

New Spirit!

Sharing in the Divine Nature

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

—Ezekiel 36:26-27

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

—2 Corinthians 3:17-18

“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

—Galatians 4:6

The Spirit of God is given to every person who becomes a child of God! What an amazing promise! God not only forgives us, he empowers us to live as we were created to live, following the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

Most people know that the Holy Spirit of God is very real, the third person of the Trinity. But if you were to ask ten people who call themselves Christians to explain the role of the Spirit in the lives of Christians, you’d get many different answers. Ephesians 4:4 says, “There is one body and one Spirit.” And 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For we were all [immersed] by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” How then can there be different teachings by different religious groups? Is it because the Bible is subject to different interpretations? Is it too hard to understand? Or is it possible that the subject is confusing only because most people have never studied it for themselves, using logical and objective principles?

In the 40+ years since I became a Christian, I have studied the Bible with many women, most of whom grew up regularly attending worship services. Every person has been confused by the disagreement about the Holy Spirit within Christendom. The contrast of beliefs in different denominations is extreme, with some ignoring the Holy Spirit altogether and others focusing on what they believe are “gifts of the Spirit” to the point of neglecting other basic aspects of Christian life and practice. The question of how the Spirit works is one of the most divisive, emotion-laden issues that separate those claiming belief in Jesus. Does it matter? Can we “live and let live”? Should we just accept as a fact that different interpretations on this subject are valid?

It does matter that we understand what God reveals to us about himself, because everything God tells us is meant for our good. Any ignorance or misunderstanding or misinterpretation of God’s will hurts us and holds us back from becoming like Jesus and experiencing the “life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19) that God intends and longs for us to know. I’ve experienced and witnessed in others this very real and serious consequence of the confusion about this subject. When someone assumes there is no clear answer to a question, the path of least resistance is to avoid the subject. Whole congregations think they are avoiding the confusion by neglecting to teach or preach or study about God’s Spirit. But how can people expect to experience true spirituality when the Giver of godly qualities is a source of confusion or fear?

The differences of doctrine about the Holy Spirit are actually not difficult to resolve. Isn’t that a bold thing to say! While no one can claim to have God figured out thoroughly, he does tell us in clear enough language what he knows we do need to understand. If we start with a basic mindset of wanting to understand him and with humility to let God determine our doctrine rather than letting our human wisdom and desires shape how we interpret the Bible, it is possible.

In trying to understand the working of the Holy Spirit, it is very easy to misunderstand or misapply what the Bible says if we aren’t careful to discern the context. This subject isn’t one that can be settled based on only a few key passages or taught in one sermon or short class. So the goal of covering the subject

in this format is to enable individuals to study through this important subject at one's own pace.

We need to get the big picture first, in order to understand the context of specific Scriptures. Then we can carefully but confidently apply principles to our own walk with God. Galatians 5:25 says, "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Surely God must reveal to us in practical terms what he means—what mindset we need and what steps we can take to be keeping pace with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit being given is not meant to confuse, but to bring freedom from what has enslaved us—sin—and to transform our lives into the likeness of Jesus, our Lord, Savior, and model. We need to "know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

The Big Picture

The working of the Holy Spirit throughout history has changed according to the purposes of God at the time. One of the most common mistakes made in trying to understand and apply biblical principles is to lift a passage out of context. We all know the importance of context in theory, but sometimes it is hard to figure out what the context is!

A good starting point for discerning context is to remember what the New King James Version says in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The New International Version puts it, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." There is a correct way to approach the Bible and an incorrect way. We can so easily misinterpret or misapply what it says if we ignore context.

One of the most basic ways to figure out context is to discern who is being spoken to and what the original hearers or readers would have understood the meaning to be. To do that, we need to look at the overall context of what other revelation from God would have been known. At the most basic level, the Bible needs to be "rightly divided" into the different periods of history based on how God related to man. Everyone familiar with the Bible knows the Old Testament and New Testament divisions, but within each part are even more distinct divisions.

For instance, in the first part of the Bible, before the actual Old Testament (Old Covenant) was given through Moses, we call the Patriarchal Age the period where God related to man based on rewarding those who followed their innate need to worship and serve their Maker. Ecclesiastes 3:11 describes this: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Though revelation was infrequent, we see the example of patriarchs such as Noah, Job, and Abraham who are praised as models for all of us. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 is an excellent summary of how God worked in the Patriarchal Age from Abraham up until the change when the covenant of the law was given through Moses.

Genesis 15:6 says, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Abraham had faith and worshipped God before God ever spoke to him (and before his name was changed from Abram to Abraham). God chose him to be the father of the Israelites (later called Jews) and ultimately of the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior. The promise in Genesis 12:1-3 ends with the prophecy that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Abraham understood that to mean, as all of his descendants did, that the Messiah would eventually come from his family, the chosen people of God. Jesus reminded the Jews of this himself, where in John 8:56 he said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." As Hebrews 11:13 says, "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance." The whole chapter of Hebrews 11 reminds us that it was the faith of the Patriarchs that we are to admire and imitate.

Romans 4 is aimed at the Jewish Christians in Rome to help them understand the big picture that they seemed to have missed. It focuses on the fact that it was Abraham's example of faith that is the real heritage of being one of his descendants. The value of being a Jew ought to have been appreciated as being a privilege, to have ready access to God's will as Romans 3:1-2 points out: "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God." Jesus' many confrontations with Jewish leaders revealed the sad

fact that the majority of Jews did not appreciate their true heritage in being “Abraham’s children.”

God gave to the Israelites through Moses what we refer to as the Old Covenant, the Law (Exodus 19-24). This was several hundred years and many generations after Abraham received the promise that his descendants would become a great nation and God’s chosen people. The law given through Moses was God’s will revealed to man in detail. And from then on through the coming of Jesus, another phase of God’s dealings with man was in place. In giving the covenant of the law to his people, God’s purpose was to prove that man can never and will never measure up to the standard of perfection that the law describes. Romans 3:20 says it well: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” God proved to all that on our own, we will always fall short of perfection. God had to prove that to us by giving us his standard of perfection to compare ourselves against. The verdict is, as Romans 3:23 concludes, that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

By the time Jesus entered human history as God in the flesh, the point was well proven. Not only did the Jews fail over and over to live up to the law, they had gone so far as to miss the point of why God chose them as his people! They thought there was something inherently special and superior about themselves. The leaders especially exemplified this arrogant mindset in their interactions with Jesus. They took great pride in the degree to which they did observe the law and based their confidence on their own righteousness, ignoring the reality that James 2:10 makes clear: “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

One aspect of Jesus’ mission in his public ministry leading up to his sacrificial death was to correct this huge blunder and convict whoever was open to learning the truth about sin. Jesus’ first public sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, aimed at the heart of the matter. He exposed the way the Jews had tried to reduce God’s will down to a list of rules that they could check off as completed so they could therefore smugly claim righteousness and superiority. In contrast, he pointed out the way their hearts were still sinful even when they followed the rules that they had made or even when they externally obeyed God’s law. For over three years, he preached and practiced true internal righteousness—from the heart—but the vast majority of the Jews had so hardened their hearts that they not only missed the point, they killed the very messenger, the Messiah, the Christ that they had claimed to be waiting for! How much clearer could the proof be that on our own power and wisdom, we humans cannot even understand God’s ways, much less live up to them?

