



The Holy Spirit

J.C. Choate

Copyright© 2016, WorldEvangelism Publications

**Recorded and used in India as radio sermons
Printed in India
Printed in USA, 3000 copies, 2016**

Order From:

**World Evangelism Publications
P.O. Box 72
Winona, Mississippi 38967
Phone: (662) 283-1192
E-Mail: Choate@WorldEvangelism.org
Web site: www.WorldEvangelism.org
www.gospelgazette.com**

INTRODUCTION

This is a series of sermons that was prepared for our radio broadcasts in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The theme of these sermons is the work of **The Holy Spirit**. There is probably no subject that is more controversial and, because of that, there is a tremendous need for the truth to be presented on it.

I have tried to cover all of the different areas pertaining to this subject and the questions that come out of a study of it. I have also gone all-out to make it as simple as possible, constantly reminding the student of the different measures of the Holy Spirit and how He has worked from the beginning. Of course, even more importantly for us, the study deals with how the Spirit works today. If people in general could ever understand what the Scriptures teach on this, it would clear up many of the religious problems of our time.

The Spirit has spoken through the pages of the Bible. His word, and especially the New Testament portion, is directed to us as the complete and final revelation from God. He has said what He wanted to say, and if we will read and study the Bible, we can understand it. That means that we can understand what the Spirit does today, and the role that He plays in our lives.

Please keep an open mind and be willing to accept the truth whether it agrees with what you thought was the truth or not. If you will, then I believe that you will profit much from this study. That is the purpose for which it was written.

J. C. Choate
Church of Christ
Winona, MS

Secondary Introduction

One series of sermons J.C. preached over Radio Sri Lanka for the listeners on that side of the world was the material in this book. Originally, it was twenty-six fifteen-minute lessons.

Because of the growing number of people in the world who believe gross error about the entire subject of the Holy Spirit, I felt that J.C.'s voice still needs to be heard through printing the manuscripts in edited book form. Of course the greetings and closings of the radio programs had to be eliminated, as well as the redundancy and review that were needed from one week to the next for radio sermons to be effective.

The text has now been prepared for use in Bible class situations, with questions added to each lesson. Members of the Lord's church need to know exactly what the Scriptures teach about the Holy Spirit and His work in the past as well as in our lives currently, so that we can guard against error. Also, because of the lack of study on the part of many Christians concerning God's providential working in the world throughout history and on up until today, I have added a few pages to the thirteenth chapter. These stories illustrate the point of providential work during biblical times, and also some powerful examples in current situations.

We pray God's blessings on those who study these lessons, that we may allow Him to work through us to the evangelizing of the lost world.

Betty Burton Choate
Winona, MS 38967
2016

CONTENTS

1. Introducing the Holy Spirit	5
2. “He Shall Baptize You with the Holy Ghost, and with Fire”	11
3. Measures of the Spirit	17
4. Why was Simon the Sorcerer Denied the Power of the Holy Spirit? ...	24
5. The Gift of the Holy Spirit	29
6. Spiritual Gifts	35
7. Casting out Evil Spirits	39
8. How does God Speak to Man Today?	46
9. The Holy Spirit in Conversion	52
10. “These Signs Shall Follow Them That Believe”	56
11. The Unity of the Spirit	62
12. The Sin Against the Holy Spirit	67
13. “When That Which is Perfect is Come”	74

Lesson 1

Introducing the Holy Spirit

For our study at this time we simply want to introduce the Holy Spirit to you. We need to understand — according to God’s word — *who* He is, *where* He came from, *His work in the world today*, and *many other things* about Him.

First, let us understand that *the Holy Spirit is the third person in the Godhead*. There are God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Christ mentioned them in this order when He said to His Apostles, **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”** (Matthew 28:19).

In Ephesians 4:4-6 Paul declared that there is one God, one Christ, and one Spirit. Writing to the Roman Christians, he mentioned these three in this statement: **“Now I beseech you brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me”** (Romans 15:30).

Again he identified these three in 2 Corinthians 13:14: **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.”**

Some refer to God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit as being a “trinity”, since there are three Persons. Although there are three distinct personalities, yet they are one in essence. Many find this hard to understand. Some want to believe that there are three Gods. To get around this, there are those who say that Jesus is Himself, but sometimes He is personified as “God the Father” and sometimes He is also personified as the “Holy Spirit”. This teaching is known as the “Jesus only” doctrine, and of course it is false.

Although we may find it hard to understand how there can be one God, one Christ, and one Holy Spirit, with them being three distinct and separate personalities or divine Beings, yet a “united one” [which is the meaning of the Hebrew word “one” (achid) that is used to describe God: *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is **one**!”* (Deuteronomy 6:4)], but this is what the Bible teaches and therefore we must accept it by faith, whether or not we can understand it with our limited human concepts.

Even though the word trinity is not mentioned in the scriptures to describe God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit as being three in one, they are referred to as being the “Godhead”. Paul preached to the Athenians, **“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s devices”** (Acts 17:29).

Speaking to those who had denied God, Paul declared, **“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are**



made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20). Referring to Christ, he said, **"For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"** (Colossians 2:9). The Godhead, then, as used in these verses, would be made up of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

But how long has the Godhead been around? Where we read of one, we read of the others. We first read of them in the beginning of things, indicating that they existed before creation, or that they are Deity, being *eternal* in nature.

The very first verse of Scripture reads, **"In the beginning God** — Elohim, the plural form for "God" in the Hebrew language — **created the heaven and the earth"** (Genesis 1:1). "God" [Elohim] includes God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Again, we read concerning creation, **"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"** (Genesis 1:26). John said, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made"** (John 1:3). **"...And the Spirit of God was hovering over face of the waters"** (Genesis 1:2). In these verses of Scripture we can clearly see that all three Persons of the Godhead were there in the beginning and therefore have always existed. None of them are created Beings.

If we made a study of each member of the Godhead, we would see that each one had a role to play or a work to do. This is seen throughout the Old Testament period, as well as in New Testament times. The Holy Spirit, in particular, inspired and guided various ones to write down the Scriptures so that they might be preserved and brought over even to our time.

Peter wrote, **"For we received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' and this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts. Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"** (2 Peter 1:17-21).

You can see again in these verses that all three members of the Godhead are mentioned, but especially the role of the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, is depicted as the One through Whom the Scriptures were given. Paul wrote, **"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"** (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

It has been said that the Old Testament refers to the Holy Spirit 88 times and uses 18 names for Him. At the same time He is spoken of in the New Testament 264 times while being called by 39 different names. It should also be pointed out that five of these names are common in both Testaments, while 52 different names of the Holy Spirit are used in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit is often pictured by humans as some type of mysterious force or ghost, but the scriptures portray Him as a person with a personality. He is said to have emotions (Ephesians 4:30), a mind (Romans 8:27), He can speak (1 Timothy 4:1), and He can help with our infirmities (Romans 8:26), among these many other things:

1. By the Spirit we are **born** in baptism (John 3:3-5).
2. He is our **helper** (John 14:16-18).
3. He is our **seal of redemption** (2 Corinthians 1:22).
4. He is our **guarantor** (2 Corinthians 5:5)
5. It is possible for us to **grieve** Him (Ephesians 4:30).
6. It is possible for us to **quench** Him (1 Thessalonians 5:19).
7. He **leads** us (Galatians 5:18).
8. We **live** in Him (2 Corinthians 3:6).
9. We **walk** in Him (Galatians 5:16).
10. Through Him we **bear fruit** (Galatians 5:32).
11. Through Him, we **enter the body**, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13).
12. He **dwells** in us (2 Timothy 1:14; 1 Corinthians 3:16,17).
13. He **abides** in us (1 John 4:13).
14. He **strengthens** us (Ephesians 3: 16-21).
15. Through Him we **put to death** the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13).
16. He **bears witness** that we are the children of God (Romans 8:16).
17. He **makes intercession** for us (Romans 8:27; Ephesians 2:18).
18. He **groans** the words we cannot articulate (Romans 8:26).
19. He **teaches** us (1 Corinthians 2:13).
20. He **discerns** (1 Corinthians 2:14).
21. We **pray** in Him (Jude 1:19,20).
22. He **gives life** (John 6:63).
23. He **gives liberty** (2 Corinthians 3:17).
24. He **transforms us** as we look into the mirror of the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).
25. Through Him we **reap life** (Galatians 6:8).
26. Through Him we have **access to the Father** (Ephesians 2:18).
27. We **abound in hope** through the power of the Spirit (Romans 15:13).
28. It is through the Spirit that we become **the habitation of God** (Ephesians 2:22).
29. He, along with the church, says, **"Come"** (Revelation 22:17). This wording, in itself, indicates strongly that the Holy Spirit is the abiding Presence with the church in this world, as we together await the coming of our Savior.

In subsequent chapters we will consider the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ, in the Apostles, in the early church, in the church throughout the centuries, and in the church today. It will be our goal to present nothing without Scriptural backing, so that whatever lessons we learn may be true to the word of God, as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

This theme of the Holy Spirit is important because so many people are confused about Him and His work. While most of the world would reject Him altogether, others go to the opposite extreme and make the Spirit the center of their focus in lessons and claims, teaching that He works

miraculously today. Of the three Persons in the Godhead, He has become the focal point of many religious teachers — not God the Father or Christ the Saviour, but the Holy Spirit. But what does the Bible say?

The Scriptures show that the Holy Spirit is a personality, the third person in the Godhead. As with God and Christ, He is eternal: He has always been and will always be. He took part in the creation and all of the great events throughout the Old Testament period. In this lesson, want to learn about His work during the time of Christ and the Apostles.

Going back to the birth of Christ, we note that the record says, **“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,**

“‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.’”

“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’”

“Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son, and he called His name Jesus” (Matthew 1:18-25).

Please note the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired Isaiah the prophet to write, **“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).** Next, Mary was found with child, with the explanation that that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit. Finally, all of this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord through the prophet, that a virgin would bring forth a Son and His name would be Immanuel, or God with us.

According to Luke 1, Zacharias and Elizabeth also had a child born to them, in keeping with the power of the Holy Spirit. He was named John and was later known as John the Baptist because he baptized those who would submit to God’s will. Being the forerunner of Christ, the one who was sent to prepare the way for the Lord, he said, **“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him.

“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a

dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:11-17).

As we saw earlier, Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit, and thus Christ was born into the world. Now, as an adult, we find Jesus being baptized (immersed in water) by John. As evidence of the Father’s approval, the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus, and God said, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”**

In Matthew 4:1 the record says, **“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”** How did He overcome the challenges and temptations of Satan? He answered each time with quotations from the Scriptures, whose writers had been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We read in John 3:34 that Christ received not the Spirit *by measure*, meaning that He received the *fullness* of the power of Spirit, enabling Him to do the work He came into the world to do. This statement, by contrast, is implying that others received the Spirit *by measure*, or that there were *limitations* as to what they could do, even with the power of the Spirit.

Christ chose twelve men to represent Him and to carry on His work after His departure. These men were called Apostles. One of the qualifications for an Apostle was that he had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry through the time of His resurrection. This very specific requirement shows us that there are no Apostles living today, though some in the religious world claim that honor.

Knowing that, as the resurrected Lord, He would return to the Father in Heaven, Jesus told His Apostles, **“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you”** (John 16:13). He said again, in identifying the Comforter, **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:26).

