit to contrast what the Scriptures say about it with what they say about the unholy spirit of Satan. Various manifestations of the Holy Spirit are referred to as: “The Spirit of Christ,” the “Spirit of holiness,” the “Spirit of truth,” the “Holy Spirit of promise,” the “Spirit of meekness,” the “Spirit of grace,” the “Spirit of prophecy.” Here again, nothing in these various shades of meaning attached to the Holy Spirit gives any thought of personality. Rather, invisible power and influence are the focus in each case.

The various manifestations of the spirit of Satan are described as the “spirit of fear,” the “spirit of bondage,” the “spirit of the world,” the “spirit of error,” the “spirit of divination,” the “spirit of anti-christ,” and the “spirit of slumber.” Similarly, no one would conclude that because the word spirit is thus used to describe the various manifestations of Satan’s influence in the world, that there is a personal “unholy spirit” who is one in substance with the Devil.

BORN OF THE SPIRIT

There are a number of expressions used in the Scriptures to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and lives of Christians. One of these is “born of the Spirit.” This is a word which suggests the coming into existence of a new life, and this is one of the things accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. This new life, when it comes fully to birth, will be so different from the human life that, concerning it, Jesus said, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof,

but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”—John 3:8

The Greek word in the Bible translated “born” is also correctly translated “begotten,” and it is necessary to determine from the context which thought is intended by the writer. By observing this distinction, we learn that it is not proper to speak of conversion to Christ as being “born of the Spirit.” When one comes to God in repentance and, through faith in Christ as his Redeemer, surrenders himself in full consecration to do God’s will, what occurs is properly described as a “begetting” of the Spirit of God. In other words, a new life is then begun.

However, this new life, to continue the symbolism, is merely an embryo. It needs to be nourished by the Word of God, and thus to develop, growing strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. It is not until the resurrection that this new life comes to the birth. Not until then is one truly “born of the Spirit.” Only then are the words of Jesus true that one thus born is able to go and come invisibly as the wind. Thus we see that to note this difference in the use of the words “born” and “begotten” gives us a much more comprehensive understanding of what the power of God exercised through his Word accomplishes on behalf of the consecrated followers of the Master.

BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT

The Scriptures also speak of the “baptism” of the Spirit. The word baptize means to bury, and to be baptized by the Spirit of God simply means to be so fully surrendered to the doing of God’s will that

one comes completely under its control, having no will of his own. However, from God's prospective standpoint, the entire church of Christ was baptized by the Spirit at Pentecost. Hence, there is no necessity for a fresh outward demonstration of the Holy Spirit upon each individual who consecrates to do the Father's will.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "By one Spirit are we all baptized," and he explains that for the individual this baptism occurs when one comes into the "one body" of Christ. (I Cor. 12:13) It is a burial of our wills into the will of God as expressed through Christ, the Head of the "body." When we get this proper viewpoint of what is involved in the baptism of the Spirit, we will not be looking for repetitions of the spectacular manifestation of the power of God which occurred at Pentecost.

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

The Scriptures declare, "Be filled with the Spirit." (Eph. 5:18) How void of meaning would this expression be if the Holy Spirit were a person! However, when we recognize that it is simply the power, or influence, of God, exercised in the Christian life through his written Word and our experiences in the narrow way, then we can understand how it is possible to have either more or less of the Spirit influencing our lives. To be filled with the Spirit calls for an emptying of self and self-will, and a diligent application of ourselves to the study of God's Word and a putting into practice all of its righteous precepts.

Christians are also said to be "sealed" by the "holy Spirit of promise." (Eph. 1:13) God's Spirit—

his power and influence—directed the minds of the prophets in writing the Old Testament, in which are recorded many promises assuring God's blessing upon his faithful people. The New Testament was also written under the direct inspiration of the Spirit, or power of God, and it contains additional promises by which God guarantees victory through Christ for every faithful follower of the Master. Thus he "seals" us by his promises—that is, he assures us that if we are faithful to him he will give us grace to help in every time of need, and in the resurrection will give us a "crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

The word "witness" is likewise used in connection with the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. His Spirit bears witness with our spirit, the apostle tells us, "that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16) This too is a very understandable matter. Throughout the Spirit-inspired Scriptures are outlined the various steps and experiences of Christians who are faithful in doing God's will. Those who find that God is blessing them along the lines outlined by the Spirit through his Word, have thus the witness of the Spirit that they have been accepted into the family of God through the begetting of the Holy Spirit, and thus are "children of God."

ALL FLESH TO BE BLESSED

God's Spirit will be poured out in various ways for the blessing of mankind during the Millennial kingdom of Christ. He will cause the knowledge of his glory to fill the whole earth "as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. 11:9) His power will also operate to restore the dead to life, for the promise is that

there “shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—Acts 24:15

In the promise of a New Covenant which God will make, first with the house of Israel, and then encompassing the whole world, the statement is made that the Lord will write his law in the hearts of the people. (Jer. 31:31-34) This too will result from the operation of his Holy Spirit in the lives of those who obey the laws of the kingdom.

During the period of Christ's kingdom Satan will be bound, thus his spirit will not be influencing people to do wrong. Instead, every condition of the new social order will be favorable to the doing of God's righteous will. Love will take the place of selfishness as a motivating power in all human activity. Mankind will learn that the greatest and only enduring joy comes from doing good to others rather than from selfishly seeking always to take care of one's own interests first.

In that kingdom, the whole outlook of the human race gradually will be changed as a result of the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all flesh. How glad we should be that the power of God is thus to be manifested for solving the problems of a distressed and dying race. When the blessings accruing from this outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be recognized as coming from the great and true God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, the people will be glad to give glory to him, for they will then know that he is truly a God of love. Thus, at the end of the kingdom, all the obedient of mankind will have their thoughts, words, and actions fully directed by nothing other than the righteous power and influence of God—his Holy Spirit. ■