Jesus’ life on earth, his ministry, and ultimately his death were the closing chapter in the Old Covenant era. His resurrection, his victory over sin and therefore over death, made possible the next—and last—phase of God’s dealings with man on earth, the New Covenant age. Everything God did and said up to that point was in preparation for this amazing era of God relating to man in the way that he promised in Jeremiah 31:33-34: “‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”

After Jesus’ resurrection, life under the New Covenant arrived on the day of Pentecost. We need to notice and take into account that in the coming of the New Covenant age, there was a period of adjustment as people were taught and the newly revealed will of God was implemented. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, and Jesus prepared the way for the New Covenant for over three years before he gave his life in sacrifice to bring the promise to fulfillment. He chose and prepared his apostles, who were his special messengers and the executors of his will, so to speak, the ones who implemented his instructions for building his *ekklesia*—his “assembly” which is traditionally but erroneously translated “church” (for a more thorough treatment of this, see the booklet *New Family! Koinonia in the Ekklesia of Christ*). And now that the apostles have completed their mission and the foundations have been laid for all time, in every generation the *ekklesia* can be built with care upon them. We who are alive in this New Covenant era are meant to live out and experience God’s amazing promises coming true in our lives as we look forward to the final age, the eternal life in heaven with our Father that he has promised to all who receive his righteousness by faith in his Son.

With this overview, this big picture in mind, we naturally wonder in a booklet about the Holy Spirit

what his role has been and is in each phase of the history of God's dealings with man. Because God is One, it is actually a bit artificial to be overly concerned about the role of the Holy Spirit when he is not specifically mentioned. We can assume that God's Spirit is active whenever God is interacting with man. But when he is mentioned specifically, we can also assume that God intends for us to pay attention to his unique personhood and role in how God works. We can understand the will and wisdom of God more fully through what he reveals to us. We can learn much about how, when, and why God works through his Spirit in the affairs of man. But we must also be careful to discern the limits of what is possible to know so that we don't become guilty of making God in our own image or according to our own wisdom or desires.

The very fact that there is so much disparity in the teachings about the Holy Spirit in different denominations today ought to arouse alarm, because contradictory teachings can't all be right. We are warned by Jesus himself to be careful about judging the working of the Holy Spirit according to human wisdom. In Mark 3:28-30 he declared, “I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.’ He said this because they were saying, ‘He has an evil spirit.’” It is extremely dangerous ground to tread to believe anything other than what God reveals about himself to us. We cannot presume to use our own faulty human logic on this subject, because to err is serious! The nature of God can only be revealed by himself, not figured out by us. Fortunately for us, God does reveal everything we need to know!

Old Testament Workings

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in the Old Testament, but not frequently. (A search of “Spirit” in any online Bible website is a good way to get an overview of the specific references.) The first mention of him is at the very beginning, in the account of the creation of the world. Genesis 1:1-2 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

After creation was finished and God began his long history of gradually revealing himself and his will to man, we start to see that every time the Spirit is mentioned, it is in connection with the accomplishment of a specific purpose. We can infer that miraculous events were accomplished through the Spirit of God, the presence of God working within time and space to accomplish God's purposes in human history. And the people God used to accomplish his will were given a measure of the Spirit to empower them to say or do just what God planned.

The first time we read of this is about Joseph, when Pharaoh himself recognized the working of God and he said of Joseph to his officials, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?” and to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you” (Genesis 41:38-39). The Providential hand of God in placing Joseph in Egypt is one of the most well-known accounts in the Bible. Joseph himself amazed his brothers with his insight into this, in Genesis 45:5,8: “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you....So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.” God worked his purposes, and the Spirit of God was recognized as the source of Joseph's abilities that rescued not only Egypt, but also the people of God. And God received the credit and the glory, which is something to pay attention to as a principle throughout the Bible.

In Exodus the Spirit is mentioned twice, both times in connection with the purpose of building the tabernacle. In Exodus 31:3, God told Moses (and in Exodus 35:30-31 Moses relayed this to the people) that he had chosen a certain man to be the master craftsman, and he said, “I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.” This is the only time the Spirit of God is specifically mentioned in the book of Exodus, but of course we know God was working mightily in the events the book describes. This is a good example of how the Spirit is the agent through which God works his specific purposes involving man.

The next example of the Spirit working for a specific purpose is in Numbers 11. After the exodus from Egypt, the people started complaining after eating manna day after day, longing for meat. Moses begged for help from God, and he responded with a plan. Moses was to gather seventy of the elders at the “Tent of Meeting,” where, as God explains in 11:17: “I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of

the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.” From this we can infer that the Spirit of God was already on Moses, and God planned to spread his Spirit to more people for the specific purpose of giving them what they would need to do this job. What did they need? Certainly the wisdom, physical endurance, and authority to speak for God—to prophesy as mentioned in 11:25-26—that we can see had been given to Moses before this, even though before this passage those gifts had not specifically been articulated as being given to him by the Spirit of God.

An interesting incident is noteworthy in this passage. Numbers 11:26 describes that two of the elders did not go out to the tent, “Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp.” Joshua, Moses’ aide, told of this with some alarm, to which Moses replied in 11:29, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” He did not realize he was expressing God’s wish and plan as would be prophesied by the prophet Joel, which we’ll look at later.

The most common mention of the Spirit’s work in the Old Testament describes that he “came upon him,” “rested on them,” “came upon him in power,” or “was among them.” Throughout the book of Judges we see God raise up leaders, the first being Othniel. Judges 3:10 says, “The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, so that he became Israel’s judge [leader] and went to war.” Later we learn of Gideon (Judges 6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:25, 14:6,19, 15:14), on whom the Spirit also came to empower them to lead. Though the Spirit is not always mentioned, “Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived” (Judges 2:18), and we know that his pattern is to work through his Spirit here on earth.

When God granted to the Israelites their wish for kings, we see that the Spirit came upon them. Saul was the first king, and the Spirit came upon him (1 Samuel 10:6,10), but later was removed when Saul disobeyed God and was rejected as king (1 Samuel 16:14). David was chosen by God to be the next king, and when that choice was revealed to the prophet Samuel and he anointed David, “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power” (1 Samuel 16:13). Jesus affirmed this once when the Pharisees were trying to trap him. He said in Matthew 22:43-44, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, called him ‘Lord’? For he says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’”

God spoke through the prophets by his Spirit, such as Samuel described in 2 Samuel 23:2: “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.” Nehemiah said, reciting the history of God’s people that had led to the sad state of Jerusalem in his time, “By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you handed them over to the neighboring peoples” (Nehemiah 9:30). The prophet Ezekiel experienced very direct effects, where the Spirit, as he describes, “came into me and raised me to my feet, and I heard him speaking to me” (2:2), “lifted me up” (3:12), “lifted me up and took me away” (3:14), “came into me and raised me to my feet” (3:24), “lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem” (8:3), “came upon me, and he told me to say...” (11:5), etc.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God was with some, but in none, except for when he was accomplishing some specific temporary purpose as with Ezekiel. The idea of God’s Spirit living and working within ordinary human beings was introduced as a new, future promise when the history of the Jews had proved without a doubt that man was too weak in his own strength to live as God intended.

The purpose of God in patiently working with man in those times was to humble us, to help us to see our need for his help. Then we would be able to appreciate the good news that he communicated through the prophets, such as Ezekiel 36:26-27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” Joel 2:28-29 says, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

This prophecy was at last proclaimed by Peter to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost as described in

Acts 2, as the New Covenant was ushered in by the unmistakable outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But before that could happen, God the Son, Jesus, had to enter human history to reveal God's nature and wisdom. And he had to submit to and ultimately conquer death for our sins to bring in this new age.