The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would do several things, according to Jesus’ promise: after the Apostles were *baptized* in the Holy Spirit (in Acts 2), He would *comfort them, guide them in all Truth, call to their remembrance all the things that Christ had taught them, enable them to speak in other languages, and to perform miracles to convince the people that they had been sent of God.*

But the Apostles could not do all the work that needed to be done. We read in Acts 6 that the Lord enabled them to lay their hands on chosen disciples so that they might also receive miraculous power through the Holy Spirit. While the Apostles had received the *baptismal measure* of the Holy Spirit — and then, they, through the laying of their hands on others, could impart miraculous power to them — these disciples who received the *laying-on-of-hands measure* of the Holy Spirit could not pass the miraculous power to others. We will learn more about this as our study progresses.

Finally, at the time of baptism in water, for the washing away of sins, all others received the **ordinary, or non-miraculous, measure** of the Spirit, according to Acts 2:38.

The Holy Spirit worked through the Apostles and those on whom they laid their hands, to enable them to perform miracles and to inspire them to write down God’s word. With the completion of the New Testament, the Spirit works today through the Word, and with us, according to teaching of that Word.

Discussion Questions

1. Is the Holy Spirit a “thing” (it) or a Person?
2. There is one God [Hebrew: *achid*, meaning *united one*, not *singular one*] made up of three Persons: _____, _____, and _____ (Matthew 28:19).
3. What does Ephesians 4:4-6 tell us? Romans 15:30?
4. What is the “Jesus only” doctrine?
5. According to 2 Peter 1:17-21, which Person of the Godhead inspired the prophets and writers of God’s word?
6. Choose and discuss 5 points from the list of 29 points that inform us more clearly of the work of the Holy Spirit.
7. Mary was found to be with child of the _____.
What does this show about the united oneness of the Godhead?
8. What happened when Jesus was baptized?
9. What does John 3:34 tell us about the source of the power by which Jesus performed miracles?
10. What did Jesus promise the Apostles in John 14:26?

Lesson 2

He Shall Baptize You with the Holy Ghost and with Fire

The scriptures tell us that John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the Lord. In other words, he went forth preaching repentance and baptism in water. Although Christ was perfect before God, He also came to John for baptism in order to fulfill all righteousness. Later, He would send His Apostles out to preach **“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”** (Mark 16:16).

Explaining the difference between himself and Christ, John said, **“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire”** (Matthew 3:11,12). Now, what was John saying here? Let’s take a closer look and see if we can’t understand these matters. Surely God wanted us to know, and surely we can know.

To begin with, John showed that Christ would be much greater than himself. He said that while he baptized with water unto repentance, Christ would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

There is a lot said in the denominational world about the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire. Both are said to be practiced today. “Holy Ghost baptism” is preached as being for believers today, and it is claimed that those who have received this baptism have the power to perform miraculous deeds. “Fire baptism” is said to be a cleansing process or a trying experience that one goes through at some stage in life. This would prepare that person, it is said, to be of greater service to the Lord. The question is, does the Bible teach this or does it teach something else?

To understand the baptisms of the Holy Ghost and of fire, we must look at the context in which this is stated. John pictures a farmer threshing his wheat, fanning the chaff away from the wheat, and gathering up the good grain to save, but taking the chaff out to burn. Now, he says that Christ will deal with the people in this way. He will have the power to baptize people with the Holy Ghost, or to bless them through the baptism of the Holy Ghost. But the chaff, or those who are evil, will be taken out and burned up. In other words, they will be baptized with fire. John, then, is talking about *two* baptisms, one for the righteous and one for the wicked.

As we go through the Scriptures, we see that Jesus promised to send the Comforter, or Holy Spirit, to the Apostles on His departure. Reading closely the 14th chapter of John, we see that **only**



Christ had the power to administer this baptism and *only the Apostles* were promised to receive it. With the baptism of the Holy Ghost, they would have the power to remember the things that Jesus had taught, to teach the truth, to tell of things to come, to speak in other languages, and to perform miracles. They were to be given this power in order to convince the people that God had sent them to represent Him and to proclaim His will.

We are told that after they received this power, **“They went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following”** (Mark 16:20). But how long did this continue? As long as the Apostles lived, since they were the only ones that had been promised the baptism of the Holy Ghost. By that time the New Testament had been given in written form and there was no longer any need for signs and wonders to confirm the Word, since it had already been confirmed.

There are many who claim to have the baptism of the Holy Ghost today, but they contradict each other, they teach doctrines that are contrary to the Scriptures, are members of churches that are not mentioned in the scriptures, and practice things that are in clear opposition to God’s Word. How, then, can they say that they have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, just as the Apostles were, and that they are speaking by His guidance? The fact is, they haven’t been baptized with the Holy Spirit. Such people are deceived and they deceive the hearts of many.

It was through the power of Christ that the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then, later, when Peter followed instructions to go to the household of Cornelius and to preach the Gospel to them, he himself was shocked when **“...As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning”** (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15). **You will notice that it was *not* through Peter’s power that these first Gentile converts received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but *as a direct working of God*. Let this be a warning to us today when preachers *command* the Holy Spirit to fall on their “converts”. *Humans don’t command the Spirit of God!***

Notice, also, that even though this was several years after the Gospel was first preached on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, from Peter’s statement in Acts 11 we can be assured that not another person had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit during that interval of time. What was Peter’s statement? That **“... the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.”** Peter himself was shocked about what had happened! Obviously, God used this outpouring as testimony that He would accept Gentile converts into the church, to prove that He was no respecter of persons (Acts 10,11), and to fulfill the prophecy of Joel that “all flesh” — both Jews and Gentiles — would be blessed with salvation through Christ.

These are the only instances recorded in Scripture of any humans receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The use for this special baptism, and the time for it, has passed. It is not the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5. Still all souls, even today, have been blessed through that baptism since the Apostles were guided by the Holy Spirit in preaching the truth and giving the written word.

But what about the other baptism, the baptism of fire? Christ would have the power to administer this one also, not to the righteous, but to the wicked. The Bible teaches that in the last day Christ will cast all of the disobedient into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:10). We read, **“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death”** (Revelation 21:8). That, then, is the baptism of fire that John had said Christ would administer. Let us pray — and strive to be obedient — so that

we will not experience that baptism.

Baptism is a burial. In the case of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Apostles, or they were immersed in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). When the wicked shall be baptized with fire in the last day, they will be immersed or buried in the lake of fire. Someone has said that we are too late for Holy Spirit baptism, too early for fire baptism, but we are just in time for water baptism, which is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

In Ephesians 4:1-4, Paul says, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

“There is one body [church] and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

How many baptisms are there today? According to God’s Word, there are as many baptisms as there are Gods: only one!

I know, according to the Scriptures, that you have not been baptized with the Holy Ghost — and I know also that you have not received fire baptism since that baptism has not come yet, but is to be administered to the wicked in the last day — but the question is, **have you been scripturally baptized in water for the remission of your sins?**

The Promise of the Comforter

Jesus came into this world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). We are also told that He came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). In spite of that, and the fact that Christ lived a sinless life and went about doing only good, still He had enemies and would eventually be crucified on a cruel cross. He knew this, and to be sure that His work would continue, He chose twelve men, called Apostles, to teach and to train so they could carry on His work when He left this world. He knew also that they were human, subject to mistakes, would forget many of the things He had taught them, or would not understand so many of the truths He wanted them to convey to the world. To be sure that they were perfectly guided and directed, He promised that on His departure He would send the Comforter to them.

In the book of John in the New Testament we read some of the statements that are written concerning the Comforter. In speaking to the Apostles, Christ said, **“And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him; but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me; because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him”** (John 14:16-21).

Christ said to the Apostles, **“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If**

ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father; for my Father is greater than I” (John 14:26-28).

Christ then explained, **“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, He shall testify of Me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning”** (John 15:26,27).

Reading further He said, **“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on Me, of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.**

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine, therefore said I, that He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you. A little while and ye shall not see Me, because I go to the Father” (John 16:7-16).

Now, in all of these verses, these facts come across:

- Christ was speaking to the Apostles only.
- He therefore promised the Comforter to them alone, not to the world, and not even to the other disciples.
- The Comforter was identified as being the Holy Spirit.
- The Comforter would come upon the Apostles once the Lord had departed.
- The Comforter, or the Holy Spirit, would be with them, make it possible for them to remember all the things that Jesus had taught them, guide them in all truth, reveal to them things to come, enable them to speak in other languages, and make it possible for them to perform miracles.
- Christ *only* would have the power, or authority, to send the Comforter to them.
- With the Comforter, the Apostles — those who had been with the Lord from the beginning — would bear witness of Him.

Luke also spoke of Christ’s promise to send the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. After the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection, He appeared to the Apostles, **“And He said unto them, ‘These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.’ Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. But tarry in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high.’ And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen”** (Luke 24:44-53).

In the biblical record, Acts 1:26 closes with the choosing of Matthias to be an Apostle, to replace Judas. The verse concludes with, **“... And he was numbered with the eleven Apostles.”** We are now ready to begin with Acts 2. Remember that in the original manuscript there were no verses and no chapters. The chain of thought and activity would have simply continued to the next

statement. Therefore the last *noun* of verse 26 would serve as the antecedent for the *pronoun* beginning Acts 2:1: “Apostles” and “they”; and it would read, **“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, *they* [the Apostles] were all with one accord in one place”** (Acts 2:1). Continuing, the record says, **“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting”** (Acts 2:2).

This sound filled all the house where **who** was sitting? Where *the Apostles* were sitting. **“And there appeared unto them”** (again, *the Apostles*) **“cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them”** (*the Apostles*, the ones to whom the promise of the Holy Spirit was made). **“And they”** (*the Apostles*) **“were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them”** (*the Apostles*) **“utterance”** (Acts 2:3,4).

Then later Peter stood up *with the eleven*, and began to speak. Now who were these eleven? Of course, they were *the Apostles*. Peter explained that these men, *these Apostles*, were not drunk, as some in the crowd had mockingly supposed, but that which was happening was spoken by the prophet Joel, **“... that in the last days God would pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh”** (Acts 2:14-17).

Did God keep that promise? Yes, ultimately, in that He gave measures of His Spirit to *all* who obeyed Him, both Jews and Gentiles:

(1) He gave *the Apostles* [also, Paul, the Apostle born out of due season] and Cornelius **the baptism of the Holy Spirit**.

(2) Then He enabled *the Apostles* to **lay their hands** on *chosen disciples* so that they, too, might have miraculous gifts of the Spirit as shown in Acts 6.

(3) And finally, all others who obey the Lord, even up to our day, receive *the gift or indwelling of the Holy Spirit*, which is the non-miraculous measure (Acts 2:38).

Continuing the study of Acts 2, we have the Apostles preaching the Gospel to the people assembled there and around 3,000 obeyed God, repenting of their sins and being baptized. As a result, they received the remission of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, as promised in verse 38. Verse 47 states that the Lord added them to His church.

In that same chapter it is also pointed out that those who obeyed the Lord continued steadfastly in the *Apostles’ doctrine* and that many wonders and signs were done *by the Apostles*. Were the signs and wonders done by all the thousands that were baptized? No, the Scriptures clearly state that, even though **all** baptized believers were given *the gift of the Spirit*, only *the Apostles* were doing miraculous things (Acts 5:12).

So you can see that all of the emphasis in these passages concerning the outpouring of the Spirit was on *the Apostles*. Why? Because *only the Apostles* were promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit by Christ. Had the hundred and twenty been baptized with the Holy Ghost, and had all of those 3,000 received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, then that would have been recorded in the account of the events of that day. And had all of those received the baptism of the Spirit, with power to do miraculous things, it would not have been necessary for the Apostles in Acts 6 to have seven men chosen from among the disciples so they might lay their hands on them, that they too might have miraculous power. Please think about all of these things, and when you do, surely the truth will become evident.