Almost New Testament—Jesus' Life and Ministry

Before we look at the fulfillment of God's promise to put his Spirit in us and see what we can learn from how he worked in the early days of the New Covenant, we need to understand the uniqueness of the years of Jesus' life and ministry. Though the books of the Bible that describe them are included in what we call the "New Testament," Jesus lived and died under the Old Testament (Old Covenant). His resurrection—his victory over death—was the turning point in the history of God's relationship with the humans he created. It was Jesus' sacrifice—his willing substitution of his death for the death we each deserve for our sins—and the gift of forgiveness it offers that made it possible for anyone who receives it to become the clean and pure vessels for his Spirit to inhabit. But before his death and resurrection, Jesus spent his life, and particularly his last three years, preparing the way for the coming of the New Covenant. It's easy to forget that those years were still under the Old Covenant. And it's therefore easy to take his words out of context and apply them in ways he didn't intend.

The Holy Spirit was integrally involved in Jesus' life from conception on. Matthew 1:18 (cf. Luke 1:35) tells us that his mother, Mary, "was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit." Joseph was reassured directly by an angel in Matthew 1:20 that, "what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." So Joseph went ahead and took Mary as his wife, became Jesus' earthly father, and raised him up in the ways of the Jews, perfectly obedient to the Law of Moses.

The Holy Spirit also worked in Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, who was chosen by God to bear the prophet John the Baptist. Luke 1:5ff describes the angel Gabriel's announcement to Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, that though they both were "well along in years" and had no children, they would bear a son to be named John who would be "filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth" (1:15) and would be a great prophet to prepare the people of Israel for the coming of the Lord—the Messiah they had been waiting for. Elizabeth was about six months along in her pregnancy when Mary, newly pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, came to see her, with interesting effects. Luke 1:41 says, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit." She exclaimed to Mary, "Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Clearly, the Holy Spirit was inspiring this knowledge and response in Elizabeth!

Another incident reveals the involvement of the Holy Spirit in Jesus' birth, which was the culmination of God's plan of salvation for mankind. A man named Simeon "was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts" (Luke 2:25-27). He recognized that the baby Jesus was who he had been waiting for and he praised God and prophesied about the impact Jesus would someday have on the world.

Joseph and Mary had difficulty wrapping their minds around raising the Son of Man who was also the Son of God! Upon hearing Simeon, they "marveled at what was said about him" (Luke 2:33). Later, when they took Jesus to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover when he was twelve years old, Luke 2:41-51 recounts Jesus' surprise that they didn't know where to find him, in the temple learning more about his Father in heaven. "But they did not understand what he was saying to them...But his mother treasured all these things in her heart." There was much to ponder with a child like Jesus!

Years later, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he was revealed publicly to be the long-awaited Messiah, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29ff) by John the Baptist. When Jesus came to be baptized (immersed) by John, God gave the sign he had been told to watch for (John 1:33-34): "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Jesus became fully-empowered by the Spirit when the right time came for him to begin his public ministry. Luke 4:1 says he was "full of the Holy Spirit" after his baptism, ready to endure all the same

temptation to sin or compromise as we do—and more than we'll ever face—without giving in, preparing to be the perfect sacrifice and substitution we needed (cf. Hebrews 2:14-18). John 3:34 describes him as having the Spirit “without measure” (NASV)—“without limit” (NIV). (We'll look more closely at the concept of “measures” of the Spirit later.)

Immediately after his baptism, he was led by the Spirit into the desert, where he endured forty days of temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-13). He submitted to the test and passed it before beginning his public ministry. Though he faced temptation regularly in the course of everyday life, as we do (Hebrews 2:17-18), I suspect that God knew that Jesus would need to prove his willingness and determination to lead for all time in the way of righteousness. He faced temptations way beyond what we will ever face, and he never gave in. His reliance on the power of the Spirit of God and not his human nature is a tremendous example and lesson for us.

As Jesus began to teach and preach and prove himself to be truly the Son of God, we see that there was still a future tense prophecy that he “will baptize with the Holy Spirit.” The time for that promise to become reality was still a ways off. It didn't, and couldn't, happen during his lifetime. As John 7:39 says, “Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven are what he himself must have had in mind when he prayed in John 17:1-5 that God would “glorify me in your presence.” As he faced crucifixion, he knew that he had “completed the work you gave me to do,” which was to make God known. He had lived the perfect, sinless life of obedience to God, in word and deed revealing truth to those who would receive it. He was proven to be the perfect sacrifice, and he knew the hour of suffering death for the sins of the world was near.

Between Jesus' baptism, when he received the Spirit without measure, and his death and resurrection, we learn some about the Spirit from what Jesus taught. His public ministry was a time of transition and preparation for the coming of the Kingdom, which was always referred to as “near.” In fact, he gave a big hint in Mark 9:1 when he said, “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.” The time was truly “near”—in the lifetime of some who heard him say those words!

Jesus began his public ministry right after being tempted by returning to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14). He announced his ministry by reading a prophecy from Isaiah in his hometown synagogue which began, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18), and concluding the reading with the announcement, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). Needless to say, this news was not received well by those who had known him and watched him grow up. They turned against him just as he predicted they would.

Later, another prophecy from Isaiah is referred to. In Matthew 12:15-21, Jesus fulfills Isaiah's words which begin with, “Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations.” But shortly after that, he is again accused wrongly. After refuting the charge of casting out demons by the power of Satan (also called Beelzebub), he makes this convicting and challenging statement in Matthew 12:28: “But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” Furthermore, he warns them in verses 31-32, “And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

What might it mean to commit “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”? In the context of what Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees for, it seems likely that to ascribe to Satan what is really of God is the sin that he was referring to. It makes sense that one couldn't be forgiven for not crediting the Holy Spirit of God for his work. One couldn't have faith in God and submission to his will while denying his power and work in accomplishing that very will. As Jesus reasoned, it is ludicrous to see evidence of God's good purposes being accomplished and not credit his Spirit for being the power accomplishing it.

In Matthew 10 (with parallel passages in Mark and Luke), Jesus began to prepare his apostles for the work they would do as his messengers in the future. He was honest with them about the persecution they would have to endure but encouraged them with the promise that when they are arrested, “At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through

you" (Matthew 10:19-20). It seems doubtful that they grasped what he was really saying at this point, since they didn't understand the big picture until after Jesus' resurrection when he explained it all to them. Then they remembered and understood Jesus' words in hindsight and especially in light of the power of the Spirit they began to experience at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2.

Luke 10 records a training mission in which Jesus sent 72 of his disciples out in pairs as advance messengers to the places he intended to go. When they returned with good news about their success, Jesus was "full of joy through the Holy Spirit" (10:21) and praised God for the spiritual insight granted to them by his Father. Jesus lived life on a higher spiritual plane than any of us do, and he rejoiced when anyone was receptive to seeing and experiencing that spiritual reality.

Another example of this is in John 4, when Jesus was oblivious to physical hunger and thirst as he focused on the spiritual "spring of water" (4:14, cf. 7:38-39, "streams of living water"...by this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive") and spiritual "food...to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (4:32,34). Jesus truly enjoyed watching people "get it." He showed his disciples a dimension that they couldn't understand, revealed by their clueless response to his disinterest in eating when he told them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about," and they replied, "Could someone have brought him food (John 4:32-33)?" Jesus was patient with them and had confidence that someday they would understand what he had been trying to reveal to them.

In this passage in John 4, another important point Jesus made was when he told the woman he had been talking to at the well (4:23-24), "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." She had asked him where the right place to worship God was, referring to the conflict between the Jews and Samaritans over the subject. What Jesus said was profound then and is still so important to remember. It's easy to slip into the mindset that worship is what is done when one goes to a "church building." But, as is seen clearly over and over in the letters to Christians written later, worship is no longer tied to buildings or any physical location. People make up the true "household of God" (Ephesians 2:19-22) and are the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). Jesus' "church" is actually an assembly of believers, not a building.

Jesus didn't teach about or mention the Holy Spirit very much, actually. He dropped hints, such as in this passage in John 4, and previously in John 3:5-6 he taught Nicodemus that, "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." Even before that, John 1:12-13 introduces the idea of those who believe in Jesus being given the right to be "born of God."

In this and other statements he made in the three years of his public ministry, Jesus was looking ahead, preparing for the future coming of the kingdom when the news would be preached not that it was "near" but that it was open to all. Jesus revealed his plan to build his "assembly of the called out" ("church") to his apostles in Matthew 16:13-20, on the bedrock truth that Peter stated, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus, using an interesting and even humorous play on words ("You are *Petros* [a stone], and on this *petra* [large rock] I will build my church [*ekklesia* (assembly)]"), commissioned Peter to be the one who would use the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" Jesus promised to give him, to "bind" and "loose" according to God's will when the gates of the kingdom would be unlocked and thrown open. Remembering that Jesus promised that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of hearers (Mark 9:1), we now know that Peter was appointed to be the one to unlock the gates. So we can watch for the fulfillment of this to come!

In John 6:25-63, Jesus taught "a hard teaching" (v. 60) that wouldn't be truly understandable until after his death and resurrection, with further illumination given to his apostles at the Last Supper when he instituted the Lord's Supper or what we commonly refer to as "communion." Elaborating on his claim to be the "bread of life," he said in 6:53-58, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." He

said this to a crowd of people who appeared to believe in him. When they grumbled about how hard it was to accept this teaching, he explained that he was speaking spiritually, not physically. “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (6:63). Here again he tries to enlighten them about the role of the Holy Spirit, but they aren’t open to even trying to understand, and (6:66), “many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”

Jesus constantly and deliberately sought to expose the true state of the hearts of his hearers. As is true of the big picture of how God worked throughout the history recorded in the Old Testament, exposing and convicting humankind of our sinfulness and our need for his love and mercy, Jesus continued that task. His purpose is for our good, as we see in John 6:67-70. After many left, Jesus asked his twelve apostles, “You do not want to leave, too, do you?” Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” Only when we conclude, as his apostles did, that he is God and we are not, that there really is nowhere else to turn for “words of eternal life,” will we have the humility to gratefully receive and obey the truth God knows we need—truth that will then set us free (John 8:32).

In his last hours with his apostles, Jesus explained things as clearly as he knew they could try to fathom, preparing them more for what was to come as he faced crucifixion. He hadn’t put much focus on or taught much about the Holy Spirit up to that point, as we’ve seen; Jesus mentioned him but must have known that because they had no frame of reference yet, there was a limit to what they could understand. But in John 13-17, the account of Jesus’ “last supper” with his apostles, he finally gets more specific about the role the Holy Spirit would play in their lives after he had left them to go back to his Father in heaven. Of course, even that fact was beyond their grasp at that point. Though he had told them plainly that he would be put to death and that he would be raised to life on the third day (Matthew 16:21-23, right after Peter’s great confession, when he received a great rebuke from Jesus for his objection to Jesus’ prediction), we know from their despair and cowardice during Jesus’ trial and crucifixion that it didn’t sink in.

In John 14:15-18, Jesus broached the subject of the Holy Spirit with them in the context of reassuring them that though he was soon to leave them, they would not be alone. He said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command, And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Hmm...what does he mean by saying he is leaving, the Spirit is coming, and at the same time saying, “I will come to you”?

In the next few verses, he seems to blur the lines between himself and the Spirit and the Father, which is a good example of the oneness of the Trinity—one God of three personalities. In John 14:19-26 he said, “...you will see me...I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you...the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him...My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him...But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.” The point is that God—Father, Son, and Spirit—will have an intimate relationship with these men, and with all who love him.

Then in chapter 15 he talked to them about the need to “remain in me.” Over and over he repeated that phrase. Other translations say “abide in me.” He didn’t explain to them what he meant, possibly because they had no way to understand it until they would experience it later. Once they experienced the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, the idea of dwelling in—abiding in—remaining in him would be more understandable. When Jesus was with them, they couldn’t imagine life without him, and they were devastated when he was arrested and killed. But though he surely knew that would happen, he continued to try to give them truths they could remember and be encouraged by in hindsight.

In this vein, he picked up more specifically about the Holy Spirit in John 16:7-15. He said, “It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you....But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That

is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." Remember that Jesus told the twelve in Matthew 10:19-20, "But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." That must have gone right over their heads at the time, but as Jesus repeated here the role of the Spirit in guiding and enlightening them, perhaps they remembered what he had said and it wasn't a completely new concept. They seemed to stay confused until Jesus spelled out that he had left the Father, come to the world, was leaving the world and going back to the Father (John 16:27-28). At least they understood it as a concept, though obviously what that meant in practical terms as Jesus was arrested, crucified, and buried was still a mystery to them.

Then events escalated quickly. Jesus was arrested, crucified, and the apostles were left to experience exactly as Jesus predicted in John 16:20-22—grief and anguish analogous to a woman giving birth. Though he urged them to look ahead to the joy that would soon come, the pain and confusion of helplessly watching him suffer such abuse and torture, and then death and burial, was very real, especially with the added element of fear for their own safety as all they hoped for seemed to fall apart.

At the news of Jesus' resurrection, the disciples (apostles) of course were overjoyed. John 20:21-23 describes Jesus appearing in their locked room, and he commissioned them anew, telling them, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And then he did something that never seems to be mentioned in churches, but it is very significant: 20:22 says, "And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" And then he imparted to them the authority to forgive sins.

How could Jesus have inspired (in the truest sense of the word) these apostles with the Holy Spirit at this point in time? Weren't they just like anyone else, needing to become Christians now that Jesus, in the resurrection, had conquered sin and death? Jesus had told them in his last hours with them, in John 15:3, "You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you." So these men were already "clean," forgiven and ready for the Spirit to inhabit them. As long as Jesus—the Son of God—was with them, the Spirit was not needed. But as Jesus prepared to return to the Father in heaven, just as he promised, they were given his Spirit.

The uniqueness of the apostles in God's scheme of things needs to be appreciated. These truly were hand-picked men who were exceptions to the norm that would be ushered in—by them as special messengers—in just a short time on the day of Pentecost. How little they grasped as they were going through these events didn't matter, because Jesus knew that these men would eventually understand fully all the spiritual truths that they had been exposed to in his time with them. He knew that at the right time, by the power of the Holy Spirit, they would live up to their commission and responsibilities for all time for "God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19b-22).

Between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension back to heaven, he further prepared his apostles for the coming of the New Covenant, which was synonymous with the beginning of Jesus building his "church" and the coming of the kingdom of God. Jesus had tied these concepts together. In Matthew 16:18-19, in the same breath as he said he would build his church, he also said that Peter would have the keys to the kingdom of heaven; as Peter opened the gates to the kingdom, he would be opening the way for people to come into the church and to experience life under the New Covenant that the pouring out of Jesus' blood made possible (Luke 22:20). (For more about this, see the booklet *New Life! The New Covenant Paradigm*.)

Luke 24 describes two times when Jesus enlightened his disciples after his resurrection and helped them to finally grasp the big picture of what he had been working to accomplish. First, on the road to Emmaus he walked with two disciples (apparently not apostles) who did not recognize him. He gently rebuked their denseness when he said in 24:25-26, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Then he went on to explain the (Old Testament) Scriptures that spoke of him. Eventually they realized it was the risen Jesus who was with them and then they understood why their hearts had been "burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us" (24:32).

Later, as the apostles and other disciples were together, Jesus appeared to them and in Luke 24:44-49, he spoke his last words to them before ascending into heaven, explaining the spiritual sense of all they had witnessed and experienced and leaving them ready for the next big event in God's plan, soon to happen after that. He reminded them, “‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”

Wow! The apostles were finally beginning to grasp the point of all they had seen Jesus do and all they heard him say. And they were soon to experience a transformation into bold and courageous spokesmen for the risen Lord! All they had to do was wait for the “power from on high.”