The conclusion? No one today receives the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit because there are no Apostles alive today to be able to give that power by laying their hands on converts. Those who teach such a doctrine contradict the very words of the Spirit in Scripture.

Discussion Questions

1. John said that the one who would be coming would baptize with _____ and with _____.
2. In the denominational world, how are these two baptisms explained?
3. Reading John 14, where Christ speaks of the Holy Spirit, to whom did He promise that baptism? Who was the only one with authority to administer that baptism?
4. Those who claim to be baptized with the Holy Ghost today _____ each other, teach doctrines that are _____ to the Scriptures, are members of _____ that are not mentioned in the Scriptures, and _____ things that are in _____ to God's word.
5. Besides the Apostles [this would include the Apostle Paul], who else received that baptism? (Acts 10:44-46; 11:15).
6. Revelation 21:8 identifies the "baptism of fire". What is it?
7. According to Ephesians 4:1-4, how many baptisms are there today?
8. According to John 14:26-28, the Holy Spirit would do what through the Apostles?
9. Reading of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:3,4, looking at the antecedent of "they" in Acts 1:26, and at the specification in Acts 2:14, did the 120 of Acts 1:15 receive the baptism or only the Apostles?
10. Acts 5:12 identifies those who were doing miracles at that time. When, and by what means, were others enabled to perform miraculous things? Are there any Apostles alive today to lay their hands on people to bestow those powers?

Lesson 3

Measures Of the Spirit

The Apostle John said of Christ, **“For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him”** (John 3:34). What does John mean when he talks about God giving the Spirit to Christ without measure? “Measure” would imply limitation. In other words, had God given Christ only *a measure* of the Spirit that would have meant that He would have been limited as to what He could do, even with the power of the Spirit. But God did not give Him the Spirit “by measure”, but “without” measure. That means that neither God nor the Spirit would place any restrictions on Christ when it came to the use of the power of the Spirit.

Our Lord, receiving the Spirit without measure, was able to do miracles, including casting out devils and raising the dead, calming the stormy seas, turning water into wine, walking upon water, etc. In addition to all of these, John wrote, **“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name”** (John 20:30,31).

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

There are many who believe that all of the Lord’s people, from the Apostles right on down to the Christians of our day, received or should receive the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit. Many even pray for that baptism, and some are audacious enough to *demand* it of God! We are going to see that this is not a valid expectation.

First of all, keep in mind that Christ promised to send the Comforter or the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles *only*. He did not make this promise to all of His followers or to all who would follow Him in the future.

When we turn to the book of John, we read, **“But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning”** (John 15:26,27).

Again, He said, **“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you”** (John 16:7).

Going on, He said, **“Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into**



all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will shew you things to come" (John 16:13). Now, to whom was the Lord speaking in these verses? If you will read the context and notice what Jesus is saying, it is very obvious that He is speaking to His Apostles, to those who had been with Him from the beginning (John 15:27). The question, then, is this: Did the Lord keep His promise?

Before we see what finally happened, consider these statements Christ made to the Apostles just prior to His return to the Father in heaven: **"And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high"** (Luke 24:49). Could this statement apply to anyone living today? Of course not!

Luke wrote this also: **"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen: to whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; and being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence"** (Acts 1:1-5).

Then Jesus said, **"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth"** (Acts 1:8). Surely we can see in these statements that it was Jesus Christ who promised the Apostles the power of the Holy Ghost. That being true, who received it? The Apostles only, or all believers in general?

In Acts 2 we read, **"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance"** (Acts 2:1-4). Reading on through that chapter, we see *the Apostles* preaching to a large crowd of people, and approximately 3,000 of them obeyed the Gospel and, on being saved, were added by God to the church (Acts 2:47). We also have this statement: **"And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles"** (Acts 2:43).

This was fulfillment of the promise that Christ would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11,12). The word baptism is defined as being a burial, an immersion, and an overwhelming action. This "burial" itself may involve water or any number of other things. It may also involve the Spirit. Therefore the record says that at the time the Apostles had gathered on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem, **"...suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting"** (Acts 2:2). In other words, the Apostles were immersed or buried in the Holy Spirit, and as proof of their being filled with the Spirit they began *to speak in other tongues or languages* (Acts 2:3,4). **These languages were recognizable because those who heard them were amazed that everyone could hear them speak in their own languages** (Acts 2:6)!

Continuing to read to the fifth chapter of Acts (verse 12), the specification is again made concerning those who were doing miracles: **"And through the hands of the Apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people."** The conclusion, then, is that *only the Apos-*

bles received the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit on that day. No one prayed for the baptism of the Spirit and no one commanded the Spirit to come down, as false teachers often do today. **Only God was responsible for that outpouring!**

Other than the Apostles (including Saul, who became known as Paul), there is only one other case of Holy Spirit baptism found in the Scriptures and that has to do with Cornelius and his household, who were Gentiles. The Apostles were Jews and they had already received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To prove that the Lord was no respecter of persons, this family of Gentiles, too, was baptized with the Spirit.

In Acts 10 and 11 we read about these people. **“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, ‘Cornelius’. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, ‘What is it, Lord?’ And he said unto him, ‘Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do’”** (Acts 10:1-6).

This was done, and coupled with the Lord having to teach Peter some lessons proving that He was no respecter of persons, Peter and others came to Cornelius and his household. The record continues, **“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, ‘Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him’”** (Acts 10:34,35).

Peter goes on to preach the Gospel to those who had gathered, and then we read, **“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that *on the Gentiles also* was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, ‘Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days”** (Acts 10:44-48).

In Acts 11, we read that Peter met with the church in Jerusalem, explaining what had happened in Caesarea when Cornelius and his household obeyed the Lord. He said, **“And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, ‘John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.’ Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, ‘Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life’”** (Acts 11:15-18).

The record here clearly shows that Cornelius and his household received the baptism of the Holy Ghost, just as Peter and the other Apostles had in the beginning, that is, on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Notice that this was something special, not something that happened every time a person became a believer. **Even Peter had to go all the way back to the time that the Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Ghost to find another example of it.**

What about all of the other Christians? Did they receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost? No, they did not. If all Christians received that baptism administered by God, what would have been so unique about the Apostles and Cornelius and his household receiving it?

But someone might say, “Surely today there would be some Christians who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit.” No, not one person today has experienced that special out-pouring. What would be the purpose of it?

In the first century, the Gospel was newly being declared; the Scriptures were in the process of being written. For that reason, as the Apostles went out, preaching everywhere “... **the Lord [was] working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.**” We have the completed written word to direct us today, and when we obey its teaching the Lord saves us as He promised He would. Those who claim to have the baptism of the Holy Spirit are basing their claim on a misunderstanding and misapplication of Scripture — which clearly proves that they don’t have what they are claiming to have, because the Spirit would not contradict what He has recorded in the written Word!

The “Laying-on-of-Hands” Measure of the Holy Spirit

Now we want to learn more about the “laying-on-of-hands” measure of the Holy Spirit. We are especially interested in studying these matters because there are so many misunderstandings about the Spirit and His work, with countless false doctrines on this subject.

John said of Christ, “**For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure. The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand**” (John 3:34,35). That is, Christ received the power of the Spirit without measure; He was not limited in what He could do through the Spirit. But if Christ received the Spirit “without measure”, that means others received Him “by measure”. This would suggest that although they had the power of the Spirit, still they were limited as to what they could do with that power.

For example, we have seen in our studies that only the Lord had the power to **baptize** with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11). To confirm that **He had the power of the Holy Spirit without measure** (Matthew 3:13-17), we need to keep in mind that *only He* could administer these baptisms.

With regard to the baptism of the Holy Spirit, first of all, Christ promised the *Apostles only* that He would send the Comforter — which was the Holy Spirit — to them (John 14:26). That promise was repeated in Luke 24:49 and in Acts 1:8. We read in Acts 2:1-4 that the Apostles were indeed baptized with the Holy Spirit. This, then, was **the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit**. Although they had received it, and for a purpose, they could not *baptize* others with the Holy Spirit. This means they were limited to that extent in their use of the Spirit.

The Apostles were only twelve and they had been commanded to take the Gospel into all the world; therefore they had a big job to do. Also, in Acts 6 we read where they got involved in helping with the physical needs of the disciples. At this point the record says, “**Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word**” (Acts 6:2-4).

Let us pause long enough to make a few observations concerning the Apostles’ suggestion. There are those who advocate that either (1) all Christians do receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or certainly that (2) they *can* receive it. But evidently **not all of those who had obeyed the Lord up to Acts 6 had received the baptism of the Holy Ghost**. We know this because, even though they were “**full of the Holy Ghost**”, they were not performing any miracles.

Evidently the Apostles understood that the Christians in general did not receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, that the chosen seven disciples did not possess miraculous power. Logically, had they received such power, it would have been unnecessary for the disciples to choose seven men from among them who were full of the Holy Spirit to aid in the work that was to be done!

Let's make further observations about the fact that the Apostles asked that seven men be chosen *who were full of the Holy Ghost*. That means it was possible to be full of the Holy Spirit but still not to have miraculous power! But what would be the difference in being *full* of the Holy Spirit and having a measure of the Holy Spirit that would empower a person to perform *miracles*? Evidently the difference was in the fact that there were *different measures* of the Spirit. The Apostles received *the baptismal measure* which enabled them to work the full range of miraculous gifts, such as speaking in other languages, healing the sick, raising the dead, preaching and writing by inspiration, and other types of miracles.

However, in contrast, even though the disciples who were chosen to help with the Apostles' work were *full* of the Holy Spirit, they had received only the gift — *the indwelling* — of the Spirit as promised in Acts 2:38. This gift did not empower the receivers to perform miracles because Acts 5:12 shows that only the Apostles were doing any miracles at that time.

What measure of the Spirit were these chosen disciples to receive? After the selection, the record says that they were **“set before the Apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them”** (Acts 6:6). So what was this? This was the *laying-on-of-hands measure* of the Holy Spirit. It was *the Apostles* who laid their hands on the men and, therefore, ***only the Apostles had the power to administer this measure of the Spirit.***

But what were these seven disciples able to do afterwards? As we read on, we are told that **“Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people”** (Acts 6:8). What about the others? They were able to do likewise, as we read in chapter 8, but please keep in mind that before the Apostles laid their hands on them they could not do these things.

Although the *laying-on-of-hands measure* of the Holy Spirit enabled these seven disciples to do miracles, they could not pass this power on to others. For example, Philip went down to Samaria to preach Christ, **“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city”** (Acts 8:7,8).

Continuing, we read, **“Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost; (for as yet He was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost** (Acts 8:14-17).

As pointed out earlier, although the seven received the laying-on-of-the-Apostles' hands that they might have the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost, they could not pass that power on to others. Had they been able to do so, Philip — one of the seven — could have selected worthy ones among the new Christians to be blessed with super-natural power. Instead, it was necessary for two of the Apostles to travel to Samaria and to lay their hands on some of the converts to enable them to have miraculous power so that they could help with the work in that place [remember, the New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written, so new converts had to have the Spirit's guidance in their spreading of the Gospel].