The New Testament Age Arrives

In Acts 1, Luke picks up where he left off in Luke 24. Acts 1:3-5 tells more of Jesus' instructions to his apostles: “After his suffering, he showed himself to these men [the apostles] and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

In Acts 1:6-9, their curiosity revealed that they still had the wrong assumption about Jesus' true goal when they asked him, “Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus' patience with and confidence in them must have been sorely tested! He didn't even answer that, perhaps because he knew they would figure out soon enough how mistaken their assumptions were. He simply responded by shifting their focus away from the desire to know exact times and dates, and once again reminded them, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Then he went up to heaven before their very eyes.

The apostles did as Jesus instructed, praying and waiting for the baptism of the Holy Spirit which Jesus had promised. As they waited, they took care of a need that gives us insight into the definition of the role of apostle. They selected someone to replace Judas Iscariot who had betrayed Jesus and had then died. Jesus had selected what was often referred to as “the Twelve” (e.g., Mark 4:10, Matthew 26:20,47) from among his early disciples (Luke 6:13) to be his messengers and special witnesses. As the remaining eleven prepared to fill the place left by Judas, Peter said in Acts 1:21-22 that one qualification was that the man was to have “been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” The apostles were, and had to be, eye-witnesses to all that they would be testifying to, about Jesus' life, teachings, and ultimately his death and resurrection.

In the events of Acts 1-2, it's very, very important to correctly deduce context. There is a whole division of Christendom that has failed to do that and has wrongly believed that some things that Jesus said apply to everyone, but in fact they were said to—and only apply to—the apostles. The reason for this will become clear and the wisdom of God is wonderful to behold in how the events of the beginning of the New Covenant age unfold. Understanding these events correctly plays a crucial role in understanding the promises of God about his Holy Spirit for all time. Misunderstanding them results in false teaching that ultimately hurts and sidetracks many people.

About a week after Jesus went back to heaven, the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which is 50 days after Passover when Jesus was crucified, brought Jews from all over the then-known world to Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). The wisdom of God in using the circumstances of that time and place is seen in the amazing opportunity it opened for the apostles to jump in to their work as messengers of the good news of what Jesus had accomplished. Acts 2 recounts the events of that important turning point in the history of God's dealings with man, and it would be hard to imagine a more dramatic scene!

“When the day of Pentecost came, they [the apostles, cf. Acts 1:26] were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [languages] as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:1-4). The apostles had no idea when to expect the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They were still gathered together waiting, as Jesus had told them to do. Then it suddenly happened!

Though they were in a house, the sound of the Holy Spirit rushing in on them was heard by a large crowd of people who gathered to find out what was going on. Jesus had alluded to this way back in the early days of his ministry, in John 3:8: “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” This was said in the context of telling Nicodemus about the need to be born again—born of water and the Spirit—which of course was a lesson that could not come true until the Spirit would come and be given to live in those who become children of God. Here in Acts 2, Jesus’ description about the Spirit moving like the wind is literally true.

The Bible is clear about who received this outpouring of the Holy Spirit: the apostles. The obvious and necessary inference is that this miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit in “tongues of fire that came to rest on each of them” (2:3) and the ability “to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (2:4) was the very “baptism of the Holy Spirit” that Jesus had told them to expect in Acts 1:1-5.

Those who gathered were “utterly amazed” (2:7) by the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit in their ability to hear the apostles “declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues” (2:11). The apostles were speaking in the many different languages of those in the crowd who had come from all over the then-known world for the feast of Pentecost—languages the apostles did not know! The people asked the logical question, “What does this mean (2:12)?” Of course there always are some negative people, and here some tried to pass off what was happening by accusing the apostles of being drunk. God had certainly gotten the attention not only of the apostles, but also of the crowd, which must have grown very large based on the response we’ll see later.

Then the real excitement began! God never uses miracles as ends in themselves, but always for the purpose of building faith, proving that a messenger is sent by him and that the message is from him and ought to be taken seriously. We’ll look at that idea more later, but here it is obvious that God intended that it would be unmistakable to all that the good news about Jesus being Lord and Christ was true.

And who is the preacher? Why, it’s Peter who “stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say... (2:14)’” And with that, he launched into the first gospel sermon of all time, telling the good news of the fulfillment of the prophecy by Joel of God’s promise to pour out his Spirit on all people, the good news of Jesus being raised from the dead, the fulfillment of God’s promise to David that one of his descendants would reign forever, and that Jesus is that descendant and has been “exalted to the right hand of God” and has “received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear” (2:33). Then Peter drove home the convicting truth in 2:36, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

So Peter, who in Matthew 16:18 was given the keys to the kingdom by Jesus, is the one to bring this message to the crowd. He has preached to them the bad news that they blew it by missing the point while Jesus was among them so completely that they, “with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross” (2:23). They had no excuse, because Jesus was “accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know” (2:22).

Then something else happened that is also quite amazing. The people actually responded to this bad news with humility and alarm at what they had done! Acts 2:37 says, “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”

How important that question is! “What shall we do?” What shall we do with Jesus? What shall we do about our state of sinfulness and spiritual death? Just as is true of those to whom Peter made the accusation that they nailed Jesus to the cross “with the help of wicked men” even though they probably were not directly involved and some were not even in Jerusalem at the time, each of us is also guilty of causing Jesus’

death. The sins of each of us required that he go to the cross to suffer the death and separation from God that we deserve. Many who heard Peter responded with readiness to repent and to obey whatever the answer would be—hoping there was an answer! They were great examples to us.

What is the answer to their question? Before we look at that, it's important to realize that Peter was about to use the keys of the kingdom and open the gate for these hearers to come into a relationship with God through the way opened by Jesus. Whatever he says is extremely significant, for them and for all people for the rest of time. All that God had been working toward in the history of mankind was about to come to fruition. He was about to provide the answer to our sin and separation from him, to open the way to be born again and to receive the forgiveness that Jesus' death and ultimately his resurrection made possible. No one had been told this answer yet, even though it had been about seven weeks since Jesus' resurrection.

Hebrews 9:15-17 teaches us something significant about this turning point: "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living." This new covenant could not come into effect until Jesus had died. So this message by Peter is analogous to the reading of Jesus' last will and testament. Though that new testament (covenant) was then possible and ready to be revealed, it had not as of yet been offered to anyone (the apostles being the exception, having been declared clean and inspired with the Holy Spirit directly by the risen Christ, as we've already seen).

As Peter's audience held their breath for the answer, it's helpful to try to put ourselves in their place. Sometimes nowadays it's hard to have the same sense of urgency and the same response of alarm at our dire condition before God as they did. We've heard the story of Jesus so often—whether accurately or not or in part or in full—that it is difficult to imagine hearing it for the first time as these people did. As they asked the question, they would not have even known whether there was an answer—whether there was anything they could actually do to overcome their guilt. They were "cut to the heart." We each need to ask ourselves whether we are deeply convicted in the same way. It takes understanding the seriousness of the bad news that Peter preached in order to receive the good news with the gratitude and readiness to respond that those people demonstrated.

Peter's answer, the good news of what Jesus offers, is concise but profound. In Acts 2:38-39, he replied, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." Their response was astounding! "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41).

What a beginning! The kingdom opened, Jesus began building his church, and the New Covenant age began in a big way and continued to grow in huge numbers. Now we can see what God reveals about the working of his Spirit until Christ returns.

The Goal of the Spirit

Peter's instructions to the crowd in Acts 2:38 was good news! It wasn't too late to repent and accept the fact that Jesus really was the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior that they had been looking for but about whom they had missed God's point completely! It's significant that in Peter's message to the Jews about Jesus, his opening focus was on the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit as foretold in Old Testament prophecies. That makes sense when we grasp that God's desire and plan was to make it possible for us to have a relationship with him that sin had destroyed. The arrival of the Spirit of God to dwell in God's children was the culmination of that plan.

It's understandable that we human beings would struggle with the concept of God's Spirit living in and among us. But putting it in the context of God's desire to have a close relationship with us as his children makes some of its mysteriousness evaporate. The big picture, the real reality—which Jesus worked very hard to help us see—is that we were designed to live as spiritual beings.

The close fellowship God had with Adam and Eve, which was broken by their sin and by the sin of

each person since, is what God desired in creating us. Even though he knew that sin would become a barrier to that fellowship, he planned from the beginning to provide the way for that barrier to be overcome. Sin's condemning and separating effect (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2) is not some arbitrary punishment on his part. Because of his perfection and holiness, he cannot co-exist with sin. After all, sin is rebellion against God's truth and perfection, so it's impossible for someone to enjoy loving and pure and good interaction with God at the same time that he is disobeying him, proving by attitudes and actions that God's ways are not truly believed and valued.

Adam's and Eve's response to God's presence after they disobeyed him (Genesis 3), hiding from him and trying to cover their nakedness and shame, is a straightforward example for us of the same effect our sin has on destroying any potential for intimacy with God. They started out pure and innocent and the contrast of before-sin and after-sin is stark. For us, who grow up in a world already full of sin before we arrived on the scene, we become so entangled in the demands and temptations of life in this world that it's hard to even realize that this is not all there is to life. But God's plan has always been that we would seek to understand life from his perspective so we could experience life as he meant for us to live it.

God has created us with an innate spiritual yearning. Looking again at Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." This "eternity" that God has set in our hearts is intended to prompt us to seek him and to want to understand his ways. Jeremiah 29:13 says, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." God's ways are really the most precious treasures we can seek in this life (see the booklet *New Treasure! Precious Promises* for more on this).

Proverbs 2:1-6 promises, "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." The theme of the whole Bible is that God wants us to seek him and to learn the truth he has revealed to us so that we can experience life as he created us to live it.

But we humans are naturally ignorant and stubborn, aren't we! We usually try to figure life out on our own, but that doesn't work. As Proverbs 16:25 predicts, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." We simply can't figure out how to get it right. With so many object lessons in the news and in movies and on television of how our own wisdom results in unhappiness and dashed hopes and dreams, we still so often resist turning to God for his answers about how life is supposed to work.

All this is to say that we desperately need God to rescue us from ourselves! We need his forgiveness for our past sins, and we need his wisdom to understand both what his will is and why his will is truly best and good for us. One more thing we need from God is his help to follow his wise ways once we have realized that we need to and have decided that we want to obey him—and that's what the Spirit offers. God knows exactly what we need, and he planned all along, before Adam and Eve were even created, to provide for those needs.

How does God offer to meet our needs? If we understand the big picture of how God has worked throughout history, we can see that he has been meeting our need for humbling, for conviction of our need for him, for utter brokenness that will result in us turning to him for the answers to life that only he can provide. His aim through it all was to culminate in God himself—the Son—coming to earth to provide exactly what we need: knowledge of his ways as he lived among us and taught us truth, forgiveness of sins as he paid the penalty we deserve, and then the ultimate gift of God himself—his Spirit to dwell in, enlighten, empower, and transform all those who seek, find, and believe the truth revealed by Jesus.

Hebrews 1:1-3 summarizes: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." Then after Jesus had completed his work of providing for our forgiveness through his death and resurrection and after he returned to heaven, the fulfillment of God's plan for our salvation came to the world in the unmistakable events of Pentecost.

That day when the apostles were “baptized with the Holy Spirit,” as Jesus had described it, was the beginning of the New Covenant age that will last until the end of time. Hebrews 2:3b-4 describes the period of the establishment of God’s good news: “This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him [the apostles]. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” After Jesus returned to heaven, the Spirit of God became very active on earth in ways and means God had not used before then. God’s Spirit working in and among men and women who have been born again “of water and the Spirit,” as Jesus foretold in John 3:5, became the new spiritual norm.

A period of transition and foundation-building required that the Spirit work in powerful ways that were intentionally temporary, to fill a need that was eventually met permanently by the writing of our New Testament Scriptures. We can and must see what is revealed about the difference between how the Holy Spirit worked then and how God has promised he will work for all time.

As we just learned from Hebrews 2:3b-4 above, there was a discernable period as the New Covenant was being instituted. The Old Covenant was becoming recognized as obsolete, as Hebrews 8:13 says: “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” During that period, the Holy Spirit worked through “signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” The purpose of those ways he worked is described to be that “God testified to” the salvation announced by Jesus and confirmed by the apostles.

In Ephesians we see the unique role that the apostles played in this period of establishment of the way of salvation through Jesus. They provided the foundation that “God’s household” is built upon (2:20) by being the conduit through whom God’s Spirit revealed the “mystery of Christ” (3:5) that all people are welcome to receive salvation and be members of the body of Christ, the “church.”

Jesus promised his apostles at his last supper with them that the Holy Spirit would “guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). They were empowered in a miraculous and unique way by the Spirit, with a different measure of power than was promised to any other disciples. This point needs to be emphasized because it is very confusing and destructive to forget that fact when studying the Bible, and whole denominations overlook it to their peril. As we look more closely at the historical accounts of the early days of Jesus building his church as recorded in the book of Acts, we’ll see how the Spirit worked through the apostles to fulfill their role and responsibility as Jesus’ special messengers.

The goal of the Spirit of God during this transition time, working directly and through the apostles, was to bring in the New Covenant, to reveal for all time the good news that there is now a way to experience the kind of relationship with God that—before he even created humans—he intended us to enjoy. Jesus had promised that it would be possible to “become children of God...born of God...born again...born of water and the Spirit” (John 1:12-13, 3:3,5). Though at the time he said those things he didn’t explain what he meant, he did say that it would be the way to “enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

On the day of Pentecost, Peter offered to anyone who was willing to “repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” the wonderful promise that “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Those instructions Peter gave in answer to the question, “What shall we do?” were the fulfillment of Jesus’ promised new birth. To be “born of water and the Spirit” was then possible in the baptism (immersion in water) Peter commanded.

God brought his plan to fulfillment on Pentecost and the door was thrown open to the kingdom. The first to be invited in were the Jews, the people chosen by God through whom he would work his plan. Yet Peter made clear the broad and permanent nature of this plan when he went on to say in Acts 2:39, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” So even the Gentiles and future generations—those who would be considered by these Jews to be “far off”—would be beneficiaries of that promise. We are among the “far off,” so thank God, the promise Peter preached that day is offered to us, too!

Acts of the Apostles

With awareness of the unique nature of the early days of the church as the New Covenant was established, we can make sense of the historical accounts in the book of Acts. The full name of this book is

“The Acts of the Apostles,” because it is the account of how the Spirit of God worked through the apostles’ acts to lay the foundations of Jesus’ church (*ekklesia*), his “assembly of the called out,” that he had told them he would build.

Let’s look more closely at Peter’s concise answer to the question, “What shall we do?” Because this answer is so important and so far-reaching, it is crucial to understand and appreciate the details, to obey it personally and then to share it with others.

Those who heard Peter were Jews, and he assumed that they were all very aware of Jesus’ credibility because he was “accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22). It’s a fairly safe assumption to make that most of them, at least those who lived in the area, had been baptized by John the Baptist. Mark 1:4-5 says, “And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.” John had been sent to prepare the Jews for the coming of the Messiah (cf. Luke 7:27, Malachi 3:1). So the people were familiar with baptism (immersion) in water following repentance as God’s designed means of receiving forgiveness of sins.