Surely the Apostles laid their hands on many disciples all over the country, that is, those who were honest, sincere, and worthy to receive that special power. This enabled the cause of Christ to grow and for local congregations to come to maturity. But ***when the Apostles died, and those on whom they had laid their hands had died, the miraculous age came to an end!*** There was no longer a need for the miraculous, since by this time the New Testament had been given. Now we have a better way because all of us have the written Word of God to guide and direct us.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Why did Christ perform miracles? (John 20:30,31). He was given the Spirit “without measure”. What does that mean, regarding His power?**
- 2. _____ alone had the authority to baptize the Apostles with the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-21). What did the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” enable them to do? (Acts 2:43; John 14:26-28).**
- 3. The Apostles could give the “laying on of hands” measure of the Spirit (Acts 6:6). What did this enable the recipients to do? (Acts 6:8)**
- 4. Could the recipients of this measure give any power of the Spirit to other converts? (Acts 8:5-18).**
- 5. Could the Apostles baptize anyone with the Holy Spirit?**
- 6. When Peter was preaching to Cornelius and his household, What happened? Who caused it to happen?**
- 7. According to Acts 5:12, who was performing miracles at that point in the development of the church?**
- 8. After the seven were selected to help the Apostles in ministering to the needs of the church, according to Acts 6:8 and 8:6,7, what were they able to do?**
- 9. What were the primary reasons for the use of miraculous power — miraculous inspiration of teachers — during the first century?**
- 10. When did the miraculous age come to a natural ending? By that time, what had been completed?**

Lesson 4

Why Was Simon the Sorcerer Denied the Power of the Holy Spirit?

Continuing the account of the spreading of the Gospel in the first century, we read that Philip went down to Samaria to preach Christ to those people. But rather than to give you a gist of that story, I would prefer that we read the text to see what happened. It says, **“And the people with one accord gave heed unto these things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice,**

came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God,’ and to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also; and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

“Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John; who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

“And when Simon saw that through laying on of the Apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me also this power, *that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*’

“But Peter said unto him, ‘Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.’

“Then answered Simon, and said, ‘Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these



things which ye have spoken come upon me.’ And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans” (Acts 8:6-25).

Philip was one of the seven on whom the Apostles had laid their hands so that he might have the power of the Holy Spirit, and he was the preacher who went down to Samaria to proclaim Christ to those people. In Samaria, in addition to his preaching, he did many miracles to show that he was truly speaking God’s message, casting out evil spirits, and such like.

As a result of all of this we are told that many believed Philip’s preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and both men and women were baptized.

This good news traveled up to Jerusalem where the Apostles were at that time. They realized that these new Christians, a distance from the church in Jerusalem and without any written Scriptures to guide them in their spiritual life, needed help. Peter and John went down to Samaria, to pray for them and to lay their hands on them, so that they could receive the Holy Spirit. Then, through the inspiration of the Spirit, those who would be given the gift of “prophecy” (according to the Greek meaning, “Declaring the message of God which cannot otherwise be known, whether dealing with the past, the present, or the future”), would be miraculously enabled to edify, encourage, and comfort the Christians (1 Corinthians 14:3).

Now, a question: Why didn’t Philip bestow miraculous power on the converts? Why was it necessary for two Apostles to travel to Samaria in order to give the needed gifts? This passage shows us clearly that **only those who had been baptized in the Spirit were enabled to give miraculous power to others**. Why didn’t Philip do it? Because he couldn’t! He was not an Apostle!

Back to Samaria: Another man lived there who had quite a reputation. He was Simon the sorcerer, or the local magician. He had deceived many to the point that they thought he was a great person. Simon was only a magician, and he knew that what he was doing was not real. In contrast, he recognized genuine miracles when he saw them, and now on hearing the Gospel, confirmed by the miracles, he also wanted to obey God.

The Apostles came down and gave certain baptized believers miraculous power, but *not all who were baptized received this power*. Simon was not in the number who received the power of the Holy Spirit, but he witnessed what happened. Instead of requesting that he also be given **the gift to perform true miracles**, he asked the Apostles to give him **the power to lay hands on others to enable them to perform miracles**.

These were two entirely different measures of the Spirit: The Apostles had been baptized in the Holy Spirit by God’s outpouring. As a result, not only could they **perform all the different miracles**, they could also **give miraculous power to others**. However, those who were given this laying-on-of-hands measure of the Spirit by the Apostles could do only particular miraculous things. According to the further explanation given in 1 Corinthians 12, *individuals* were given *individual gifts*; some could speak in another language, some could prophesy, some could do miraculous healing. In this way, the church as a whole was fully equipped, but the Christians were also interdependent, needing the input of each other’s gifts.

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to

another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

What Simon wanted was the ability to give miraculous power to others, and he offered money to the Apostles. Perhaps he was so accustomed to deceit and bribery that he automatically attempted it in this new situation. Having become great in the eyes of the people through his sorcery or magic tricks, he no doubt thought that if he had the power of the Holy Spirit he could create a host of his own miracle-working followers and would really be a big man.

This is precisely why only the Apostles were given the power to pass gifts on to others. Had others been able to do that, some would have been tempted to offer it for a bribe or to give it to their relatives and friends, those who might not even know the significance of it. Of course, man cannot command or deceive God, so none of this corruption would have been allowed.

Simon’s attempted bribe did not work. Peter simply responded by saying, **“Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money”** (Acts 8:20). In this way Peter explained to him that he completely misunderstood how all of this worked, that certainly the gift of God could not be bought with money. He then rebuked him, pointing out that his heart was not right before God, that he needed to repent of his wickedness and pray to God that his thoughts might be forgiven. Peter concluded, **“For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity”** (Acts 8:23). In other words, Simon had gone about as low as he could go. He was completely wrong.

Peter was able to say these things because Simon had heard the Gospel and had obeyed it. That is, as a Christian, a member of the church, he had sinned, but it would not be necessary for him to go through the acts of obeying the Gospel again and being baptized. Being a child of God already, he simply needed to repent of his sins and pray to God that he might be forgiven. To the credit of Simon, he did not resent Peter’s rebuke by trying to justify what he had done, but rather he said, **“Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me”** (Acts 8:24).

With that, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem and Philip went elsewhere. But what about Simon? We would have to assume that since Peter rebuked him, telling him to repent and to pray to God for forgiveness, and since Simon responded by acknowledging his sin, asking Peter to pray for him, that he indeed was restored to his first love and now he would once again be considered a faithful Christian.

Does that mean that the Apostles then laid their hands on Simon, that he might have the power to do miracles? No, there is no indication of that, and for three reasons:

- As had been the case in Jerusalem where the seven had the hands of the Apostles laid on them, yet others did not, we see that **not everyone who had been baptized in Samaria was given miraculous power.**
- In Simon’s case, because he was widely known for his false “miracles”, done through sorcery, **there would have been the danger that people would have heard of what he was doing now as a Christian and would have attributed that power either to Simon himself, or to whatever he might have claimed as his source in doing his witchcraft;** this would also have brought the church, itself, into that fellowship of sorcery, in the minds of onlookers.
- To have received the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit might have proven to be **too great a temptation to misuse that power.** As someone has wisely said, “A man might be forgiven for robbing a bank, if he has repented of his sin, but you wouldn’t want to turn around and make him a

teller at that bank; that is, one who is in charge of handling money there.”

Receiving the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with one's salvation, but certain of the Lord's people were chosen to be given these gifts so that they could render a greater service to the Lord's cause in that day. Today we do not have to lean on such miraculous things since we have the New Testament to reveal God's will to us and to all mankind as we go forth to proclaim it to a lost world.

Discussion Questions

1. When Philip made converts in Samaria, what was the result of their baptism? (Acts 2:38) 1. the _____ of their sins; 2. they received the gift of the _____.
2. Were they *baptized* with the Holy Spirit?
3. Did Philip lay hands on certain ones to give them miraculous gifts?
4. According to Acts 8, who came to Samaria, and for what purpose?
5. Why did Philip not enable the new converts to do miracles?
6. What specific gift did Simon the sorcerer want?
7. Was Simon a true convert? What was his response to Peter's rebuke?
8. How do we know that not every convert in Samaria was given miraculous power?
9. What is the logical reason, considering Simon's background, that he was not selected to receive miraculous power?
10. Why do we not need miracles today?

Lesson 5

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

We have studied about baptism of the Holy Spirit and the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit, and now we come to the *gift of the Holy Spirit*, which is promised to all Christians.

While the Apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit, and a chosen number of the disciples received the laying-on-of-hands measure as administered by the Apostles, all others who have obeyed the Lord — including all of those up to our time and even up to the time the Lord returns — have received the “gift of the Holy Spirit”.

When we turn to Acts 2 we have the record telling us how the Apostles were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, a Jewish feast day, at a time when Jews had come together from all parts of the world. It was at this time that the Holy Spirit of God came upon the Apostles, and — being baptized by the Holy Spirit — they began to speak in other tongues, or other languages, actually in the languages of the people who were assembled there on that day. This was followed by Peter and the Apostles preaching Christ as the resurrected Lord to a great throng of people. Continuing, the record says, **“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”** (Acts 2:37,38).

In these verses we see that those who became believers in the Lord repented of their sins, were baptized for the remission of their sins, and that they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. The *gift of the Holy Spirit* is to be distinguished from the *baptism of the Holy Spirit* and the *giving of the Spirit through the laying-on-of-hands* as administered by the Apostles. When reading about these in the Scriptures, each one can be seen to be different from the other, according to the context in which it is found. For example, in Acts 2:1-4 we can see clearly that the Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 6 and Acts 8 we have the Apostles laying their hands on certain of the disciples that they might have the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. However, in Acts 2:38 the gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to *all* who would obey the Lord, in order that they might have the remission of their sins and a new fellowship with God as His children.

Again, in Acts 6 we can see that the seven chosen from among the disciples had not received the *baptism of the Holy Spirit* or else there would have been no need for them to have received miraculous power through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands. Yet, it is said that they were good men of honest report, *that they were full of the Holy Spirit*, and wisdom. What does it mean when it says that they were **“full of the Holy Spirit”**? For one thing, it did not mean that they had



the power to do miracles, speak in other languages, and such like. Rather, it meant that they simply had received the non-miraculous measure of the Spirit. When did they receive it? When they obeyed God and had the remission of their sins, according to Acts 2:38. That is the same non-miraculous measure of the Spirit that every person receives when he obeys the Lord to be saved from his sins. In other words, that is the measure of the Spirit that the Lord gives today when one obeys him.

When Peter and the other Apostles were brought before the council in Jerusalem to explain why they were continuing to preach when they had been commanded not to do so, they explained to the High Priest and those with him, **“We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him”** (Acts 5:29-32).

While it might be said that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit were given to selected ones of those who obeyed God, certainly *the gift* of the Holy Spirit — the non-miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit — was also given, and continues to be given, to all those who obey God. You can see here that it is the Holy Spirit Himself who is given to the obedient, and if that is so, then **the Holy Spirit Himself must dwell in the Christian.**

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians, **“Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another”** (1 Thessalonians 4:1-9).

In this setting Paul is encouraging these Christians to remain pure and clean and to have proper respect and love for one another since they belonged to God and the Holy Spirit had been given to them. In the context, it appears that Paul is speaking to all Christians in general, and in doing so he says that God had given them the Holy Spirit.

Paul said to the Christians at Corinth, **“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”** (1 Corinthians 3:16,17).

Again, he said, **“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s”** (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

Paul was clearly saying that our bodies are the temple of the Spirit, but how can He live in a Christian in a non-miraculous way? In the same way that Christ dwells in us (Colossians 1:27), and God dwells in us (Ephesians 4:6), and of course we dwell in Christ, and in God (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27).

(Romans 8:6)

... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man... (Ephesians 3:16)

... one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:6).

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His (Romans 8:9).