There was no dispute in those early days over the necessity or value of baptism in water. Its purpose as a spiritual cleansing of those who repent of sin and who submit to being submerged in and then raised up out of the water was never controversial. The only thing that was an issue was the question of whether someone who wanted to be baptized had truly repented. John the Baptist bluntly rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees who tried to join the crowd of those being baptized but had not repented (Matthew 3:7-8). The consequence of not submitting to John’s baptism was, as noted in Luke 7:30, “But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God’s purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.” They lacked humility and submissiveness toward God and missed out on his will for them, to their great loss.

So when Peter preached to the crowd on Pentecost that they needed to “repent and be baptized,” it was not a new concept. But though many had been baptized by John, they were being told by Peter that now, with the good news of salvation and the coming of the Holy Spirit, they needed to be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” And this baptism was not only “for the forgiveness of your sins,” as had been true of John’s baptism as well. Peter’s great news to them was that now, by being baptized in Jesus’ name—by his authority—they would be given “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit was promised to anyone who would “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus.” (For more about the often-neglected meaning and purpose of baptism, see the booklet *New Birth! Known by God.*)

Later, in Acts 5:32 when the apostles were questioned by the Jewish leaders, they stated boldly, “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” This mind-boggling promise, that God himself will come to dwell in his children, is truly the most wonderful news imaginable to anyone who is desperately seeking to know and be in a relationship with God!

As we work through the book of Acts, we can see the drastic and dramatic difference in the apostles after their baptism with the Holy Spirit compared to how they had been during their time with Jesus and even through the events of his crucifixion and up to the day he went back to heaven. Jesus’ confidence in them was proven right once they had been “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). It wasn’t their inherent greatness that gave Jesus that confidence. In fact, it was their very ordinariness that proved to be a great witness to the fact that it was the Holy Spirit that transformed them.

In Acts 4, Peter and John were seized by the Jewish leaders, jailed, and interrogated. In 4:8, “Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit,” boldly spoke up and demonstrated the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that his apostles would be given what to say by the Holy Spirit when the time came (Matthew 10:19, Mark 13:11). The response of those Jewish leaders was, as Acts 4:13 records, “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”

It would be great to be able to look at every verse that mentions the Holy Spirit in Acts, but this booklet would become too long! There are almost sixty references to the Spirit in Acts alone. A good way to get an overview about him is to do an internet search on a good online Bible website, such as BibleGateway.com, and read through the list of verses. God’s Spirit was very much involved in every detail of the establishment

of Jesus' church. He worked through the apostles in a special and unique way that would therefore end when they all died, enabling them to perform miracles as confirmation of the message, speaking to them, helping them solve problems and handle challenging circumstances, and giving them wisdom to discern the best course of action when questions and needs arose. To sum it all up, he guided them into all truth just as Jesus had promised he would (John 16:13).

Even with the proactive and miraculous involvement of the Holy Spirit in those early days of the church, one thing that stands out in Acts is that it was still necessary to "live by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). It took great courage and dependence on God's Spirit to meet the challenges and to fulfill the tremendous responsibility to lead a huge number of people in a completely new paradigm. The New Covenant way is by its very nature not a comfortable list of rules as the Old Covenant had been. There was no checklist handed to them, no preprinted guidebook to follow. The New Testament Scriptures had not been written yet!

Though the writers of the books and letters that eventually were compiled into the canon of the New Testament could have confidence that the Holy Spirit was guiding them in every aspect of their witness, including written accounts, there isn't a sense as one is reading them that they were dictated word for word. Instead, it seems that they acted, spoke, and wrote with reliance on the Holy Spirit's power and guidance, responding to real-life needs and problems.

The apostles (and those to whom they conferred miraculous powers, which we'll see later) performed miracles when the situation arose to do so, for the purpose of confirming their message. Their sense of "normal" was to go with the flow, trusting that the Holy Spirit was at work to accomplish God's will, whether it made sense from a human perspective or not. They met every challenging circumstance with an attitude such as they displayed after being flogged for preaching about Jesus after the Sanhedrin had forbidden them to do so. Acts 5:41-42 says, "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ."

The apostles set the example in following the leading of the Holy Spirit, gladly obeying whatever became clear for them to do. They lived in the present and relinquished control of their lives to God completely. Their passion was to do exactly what an angel instructed them upon their miraculous release from prison (Acts 5:20): "Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people the full message of this new life." When they at last understood what Jesus had been trying to teach them and the meaning of his death as it was overcome by his resurrection, they were radically transformed into the bold and courageous and proactive messengers that Jesus had envisioned they would be as his special witnesses.

Their strong leadership was absolutely necessary for the foundations of Jesus' church to be laid for all time. Even with their diligent leadership, logistical and moral and doctrinal issues arose often, and the reality that humans make up the church brings with it challenges that will always need to be handled.

Key Events in Acts

There are several historical events recorded in Acts that are important for understanding the work of the Holy Spirit in establishing the church. The baptism of the apostles with the Holy Spirit and the huge numbers that responded to Peter's message began the New Covenant age in a big way. From then on, the practical realities of how the first Christians lived out their new faith in Jesus and how they functioned as the body of Christ reveal the Providential guidance of God in laying important foundations for all time. As they lived in the world but not "of the world" (John 17:14-18) there was much to learn.

Early on there was a drastic response to sin creeping into the church. Chapter 5 recounts that many disciples were volunteering to pool their resources to meet the physical needs of other disciples, many of whom had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost and stayed on after becoming disciples. God exposed, rebuked, and struck dead a married couple for lying about giving all the proceeds of the sale of property to that cause, while keeping some back! Peter's rebuke to Ananias was that, "Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...you have not lied to men but to God." When Sapphira, came, not knowing her husband had dropped dead after Peter's rebuke, she lied, too, and Peter's rebuke to her was, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?" And then she dropped dead, too! The result was that, "Great fear

seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.” God made it clear early on that he would not tolerate sin creeping into the church. It’s a serious warning for all time. Though God nowadays does not bring about instant justice and judgment, the lesson is clear that he will not accept hypocrisy and deceit and we’d better not compromise, either.

An important milestone was the delineation of roles and responsibilities as the number of disciples grew and real-life needs had to be met. In chapter 6, the first special servants were selected. The role they filled eventually developed into a more official role in the church known as “deacons” from the transliteration of the Greek word *diakonos*, which means “minister” or “servant.” It is not always referring to an appointed role but can simply describe one who is servant-hearted, as with a woman named Phoebe in Romans 16:1. But in Acts 6, there was a specific administrative and logistical need, for which there was instituted a selection process to find men to take on the responsibility. (Another leadership role arose later, as congregations formed with the spread of the gospel. We’ll see this role of “elder” develop later.) The qualifications for the work of “deacons” were that they would be “full of the Spirit and wisdom.” The apostles would then be freed to focus on “prayer and the ministry of the word.” When “the Seven” were chosen, the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them, ordaining or setting them apart for that role. This was the first time we learn of the apostles laying their hands on anyone, and the subsequent events reveal the effect of that.

The accounts in Acts 6-8 immediately following the appointment of “deacons” involve two of those very men, Stephen and Philip, upon whom the apostles had laid their hands. Stephen became the first martyr. He “did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people” (6:8), which aroused opposition that led to being stoned after a kangaroo court trial with false witnesses.

The persecution of the disciples described in Acts 8:1 following the martyrdom of Stephen reveals that God’s plan for spreading the gospel did not fit into humanly predictable and neat patterns. No one could have foreseen that when Jesus told his apostles that they would be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) that the catalyst for the movement outward from Jerusalem would be persecution. It was an early real-life lesson of the principle that Paul would later articulate in Romans 8:28: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” The disciples became great examples for us in their undeterred focus, as “those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4).