There are those who deny a literal “indwelling” of the Spirit, saying that He indwells Christians only *representatively* through the Scriptures. Their logic is that the Bible was inspired by the Spirit, so **He dwells in us through the Word**. There are several problems with this doctrine, beyond the fact that when they read verses saying that the Spirit dwells in us, as in Romans 8:11, they are forced to parenthetically insert “through the word” in order to make it read like their belief says: **“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you [through the word], He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you [through the word].** Doesn’t Revelation 22:18 have something to say about “adding to the word”? **“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book....”**

Beyond that problem, there is the fact that when Peter preached, saying that those who repented and were baptized would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, *the New Testament had not yet been written!* How could the 3000 on that day receive something that would not be completed for decades, if the “gift” of indwelling was *the Scriptures*, not *the Spirit, Himself?*

And then there is the problem that people living under the Old Testament portion of the Scriptures were never described as being given the **“gift of the Holy Spirit”**. They had God’s word dwelling in them. Why is it never said that the Holy Spirit was “indwelling” the nation of Israel?

And, finally, humans imbibe various amounts of Scripture throughout their lives. If the “indwelling” is only as they have the Scriptures in their hearts, do some have 20%, others 35% of the Spirit — and what about those who have even memorized large portions of Scripture and yet were never baptized correctly according to the specifications in Acts 2:38? They may actually have more of the literal Scripture in their heads than do many who are part of the Family of God, so do they have more of the Spirit dwelling in them even though they never complied with what God required a person to do to be given **“the gift of the Holy Spirit”** in the first place?

Was the “Gift of the Holy Spirit” Miraculous?

In the absence of a careful study of the Scriptures, most people assume that anything that has any connection with the Holy Spirit has to be miraculous. For instance, they think that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit would enable their recipients to do “miraculous things”, and they are right. As we have seen in our study so far, both the Apostles and those on whom they laid their hands had the power to do miracles. No one living today can honestly claim such power, though, since the Scriptures clearly show that the Apostles and Cornelius and his household were the only ones to receive that measure of the Holy Spirit, and they have been dead hundreds of years.

There are many today who believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit spoken of in Acts 2:38 was also a miraculous measure of the Spirit. It is true that even the baptism of the Holy Spirit was

referred to as *a gift*, as in the case of Cornelius and his household. Let us note, though, that Peter not only referred to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as being a gift in relation to Cornelius and his household, but he also referred to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as being a gift in relation to the Apostles receiving that same baptism. He said, **“Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I, that I could withstand God?”** (Acts 11:17). Peter was showing that the Lord was teaching them, by giving the baptism of the Spirit to Cornelius and his household, that the Gentiles had been accepted of God as well as the Jews.

Yes, the baptism of the Holy Spirit was a gift, and so was the laying-on-of-the-Apostles’-hands measure of the Spirit, but “the gift” referred to in Acts 2:38 was *another* gift. In this case, it was a non-miraculous measure. How do we know this to be true? By reading the context to see whether or not those who received that gift were able as a result to perform miracles and to speak in other languages.

Keep in mind that several thousand had obeyed God and therefore had received *the gift of the Holy Spirit* by the time we come to Acts 6, where the Apostles laid their hands on seven chosen disciples that they might have the miraculous power of the Spirit. This means that if “the gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38 was a miraculous gift, giving its recipients the ability to perform miracles, why did seven have to be chosen later to be given special powers by the Apostles?

Please note, too, that the Apostles stipulated that seven men be chosen from *among the disciples*, and one of the specific requirements was that they must be “full of the Holy Spirit”. If being *full of the Holy Spirit* meant that they already had miraculous power, then there would have been no need for the Apostles to give any special gift by laying their hands on them! Obviously, being “full of the Holy Spirit” did not equate to having miraculous power. So what was meant by the expression? It simply meant that the Holy Spirit had been given to them because they were among the 3000 who had obeyed the Lord in baptism.

There are any number of references in the Scriptures that tell us that those who obey God receive the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit dwells in our body, which is the temple of God, that God dwells in us, that Christ dwells in us, etc. Now, there is nothing supernatural about the indwelling, that is, nothing of a miraculous nature. How is one born again? How does the blood of Christ wash away our sins? How does the grace of God save? How does faith operate in our hearts? There are some who see the miraculous in all of these things, but they are not miraculous; rather they are done according to the spiritual laws God has set in motion.

The same people would call physical birth miraculous, or escaping death in a car accident, getting through an operation, or overcoming a dreaded disease. There is nothing miraculous in any of these things. God set into order physical and spiritual laws, and events are governed by those laws. Therefore, children are not born miraculously, but through the natural laws of child birth, and the same is true with all other physical things.

In the spiritual realm, Christ did perform miracles, and so did the Apostles and a chosen number of disciples who were given the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, for a specific time and for specific purposes — to prove that the spokesperson and his message were from God. However, with the completion of the revelation of the word of God, the miraculous age came to an end.

To the other extreme, some oppose the idea of God’s interaction with events in this world to the extent that they deny altogether that the Holy Spirit is doing *any* work today. In other words, they would frown on the idea that He actually dwells in the Christian, or that God and Christ live in the Christian. **They would reduce prayer and the providence of God to figures of speech, not**

real promises. They would also depict any one who believes that the Spirit dwells in the Christian as being *charismatic* or *Pentecostal*. Those people are mistaken, and they are denying plain wording in the Scriptures. **Their beliefs are not based on truth but are a reaction to false doctrine, and that reaction devolves into an equally false doctrine itself!** They could be described as “... **having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!**” (2 Timothy 3:5).

While the gift of the Holy Spirit is not miraculous, the Holy Spirit *is* given to each one who obeys God. The Christian therefore receives the Spirit as the earnest, or down payment, or proof, of his salvation:

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:21,22).

Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 5:5).

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:14).

We therefore believe we are in the Lord and the Lord is in us. We believe God hears and answers prayers and He works mightily through providence. At the same time we believe that the work of the Spirit, in answer to prayer, through providence, and all that is sacred and divine, is done today in harmony and in keeping with the Spirit’s word — or the word of God — as contained in the New Testament. Nothing, absolutely nothing, in our lives and in the things we teach, can contradict one word that is written in the Scriptures. God works today, and the Spirit lives within us, but it is within the framework of what is said in His word.

Discussion Questions

1. What is promised to all Christians?
2. From the previous lessons, explain the differences in the “measures” of the Holy Spirit.
3. Reading Acts 6, the Apostles instructed the Christians to choose men of _____ and _____ of the _____, to aid in the work of caring for the church.
4. Did these seven men have “the Holy Spirit”?
5. After the Apostles prayed and laid hands on them, what happened? (Acts 6:8).
6. First Thessalonians 4:1-9 urges Christians to be pure because God has given “_____.”
7. Our bodies are called the _____ (Greek: Naos) of the _____, because “_____” (1 Corinthians 3:16,17).
8. Quote Ephesians 3:16; Romans 8:9; what do these verses say about the Holy Spirit?
9. What has to be parenthetically added to the Scripture if we limit the “indwelling” of the Spirit to be only “through the word”?
10. What does 2 Corinthians 1:21,22 say about the Holy Spirit?

Lesson 6

Spiritual Gifts

We have already studied lessons on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the laying-on-of-hands measure of the Holy Spirit. We have also talked about the gift of the Holy Spirit as being a non-miraculous measure in nature. In discussing the *gifts* of the Spirit, we are thinking in terms of the miraculous gifts that came through the miraculous measures of the Holy Spirit.

Actually, only the Apostles and those on whom they laid their hands had spiritual gifts of a miraculous nature, and only the Apostles had the power to bestow miraculous gifts on others. Paul, being an Apostle, wrote his Roman brethren, **“For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift to the end ye may be established”** (Romans 1:11). In other words, he wanted to visit them, to lay his hands on some of them that they might have various miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. That would enable them to strengthen the work there and to help spread the cause of Christ, because at that time the New Testament had not been fully written, so the young church in Rome lacked the spiritual guidance of those who could preach and teach through the inspiration of the Spirit.

Different gifts served different purposes. Paul said, **“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy** [the word does not necessarily mean “foretelling future events”; in this case it carried the idea of preaching and teaching the word of God by the guidance of the Spirit.] **For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied, for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification”** (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).

Paul was showing here that the gift of prophesying was greater than other gifts because, through this, God’s will was being revealed. While speaking in languages was important, it was useful only as the tool for revealing to the audience the prophesying or teaching that was being done. From this text we can see that there were times when one had a particular spiritual gift — perhaps Aramaic was a person’s mother tongue, but he was given the gift to speak Greek without studying it. That gift would be priceless in the Greek-speaking world. However in fleeing from persecution, if he went to Persia he would need someone to interpret into the Persian language. If no such person was present, he should not begin to preach a sermon in Greek, which none of the congregation could understand.



Paul dealt with this problem, **“If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues** [various ones in the church having miraculous gifts to speak in different languages, and all verbalizing some spiritual lesson in the language they had been given], **and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy** [preach the Gospel], **and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.**

“How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue [a language not common to the people of that area], **let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.** [In Pentecostal churches today, the claim is made that the reference to “tongues” means a heavenly language that only God understands; this passage says that if no one was present who could interpret — so it was *a known language* — the person must not begin to speak. **Such Pentecostal outbreaks are a violation of the clear wording of this Scripture.] Let the prophets** [those given a message of doctrine or exhortation by inspiration of the Spirit] **speak two or three, and let the other judge. If anything be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints”** (1 Corinthians 14:23-33).

Why would the Spirit inspire some in the assembly of the church to speak up with a message of Truth? So that congregations would not devolve into a one- or two-man domination; several were inspired to contribute to the lessons being taught so that the Christians would be interdependent, all having part in the teaching and the work of the church.

Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, **“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: you know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.**

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:1-11).

In the foregoing scripture we can clearly see that Paul is talking about **miraculous gifts of the Spirit**. He speaks of the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues or languages, and the interpretation of tongues or languages. It should also be pointed out that individual Christians were given individual gifts, according to the Spirit’s discerning of the hearts and abilities of the recipients. As we learned previously, the record of Simon the sorcerer — though a baptized believer — becomes evidence that **not every Christian was given one of these special gifts.**

A careful analysis of these verses shows that:

- Through the “laying-on-of-the-hands” measure of the Spirit, the recipient did not receive power to do whatever miracle needed to be done at the time. Instead, one person was given the miraculous ability to speak a particular language; another was given the ability to interpret that language; another was given the inspiration to preach God’s message; another had inspired wisdom, another inspired faith, another the power of healing, another the working of other miracles.
- In all of this Paul was simply dealing with the problem of various disciples having different gifts and teaching them how to use them so they and others would be benefitted. In other words, if there was someone in the meeting who was speaking in an unknown tongue, or a language unknown to people in the assembly, and no one was there with the spiritual gift to interpret, it would be better for the first man to remain silent. Spiritual gifts were to be used to teach and to edify, not to cause confusion.
- The purpose of all of these gifts was to confirm the Word, to make believers, and to edify the church. We must stress again that at this time the people did not have the New Testament in written form, so it was necessary to lean on these props until the writing of the Word could be completed. Even the miracles that Jesus did were to confirm the Word. We read, **“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name”** (John 20:30,31). After the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection, and His return to the Father in Heaven, the record says concerning the Apostles, **“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord confirming the word with signs following. Amen”** (Mark 16:20).

The Hebrew writer said, **“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?”** (Hebrews 2:1-4).

Finally, Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, **“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ”** (Ephesians 4:7). Going on, he says concerning spiritual gifts, **“And He gave some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from who the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”** (Ephesians 4:11-16).

So these special gifts of the Spirit were temporary, for the purpose of helping the church to grow and spread prior to the giving of the New Testament in written form. Once the New Testament came these miraculous gifts ceased.

Discussion Questions

1. In discussing “gifts of the Spirit”, we are thinking in terms of the _____ that came through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands.
2. A clarification: Acts 2:38 promised baptized believers “the gift of the Holy Spirit”, or the Spirit as a gift. The spiritual gifts (“gifts *of* the Spirit”) enumerated in 1 Corinthians 12:1-5 were miraculous gifts bestowed only through prayer and the laying on of the Apostles’ hands.
3. List 8 of these miraculous gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11).
4. Paul said to the Roman church that he wanted to come to see them so that he could give them some spiritual gifts. This tells us that no _____ was involved in the beginning of the church there.
5. What did Paul say was the purpose of the gifts? “_____ that _____” (Romans 1:1).
6. Selected ones in a congregation had a miraculous gift. Not all Christians had a special gift. True or False
7. How did this diversity of gifts among members edify and stabilize the congregation?
8. Why were the gifts necessary? What was not yet available for the guidance of the churches?
9. The gifts, according to Ephesians 4:11-16 were *until* “we all come in the _____ of the _____, and of the Son of God.”
10. When did the miraculous gifts cease?

Lesson 7

Miraculous Signs: *First Century or Today?*

Casting Out Evil Spirits

There are many in the world today who believe that devils, demons, or evil spirits possess human beings. They also believe that these spirits enter people without their permission and control their lives. Finally, they believe that it is only with the help of a believer in Christ who can work miracles that these invading spirits can be cast out. Does the Bible teach this?

We know that in the days of Christ and the Apostles demon possession did occur. Christ Himself cast out evil spirits on several occasions. For example, we have this story of Jesus casting out such a spirit:

“And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes. And when He was come out of the ship, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains: because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chains had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.

“But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped Him. And cried with a loud voice, and said, ‘What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.’ For He said unto him, ‘Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.’ And He asked him, ‘What is thy name?’ And he answered, saying, ‘My name is Legion: for we are many.’ And he besought Him, saying, ‘Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.’ And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea (they were about two thousand), and were choked in the sea.

“And they that fed the swine fled, and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they came to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray Him to depart out of their coasts.

“And when He was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed Him that he might be with Him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him,



‘Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.’ And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel” (Mark 5:1-20).

Of course this was just one occasion in which Jesus cast out evil spirits. The Apostles, having been baptized with the Holy Spirit, also had the power to cast out devils (Mark 16:17). Even those that the Apostles laid their hands on, that they might have the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit, could cast out evil spirits. For example, when Philip went down to Samaria to preach to the people, the record says, **“And people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed”** (Acts 8:6,7). It seems that in the days of Christ and the Apostles, God allowed the devil some special freedom to enter into certain people until Christ, the Apostles, or those on whom the Apostles had laid their hands, could come and cast him out. This proved that the Lord had power over Satan.

But there were those who accused Christ of casting Satan out by the power of Beelzebub — Satan, himself. The record says, **“Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Is not this the son of David?’ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.’”**

“And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, ‘Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:22-30).

The fact is, Jesus cast out devils by the power of God, and so did the Apostles and those on whom they laid their hands. If they had been working through the power of Satan, then naturally they would not have cast him out. Please keep this in mind as we consider events in our day.

Now when the miraculous age passed away with the death of the Apostles and those on whom they had laid their hands, the devil was no longer permitted to enter people *against their will*. A just God could not allow defenseless people to be controlled by Satan when they were not choosing to serve him, and in an age when miracles are no longer providing any way of escape, if Satan had that power.

This means there are no devils, demons, or evil spirits living in people today as in the days of Christ and the Apostles. There are those who claim that the devil possesses people now, and there are those who say that they have the power to cast out devils. But who are these people? Are they of God? **Check them out** and you will see that they are of religions that we do not read about in the Bible. They are preachers who do not even profess to be members of the Lord’s church, they do not wear the Lord’s name, and they teach things contrary to the Scriptures. In other words, from all of their markings, they appear to be of Satan, themselves! As Jesus said, how can Satan cast out Satan?

No, people are not possessed by the devil today as they were in the days of Christ and the Apostles. The devil is in the majority of the people, not *miraculously* but because *they have*

allowed him to come in, and to stay in them, and to influence them for evil — but he is not there without their consent. Furthermore, **they can personally rid themselves of the devil any time they choose to repent of their sins and to obey God.**

Those who are ignorant of God's word and have been deceived by false teachers are often taught by religious leaders that the Devil can possess people today against their will. Sometimes those who have a physical handicap or disease, or those who are mentally ill, are said to have an evil spirit in them, but this is not true. These are preachers and "witch doctors" who prey on ignorance and superstition. Their goal is to convince listeners that devils live in people today and that **for a price they can cast them out.** Guess who gets "the price"?! It is obvious that power and money are the motives behind these spiritual lies.

We should fear the devil and all of his evil ways and influences, but we should always remember that he cannot come into our lives unless we allow him in. Again, **we can rid ourselves of him anytime we want to do so by simply believing in the Lord, repenting of our sins, confessing Christ to be the Son of God, and by being baptized for the remission of our sins, as is clearly stated in Acts 2:38.** Through our obedience we replace the devil with Christ as being the Lord of our lives.

Miraculous Healing

It is commonly taught among a large number of believers in Christ that miracles are still being performed. Preachers and promoters of this type of thing are usually very emotional, listing the miracles that Christ did, and the different Scriptures that have anything to say about the miraculous. They also refer to verses like Hebrews 13:8 where it says, **"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever."** That is true, but those words within themselves do not mean that Jesus is performing miracles today. The first man and woman were created by a miracle, and Christ took part in that creation, according to Genesis 1:26,27 — but He is not creating new people today from the dust. So it is not enough just to quote some verse of scripture out of context and then use that to try to imply it is teaching a certain thing just because we want it to teach that. Rather, we must take a look at miracles and see who performed them, why they were performed, and if it is the Lord's intention and promise that they be done today.

Again, those who teach that miracles are for people of our time make an emotional appeal to the sick, the crippled, the dying, and others who believe that a miracle is perhaps their only way to survive or to be helped. Many preachers use this approach to become famous and rich. Their preaching is almost altogether on the Holy Spirit and on the miracles that Jesus did. Then they promise that all the sick and afflicted today can have a miracle in their lives if they will only believe in Jesus. Yet, the hospitals continue to be filled with the sick, operations continue to be performed, millions of dollars are spent on medicine to take care of man's ills, and people continue to die. If miracles were still being performed as they were in Jesus' day, all of this would change radically.

It is a fact that not all of the sickness, diseases, ills, and deaths of Jesus' day ended as a result of the miracles He did. We must remember that He did not come to heal all of these maladies throughout the world. He did not come to heal all of the cripples, to give sight to all who were blind, to give hearing to all of the deaf, and to raise all of the dead. He performed miracles, not just to heal people, but **for the purpose of convincing them that He was sent by God and that He truly was the Son of God.** He came to seek and to save the lost, to save the souls of men (Luke 19:10)!

If you will read through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John you will see again and again that the emphasis was on the people believing, after **seeing the miracles** He did. For instance, we read, **"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in His**

name when they saw the miracles which He did” (John 2:23). Later John wrote, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name” (John 20:30,31).

So Jesus performed miracles *to make believers*. Those who were healed, etc., were physically benefited, it is true, but that was not the primary purpose for the healing. Again, the *real* purpose was to make believers of those who witnessed the miracles. Faith healers of today leave the impression that the Lord’s purpose for healing people was simply to make them well. According to the things they advocate, there should be no sick people and no one should ever die, and if they died, they could be raised up again. But the strange thing is, their claims prove to be false, and things continue as always.

I want to show you where these so-called healers miss some wonderful opportunities. For example, back when the Prime Minister of India was assassinated, wouldn’t it have been wonderful if one of these healers had raised him from the dead? Years ago when John F. Kennedy, President of the United States of America, was killed, why didn’t someone like Oral Roberts go and pray over his body and raise him from the dead?

Of course there have been many other such opportunities that “faith healers” have passed up. But why talk about these world figures? Because if *they* could be raised, just think of the publicity it would bring in favor of miracles. People everywhere would become believers in Christ because of such miracles. But do you know why they did not attempt to raise these people from the dead? **Simply because they could not!** Of course they would use all kinds of excuses. They would say that it is not they who do these miracles, but it is Christ. They would say that it would be tempting the Lord to ask him to raise any particular person from the dead, but if the Lord was working through them, and if it would be a means of making believers all over the world, then why would that be tempting Him? And why have these famous “faith healers” not been able to raise their own family members from the dead, and why do they themselves die in old age and from disease? Their lying claims are evident when we look at the sickness and death in their own lives.

Oh yes, they will claim to heal backaches, heartaches, headaches, fevers, and lots of invisible things like that, but doctors will tell you that most of man’s ills are “in his head” and can be “healed” if the individuals believe strongly enough in the person who claims he can heal them. But we are waiting for these people to restore some legs, arms, give sight to the blind, and such like. When they begin to do these things, more people would certainly take note of what they are saying. But these wonders are beyond their fraudulent powers.

What is a miracle? Someone has defined it as being that which is done contrary to the law of nature, like making something from nothing, or restoring a leg or arm that has been lost, or raising the dead, and many other such things. A miracle is not simply something that we don’t understand. We don’t understand how many things work, but they work according to the law of nature, or through some scheme or pattern that man has been able to devise.

Christ, the Apostles, and those on whom they laid their hands, were the only ones in the New Testament who were able to perform miracles. They did so, as we have pointed out, to make believers. This was before the New Testament had been given in written form. After it was completed and given to man, the miraculous age ended. We no longer need miracles to produce faith in our hearts. Paul said, **“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”** (Romans 10:17). If you will not believe what the Lord has said in His word, then you would not believe even if you saw a miracle.

It is not that the Lord is no longer *able* to perform miracles; it is not that He is powerless and that His people are without power. The fact is, He and His people have as much power as ever, but God has simply chosen a different way — actually **a better way** — of doing things.

What way could be better, you might ask. I'll tell you: there are Hindu "holy men" who claim to do miracles; there are "witch doctors" who claim to cast out demons; there are Pentecostal denominational preachers who claim to do miracles. Now are all of these claims true? If you doubt them, how can you prove or disprove them? Can you go to India to sit at the feet of the Hindu teacher? Can you go "behind the scenes" to check the claims of the preacher? No, we cannot chase around the world, verifying or exposing truth and error. How can we know whether or not to believe a teacher? **By listening to his words and comparing them to the Scriptures.** When everything these men are teaching is contradictory to God's word, we can KNOW that they are not doing miracles through the power of our Lord! **God's "better way" to be convinced of truth is through the written inspired Word He has given to the world!**

Miracles, signs, and wonders were only temporary. We do not have to depend on them today since we now have the word of God to read, study, believe, and obey. As we do so, the Lord saves us and blesses us. For what more could we ask?

Speaking in Tongues

Mainly among the Pentecostal and charismatic groups, but also among some of the other religious groups, there is the belief that God's people today receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and, as a sign of that, the recipients speak in "tongues". Their idea of speaking in tongues is making some unrecognizable sounds which, in defense, they refer to those sounds as being a heavenly language that only God understands. Sometimes when one supposedly has received the Holy Spirit, but is still "unable" to speak in these sounds, they admit to imitating what they hear others saying in order to be accepted. This is not something I have made up to be critical of these people, but it is what some of them have told us after seeing the error of their way and leaving such a movement.

Let us now go to the Scriptures and see what the Bible teaches on this subject. Christ promised that after His departure He would send the Holy Spirit to be with the Apostles (John 14:26). When the Apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit, one of the signs was that they began to speak in other tongues, **"as the Spirit gave them utterance"** (Acts 2:1-4). The record goes on the say, **"And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language"** (Acts 2:5,6).