Another one of the Seven, Philip, went to Samaria to preach and experienced a great response. He also was able to do miraculous signs, which served to confirm his message (Acts 8:6). But apparently he wasn’t able to confer that ability to others. The apostles who stayed in Jerusalem heard of the response of the Samaritans to Philip’s preaching and went there. They immediately raised the subject of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:15-17 seems, on the surface, to be confusing: “When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” But wait—we need to remember that Peter had already revealed a promise from God on Pentecost that he said was “for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). These Samaritans, given the opportunity to hear the call of God through the preaching of Philip, would have qualified to receive that promise in Acts 2:38, which was that those who will “repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins...will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, the logical inference must be that the Samaritans who “had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16) had already received what Peter had promised—the forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Another clue about what is meant about the Holy Spirit in this chapter is the phrase in 8:16, “...because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them.” This is the same wording that was used in the Old Covenant age when God’s Spirit was given to a few individuals as he chose to work through them for unique purposes, to fulfill his will for his people at particular points in history. The Spirit having “come upon” people served a different purpose than the indwelling promised to all Christians. The “gift of the Holy Spirit” is the presence of God himself inhabiting the inner being of those who are born again, the many benefits of which we’ll see as we look at teachings in the letters that follow the book of Acts. But the

Spirit coming upon his people in these foundation-laying days of Jesus beginning to build his church was for a temporary and unique purpose which must be noticed and understood.

The apostles had received the gift of the indwelling Spirit from the resurrected Jesus (John 20:22) and then subsequently experienced the Spirit being given in what can best be described as a different “measure.” The purpose of that measure was to empower them with the miraculous abilities needed for the proclamation and confirmation of the good news about Jesus’ resurrection and what that means for all people. On Pentecost the Spirit came down on them at God’s initiative and in his perfect timing, which was, as Jesus had promised, them being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5).

The best way to distinguish the difference in these measures is to notice what the actual “gift” is. In Acts 2:38, “gift” translates the Greek word for an actual gift, the Holy Spirit being that gift—the person himself, not specific powers or abilities.

In Hebrews 2:4, which says “gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will,” there is no actual word “gift” in the Greek, but rather the word means “distribution” from a word meaning “to apportion, divide, share, distribute” etc. So this passage describes apportionments or distributions from the Holy Spirit that were given in God’s wisdom for the purpose of testifying to the truth of the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. What was given were miraculous powers from the Holy Spirit to individuals, which is completely different from the promise Peter proclaimed in Acts 2:28 that the Holy Spirit himself would be given as a gift throughout the ages to every penitent believer who is baptized in the name of Jesus.

In Acts 8, what is confusing is that the wording used refers to the Holy Spirit himself rather than gifts he gives: “...they prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them....Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles’ hands...” (8:15-18). The key to understanding what is meant here is to notice the role of the apostles. What is significant is that the apostles in their unique foundation-laying and message-proclaiming role had the ability to impart the Holy Spirit in some measure to others through praying and then laying their hands on them.

What measure of the Holy Spirit did the apostles impart by laying on of their hands? What degree of control over the distribution of his Spirit did God give to the apostles? If God promised to give his Spirit as a gift to every believer at baptism, then why is here another description of the Spirit being given by the apostles laying their hands on some baptized believers?

Some interpretations of this passage conclude that God withheld his Spirit from the Samaritans’ baptisms but then gave him via apostles in order to highlight and validate their acceptance on equal terms with the Jewish believers. On the surface that seems plausible, but the difficulty I have in drawing that conclusion arises from the fact that in order for that to be true, it requires an exception to God’s own stated promise where no exception is clearly articulated. It seems safest to assume that what God had already promised was as true here for the Samaritans as it was for the Jewish believers at Pentecost—to assume that the Samaritans did receive the indwelling Holy Spirit at the same time they were forgiven. Would God cleanse them of their sin yet withhold his empowering Spirit? The more logical inference would be to accept the possibility that the laying on of apostles’ hands imparted the power of the Spirit in some measure other than what was already promised—the gifts of the Spirit, not the Spirit himself.

“full of the Holy Spirit” descriptions

Paul’s conversion

Cornelius also baptized with Holy Spirit to fulfill promise to Gentiles—2nd half of prophecy of baptism of Holy Spirit.

Apollos corrected and Ephesians rebaptized

Paul’s missionary trips to Gentiles and eventually elders appointed in every congregation—maturity and ongoing pattern for post-apostolic age.

Life in the Body of Christ

The amazing thing about the New Covenant paradigm is that God entrusts so much to his children, and there is much room for us to mess up and miss out on what he intended us to experience. But that danger is

a necessary risk that God knows must be taken in order for his blessings and his joy to be experienced by those who choose to accept his truth and his will for how life is meant to work. This new paradigm flows out of a relationship with God that is intensely personal and intimate.

Hebrews 8:10-12 quotes the prophecies of Ezekiel 11:19-20, Isaiah 54:13, and Jeremiah 31:31-34 and declares them to be fulfilled: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” The new paradigm is to know God and to obey him because we want to please him out of love. He is our Father who draws from us the response of crying out from the heart, “Abba!” (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6)—or, as we say in English, “Daddy!”

God has created us to be happiest when whatever we do is voluntary and from the heart. Choosing to trust and obey what God tells us is right results in joy and peace. The apostles exemplified that truth in every circumstance in the book of Acts. Even in the midst of persecution and hardship and uncertainty, they demonstrated the truth of the New Covenant: that faith in God, gratefulness for Jesus’ loving sacrifice and the fact of his resurrection, and reliance on the Holy Spirit for whatever is needed to live in the world yet not be of the world will result in “life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:19), “life...to the full” (John 10:10).

One of my favorite examples of the blessings of the new life God gives us is when the apostle Paul (who was chosen directly by Jesus to be an apostle in addition to the Twelve) was saying goodbye to the elders he had grown close to in Ephesus in Acts 20. After exhorting them and charging them to be diligent in their responsibilities to lead and protect the church after he was gone, we can see in Acts 20:36-38 the kind of heartfelt bonds of love that he experienced with them, which is only possible with fellow Christians: “When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept and they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again.” Paul practiced what he preached, and he used his own life as a model of how God designed us to live. He was a great example of the paradigm of loving and serving God from the heart, and therefore his life had a huge impact on many, many people both in his lifetime and now through his writings.

Then move on to epistles,
the role of Holy Spirit in our lives day by day,
our responsibility to keep in step with the Spirit,
not put out Spirit’s fire, etc.,
fruit of Spirit,
gifts of Spirit limited to body life in lifetime of apostles.
1 Cor 12/14—then, not now, not needed



2 Timothy 2:15, which we looked at earlier, reminds us to “rightly divide” or “correctly handle” the Scriptures. When we are trying to understand God’s will and his promises about his Spirit working in our lives, we have to be careful to discern what limits would apply based on either what God describes or how he acts in the time period we’re reading about.

P. 21 refer back to this when I get to Heb. 1.

2 Cor. 7:10-11—godly sorrow example of those in Acts.

Acts 14:3—Paul and Barnabas do miraculous signs and wonders

Spirit lived in Holy of Holies under old covenant, then the “curtain was torn” and the Spirit lives now in God’s children.

Conclusion

There’s a great need to understand and appreciate the role of God’s Holy Spirit in this New Covenant age. My experiences of over 40 years as a Christian have included exposure to groups at both extremes. Some ignore him, others worship him to the neglect of the Father and Jesus the Son.

The first sermon about the Holy Spirit that I remember ever hearing was preached recently in my congregation. It was so good for me to hear both for my own walk with God and for the encouragement of seeing progress in giving him the credit he deserves.

Dedication

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