As the story continues, people from many countries were there, and were amazed as well as confused. They concluded that since these were only poor, uneducated Galileans who were speaking these languages, they must be drunk [What a stupid explanation, on their part!]. But Peter explained that they were not drunk as the crowd had supposed, since it was early in the morning, but that which was happening was according to what Joel had prophesied in the long ago, that in the last days *the Lord would pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh* (Acts 2:7-17).

The Apostles, as pointed out, were able to speak in other languages as a result of having the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Lord knew they would be preaching the Gospel to many people of many different languages in different parts of the world in the decades to come, so He gave them the miraculous ability to speak in the local language regardless of where they were, without having to learn all of those languages or to depend on translators. This would be both a means of convincing people that they had been sent by God to proclaim His will, and would also enable the Apostles/disciples to move quickly in the spreading of the Gospel.

But what about the “unknown” tongue? It was simply that! Because of persecution, there was a great deal of moving from place to place by Christians. Even though a man had the miraculous gift to speak in a certain language he had not studied, if he was assembling with a church in which no one spoke that language, he was forbidden to “show off” his gift by speaking what would sound like gibberish, of no profit to his hearers. If a translator was there who could speak that language, and could translate it, then the individual could speak; otherwise, he was told to remain quiet.

Paul said, **“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue”** (1 Corinthians 14:22). We have already shown that one of the reasons for the Apostles and those on whom they laid their hands to be able to speak in tongues or other languages, was to convince hearers that they had been sent by God, and therefore to make believers of them. However, when you go into a modern-day service where “tongues” are supposedly being spoken, it is made up of people who are already “believers”. Even in this, these people are not following the scriptural procedure.

But what about those who received the ordinary measure of the Holy Spirit, or the non-miraculous measure as spoken of in Acts 2:38? Could they speak in other languages? No, they could not, and there is no example to be found in the New Testament where they were ever able to do so. Furthermore, since there are no Apostles today, and those on whom they laid their hands have died, there is no one today who can miraculously speak in other languages as was done in the days of the Apostles. Some claim they can do this, but they only speak in some jibber-jabberish which no one can understand. When they go into other parts of the world where other languages are spoken, they must either take time to study that language to be able to speak it, or they must get someone to translate for them. That should prove they do not have the baptism of the Holy Spirit and therefore they are unable to speak in tongues as the Apostles did in their day.

Finally, Paul said the day would come when tongues would cease. That is, the day would come when miraculously speaking in languages would come to an end. When would that be? When the New Testament was finally given to man in completed form. Paul said, **“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away”** (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). What is the “perfect” that he speaks about here? James calls it **the perfect law of liberty**, which is the New Testament, because **there is no other perfect thing existing in this world**. Miracles, tongues, and such like, were only helps or props to assist man until the New Testament could be given, but once the New Testament came, there was no longer a need for these other things.

Discussion Questions

1. What do some believe today about “demon possession”? Were there cases of “demon possession” during the time of Christ and the Apostles?
2. The power of Christ and the Apostles to cast out demons proved what?
3. Skeptics accused the Lord of _____ out _____ by the power of _____ (Matthew 12:22-30).
4. Would a just God allow defenseless people to be controlled by Satan, against their will, during a time when miracles are no longer worked?
5. Those who claim that satan possesses people today are the same people who claim to be able to do what?
6. How can we know that these people are not doing anything by God’s power?
7. We should _____ the devil and all of his _____, but we should always remember what?
8. If modern-day “faith healers” raised some world-renowned person from the dead, what effect would that miracle have on the world? They claim to be able to raise the dead; why don’t they do that?
9. When a “faith healer” goes to a country where another language is spoken, can he miraculously speak that language?
10. According to 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, the time would come when miraculous works would end. When did that happen? What is the only “perfect” *thing* in the world today?

Lesson 8

How Does God Speak to Man Today?

Numerous people believe that God speaks directly to man today, separate and apart from the written word. They commonly say that God spoke to them and told them to do so-and-so, or that the Lord revealed to them that such-and-such was about to happen. God doesn't speak to me that way — does He speak to you in that manner? If He speaks to one person directly to reveal some truth, and doesn't speak to others, wouldn't that make God a respecter of persons? Let us see what the Bible says.

It is true that God has spoken at different times in different ways. In the beginning, He spoke directly to the patriarchs or to the fathers of the households and they told their families what God had said. Later God spoke to the prophets and then they passed on that information to the people. Finally, God spoke through His Son, Christ Jesus. The Hebrew writer had all of this in mind when he said, **“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds”** (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Peter declared, **“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For we received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’ And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”** (2 Peter 1:16-21).

First, notice that Peter was referring to the time when the Lord was transfigured before them and they heard a voice from heaven, which said, **“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him”** (Matthew 17:5). John wrote of Christ as being the Word, the one who had come to deliver God's message. We read, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God”** (John 1:1,2). Later he said, **“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples,**



which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (John 20:30,31).

Second, the passage from 2 Peter 1:21 states that *holy men of old spake* as they were *moved by the Holy Spirit*. Paul tells us, **"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"** (2 Timothy 3:16,17). When Paul refers to the Scriptures being inspired, he is talking about *the Holy Spirit directing that certain ones write down the word*. He guided them, or directed them, in what they wrote. It is verbally inspired. It is God's word, not man's word; therefore, it completely furnishes man to every good work. God knew what He wanted to say to man, and He said it, and the Holy Spirit inspired or directed its writing. Peter again wrote, **"According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue"** (2 Peter 1:3). Notice that the Lord has given unto us *all things that pertain to life and godliness*. How has He done that? Through His word.

The Apostles were given the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and then they laid their hands on chosen disciples that they might have the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit. This was done to guide and direct them into all the truth, since up to this time the New Testament had not been completed and given to man. Paul said when that which was perfect was come — referring to the New Testament — then miraculous helps would cease. Finally, the word was given in completed form, and James declared, **"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed"** (James 1:25). He also said, **"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves"** (James 1:22).

Christ said that this word would never pass away. Hear Him, **"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away"** (Matthew 24:35). Then Peter said, **"But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you"** (1 Peter 1:25). John wrote, **"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book"** (Revelation 22:18,19).

Concerning the Gospel Paul preached, he said, **"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"** (Galatians 1:6-9).

In all of these verses, it sounds as though the Scriptures are from God, they have been given to man in completed form, and only they are to govern our spiritual lives. Paul tells us, **"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"** (Romans 10:17). What "word of God" is he referring to? The only written word of God that we have, and that has been revealed to us in the pages of the New Testament.

Is God giving new revelation today? Is He telling some of us something He has not told the rest of us? Certainly not. If we do not have all of God's revelation, and He is still revealing

His will to man, what good is the Bible? If He is still speaking to man, then we have no way of knowing what He wants us to do, or who might be telling the truth and who might be fabricating a new “revelation”. It would be very confusing for God to tell one to do one thing and another to do something else. If the Lord forbids us to add to His word, how can we think that He would violate His own command by giving a new message of inspiration to someone?

This should convince us that God is not speaking to any person today, separate and apart from His word. But as with “miracles”, speaking in “tongues”, etc., notice that those who claim that God is speaking directly to them are contradicting one another, accusing each other of not being of God, and furthermore, they are in all kinds of man-made churches, wearing man-made names, and worshiping in ways God has not authorized. Surely if God was speaking to these people, He would not be telling them to do things that are contrary to what the New Testament teaches.

Called to Preach

There have been stories told of how some claim they were called to preach. One man said he saw in the sky these letters: G-P-C. He concluded that this meant “Go Preach Christ”. After hearing him preach a very unbiblical sermon, someone remarked that since he had been a farmer, the letters surely meant “Go Plow Corn”! Others have claimed that the Lord spoke to them and commanded them to go preach. Some have had “dreams” and others have had “visions”, all claims of miraculous events. But does God call men to preach His word? If so, does He call them in these ways?

Prior to the Lord’s return to the Father in heaven, He gave this great command, **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”** (Mark 16:15,16). Again, He said, **“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”** (Matthew 28:19,20). Notice the command: **go and preach the Gospel**. To whom? **To the whole world, even to every creature**. Who should go? **The Apostles and their converts**. That comes right on up to our day since we have been converted to the Lord, so therefore we must go and preach.

Please notice that nowhere in the New Testament do you have God’s people seeing signs in heaven or having visions or hearing a voice telling them to go and preach God’s word. Neither do you have the Lord calling anyone today in that manner. He has already commanded His people to do that work. Why would He need to visit someone personally to ask them, to command them, or to pressure and force them to preach His Gospel?

When we were sinners, out in the world, the Lord called us to come and obey Him — but *how* did He call? Through a dream or a still, small voice? No! Paul said to the Thessalonian Christians, **“Whereunto He called you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 1:14). He calls us in the same way, *through the preaching of the Gospel*, as it is proclaimed from the written word, inviting souls to come unto Him. Christ said, **“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”** (Matthew 11:28-30).

The Gospel, therefore, has been put in earthen vessels, that is, given to human beings, those who belong to the Lord, to carry it forth to the world (2 Corinthians 4:7). Paul said that even if an angel should come and preach a *different* Gospel than what he had preached, the curse of God would be upon him (Galatians 1:6-9). That is to say, the Lord has revealed His Gospel in the Scriptures. Those who obey it are to take it to others, and upon hearing it and obeying it they, too,

have been “called by the Gospel”. As a result, they too, share the responsibility of proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ.

It should be pointed out that while all are to take the Gospel to others, it must be understood that this does not mean that everyone is expected to stand in a pulpit and to preach publicly. Women are forbidden to usurp authority over men by speaking to a mixed audience. The ladies of the church can teach men and women privately, they can teach ladies groups and classes of children, but in a mixed worship assembly of adults they are to remain silent (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11). There are women preachers today in denominational groups. Every time they stand before a mixed adult group, even if they preached the truth, they would be personally disobeying God. As far as I know, 100 percent of them not only disobey God in their public preaching, but they further do a disservice to God and man by preaching error.

What about the men? Well, not all Christian men want to be public preachers, or even have the ability or training to do so. If this be the case, they should not publicly preach, but they should still make opportunities to share the Gospel in private studies. On the other hand, if one has obeyed the Gospel, is a member of the church and a faithful Christian, has the desire to preach the Gospel, has the ability to do so, and will study and prepare himself to preach, then by all means the Lord would have him to preach His word.

Again, there are those today who claim they had no ability, no knowledge of the Scriptures, but God called them to preach, and God gives them the message they are to deliver “as the Holy Spirit puts the words in their mouths”. What they are teaching is error, and it is blasphemy that they would blame the Holy Spirit for what they teach. Even if the Holy Spirit miraculously guided people today in their preaching — which He does not — He would not guide them to preach anything contrary to what is already written in the Scriptures. Listen to the preachers who claim that God has called them to preach, and listen to the things they say, supposedly being guided by the Holy Spirit, and you will see that they teach many things not found in the Scriptures, they contradict themselves, and furthermore, they are in churches we do not read about in the Bible, and they wear man-made names. How could these people represent the Lord? They do not. They may be preachers, but they are preaching error and damnation.

We should listen to John’s warning, **“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world”** (1 John 4:1). John said that many false prophets, teachers, or preachers had gone out into the world, and that is just as true today as it was then. But he said we should test these men, we should compare their preaching with the word of God. If the things they say are not taught in the Scriptures, if their doctrines do not harmonize with what the Lord has said, regardless of what they claim, they are false preachers.

John said, **“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds”** (2 John 9-11).

Yes, we need preachers today, and lots of them, those who have been called through the teaching of God’s word, and those who preach only the truth. We need men who love the Lord and the souls of men and will give their lives in spreading the cause of Christ. We don’t need hirelings, those who want to preach just to have a job, or who will preach even error if they are paid for it. Paul said to the young preacher, Timothy, **“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus**

Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of the ministry” (2 Timothy 4:1-5). We would do well to think seriously about what Paul has said here. Those who presume to break the bread of life to others will one day answer for what they have taught. We must be sure to preach only the Gospel — but we must also be sure to preach **all of the Gospel**, in clarity and in love, whether it pleases the audience or not.

Discussion Questions

1. Hebrews 1:1,2 explains that God has spoken to man in what ways?
2. The prophets and writers of the Old Testament spoke by inspiration of _____, according to 2 Peter 1:21.
3. How are people guided today? by direct messages from God, or by the written word? (James 1:22).
4. What warning is given in revelation 22:18,19 about adding to the word or subtracting from it?
5. “If any _____ preach any other _____ unto you than that ye have received, _____” (Galatians 1:6-9).
6. These verses teach what three things?
7. There are people today who claim that God is giving them special revelations. Do they contradict one another? Do they contradict Scripture? Are they members of man-made churches? Do they worship in ways not authorized by God? Would God be giving them contradictory doctrines?
8. Does God miraculously call people to go and preach today? People who make that claim invariably teach things contrary to Scripture. Would God do that?
9. We are warned not to _____ every _____ (1 John 4:1).
10. How does God judge those who teach things contrary to the doctrine of Christ? How will He judge those who are supportive of such false teachers? (2 John 9-11).

Lesson 9

The Holy Spirit in Conversion

It is important that we know *who* the Holy Spirit is and *how* He works, and *if He works in our lives today*. A good case in point is the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

Conversion, of course, has to do with a change that takes place in one's life. According to the Scriptures, conversion results when one believes in God, repents of his sins, confesses Christ to be the Son of God, and is baptized to wash away his sins. There are at least eleven cases of conversion set forth in the book of Acts, showing that all the people did the same thing in their obedience to the Lord. But what role does the Holy Spirit play in all of this?

Please go with me to John 3 and let us read and give some thought to *the new birth* as taught by Jesus. The record says, **"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, 'Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus saith unto him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?'"**

"Jesus answered, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus answered and said unto him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven'" (John 3:1-13).

Please notice the conversation that took place between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. Here was a Pharisee, a very religious man, but one who believed in Jesus. Evidently being afraid of the Jews, and what others might say, he came to Jesus by night. This man is mentioned on two other occasions, once when Joseph of Arimathea pleaded the case for Jesus, and the other time was



when Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloe, and he and Joseph took linen clothes with the spices and wrapped Jesus for His burial. But Nicodemus acknowledged his faith in Jesus when he said, **“Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”**

As the record continues, Jesus responded by telling him that he would have to be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. The kingdom or church had not been established yet, but it would soon come into existence, and the only way that one could enter the kingdom would be through a spiritual birth.

Naturally, Nicodemus thought that Christ was talking about physical birth, and so he wanted to know how a man could be born again when he was old. In response, Jesus explained the type of birth He was talking about. He was not referring to a physical birth because, unlike the Jewish nation, this new kingdom would not be made up of people being physically born into it. The birth that Jesus had in mind was a spiritual one. This spiritual birth would be brought about through a physical act, that is, being born of water. There is only one act of obedience in the Scriptures that has to do with water and that is baptism. John, we are told, baptized where there was much water (John 3:23). Christ was baptized in water (Matthew 3:13-17). Saul was told that he should arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). Also, Paul said that through baptism we enter Christ (Romans 6:3,4), and that being in Christ we are new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). This, then, was what it meant to be born of water.

In the second place, the birth that Jesus had in mind would also involve the Spirit. He said, **“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”** (John 3:5). As we have seen, being born of water obviously has reference to baptism, but what role does the Spirit play in all of this? Actually, being **“born of the water and of the Spirit”** is all tied together. You cannot do the one without the other. To understand the involvement of the Spirit here, let us go over to 1 Peter 1:22,23, and there we read, as Peter talks to Christians, **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”** That means that to be born *again* one must be born, not through corruptible seed or by physical birth, but of incorruptible seed or by the word of God. Now who gave the word? The Spirit, of course. Christ said, **“It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life”** (John 6:63). Christ then commanded that the Gospel, the word, the truth, should be taken to all the world (Mark 16:15). So when one hears that word and he becomes a believer (Romans 10:17), and he acts upon a knowledge of the word, and obeys it, the Lord saves that person. Christ said, **“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”** (Mark 16:16).

What does it mean to be born of water and of the Spirit? It just simply means that the Spirit, through the word, directs a person to believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be buried with the Lord in the waters of baptism. **Through this obedience, one is “born of water and of the Spirit”, or that he “obeys the Gospel”, or that “he obeys Christ”, that is, as the Spirit through the Scriptures directs him to do so.** In this action, both water and Spirit are involved. Does it mean the Spirit *miraculously* leads one to salvation, or that one is born of water and of the Spirit separate and apart from the word? The answer would be no. Salvation here is not through some miraculous occurrence, but it is according to God’s spiritual law that when one obeys the Lord’s teaching, he is saved. On the other hand, those who fail to obey that law cannot be saved.

Let's look at the human condition. At the time of one's physical birth, he was innocent, accepted by God, and if he died he would be among those who will enjoy eternal bliss. But when he reached the age of knowing right from wrong, he became a sinner through his wrong choices. Romans 3:23 says, **"...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."** Sin separates us from God, so that soul becomes dead spiritually in sin. **What is necessary to make him alive spiritually to God?** A new birth! 2 Corinthians 3:6 says that **the Spirit gives life!** The picture? We were dead in sin, but when we were born of water in baptism we were also born of the Spirit as new babes in the Family of God — into the church! Now, God's Holy Spirit dwells in us, creating that new spiritual life and identifying us as children of God. Notice what is explained in Romans 8:13-17:

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

The record says that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. The Lord explained to Nicodemus that we don't always understand how these spiritual things are brought about. We cannot see the wind, but we can see the results of the wind. Neither can we see the word of the Spirit as it works on the heart of an individual, producing faith that leads to obedience and life, but we can see the results of it: the convicted soul obeys the Lord, is saved, enters the Lord's kingdom, the church. This, then, is the new birth and this is the role the Spirit plays in conversion.

All physical births are the same, being based on the natural law of procreation. This is equally true with spiritual birth. God does not save one person in one way, and another person in another way. He saves all in the same way, that is, according to the law that is shown in the Scriptures, and then the new Christian is to bear fruit, bringing others to a knowledge of God.

Discussion Questions

- 1. There are those who claim that it is only by the “direct operation of the Holy Spirit” that a person’s heart can be opened to God. Does the New Testament teach this?**
- 2. What is conversion?**
- 3. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus a person must do before he can see the kingdom (church) of God?**
- 4. What is the only way by which a soul can enter the church?**
- 5. Nicodemus mistakenly thought Jesus referred to physical birth. Explain in your own words what the expression “born again” means.**
- 6. What does it mean to be born of water?
What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?**
- 7. What happens in physical birth? [new life]
What happens in spiritual birth? [souls that are dead in sin are made alive by the quickening of the Holy Spirit (John 6:63)].**
- 8. What is the incorruptible seed that grows in our hearts so that we can experience the “new birth” through baptism into Christ? (1 Peter 1:22,23).**
- 9. Second Corinthians 3:6 says what?**
- 10. When we experience that new spiritual birth, how are we to live, according to Romans 8:13-17?**

Lesson 10

“These Signs Shall Follow Them that Believe”

After Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, and just before He returned to the Father in heaven, He gathered His Apostles around Him, **“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And *these signs shall follow them that believe*; in My name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen”** (Mark 16:15-20).

There are those who believe that all Christians today, or at least some of them, can cast out devils, speak in “heavenly” tongues, handle poisonous snakes without being hurt, drink poisons without dying, and can heal the sick. They base their belief on Mark 16:17,18. But does this text say that Christians in general, and today, would have the power to do these things?

We must keep several things in mind when we talk about “the miraculous signs that would follow those who believe”.

● **First, we must remember that Jesus promised the Comforter, or the baptism of the Holy Spirit, to the Apostles only** (John 14:26; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). They, in turn, were given the power to lay their hands on select disciples that they too might have miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6; Acts 19). What was the purpose of these gifts? Paul wrote to the Roman church, **“For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift to the end ye may be established”** (Romans 1:11). The people to whom he was writing were Christians, but obviously they had no special gifts. **Paul was an Apostle**, and he wanted to come to Rome because he had the power to fill that void through giving gifts of inspired teaching, faith, wisdom, gifts of healing, of discerning spirits, etc., vital gifts that were designed to guide the church during the decades when the writing of the New Testament was taking place.

However, throughout the pages of Scripture you will not read of all Christians in general receiving miraculous gifts of the Spirit, and it is also clear that *only the Lord’s Apostles could bestow those gifts*. All the Apostles have been dead for 1900 years! That means there are no Chris-



tians today who can do miraculous things! Some who claim to follow Christ also claim to have this power, but in reality they have never performed the first miracle by the power of the Holy Spirit. Neither can they. Such people are deceived, and they deceive those who follow them.

● **Second, if Jesus' statement, "And these signs shall follow them that believe" is a promise to *all* Christians, why did the Apostles have to lay their hands on chosen disciples to enable them to have miraculous power?** Everyone who had been properly baptized should have already been able to do miraculous things! But **no one** had such power until the Apostles laid their hands on them. For example, Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ unto them. We are also told that the people gave heed to the things that he taught, **"Hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed"** (Acts 8:6,7). When did Philip receive this power? When the Apostles laid their hands on him, as well as on six other disciples. Before that, these men had received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and were full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3), but **they did not have the power to do miraculous things!**

● **Third, if Jesus' statement, "And these signs shall follow them that believe" applies to all believers, then all Christians from that time up to our time should have the power to do miraculous things, such as to speak in other languages, to handle snakes without being hurt, to drink deadly poison without dying, to cast out devils, and to miraculously heal the sick.** But all Christians cannot do these things, and even those who advocate that Christians in general received this promise will admit that not all can do miracles. Of course, they make excuses like, "Their faith is not great enough," or "It is not I that can or cannot do these things, but only the Lord," or they "... don't want to ask the Lord to do these things lest I tempt Him," but where does the Bible teach any of this? If God gave Christians in general and throughout time the power to perform these miracles, then any and all Christians *can* do them today. Yes, the Apostles had miraculous power, as did those on whom they laid their hands. Besides healing the sick, speaking in other languages, casting out devils, etc., the Scriptures tell us about the time a serpent bit Paul, and those looking on thought that he would surely die, but he did not die. He simply shook the snake off into the fire and went on his way (Acts 28:1-10). Some in modern times have deliberately handled poisonous snakes to prove their power over them, but many of those have been bitten and died. To read of one recent illustration, "Google" **snake-handling preacher dies — of snakebite.**

● **Fourth, keeping all of the foregoing things in mind, if you will go back and read through Mark 16 you will find in the context that the Lord was talking to the Apostles about their duties and what would follow.** The pronoun, "them", is mentioned often, and this always referred to the Apostles. When Christ said, **"And these signs shall follow them that believe,"** He was referring to the Apostles and not to Christians in general. If He referred to Christians in general, why didn't Christians in general do those things He said would follow? Did the Lord lie? No! This promise was made to the Apostles, and the Apostles were able to do all of those things. In referring to the individual to whom the Gospel would be preached, and the one that would either obey it or would not obey it, Christ said, **"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"** (Mark 16:16). The promise concerning the miraculous signs was that they would follow *the Apostles and those who had been given miraculous gifts*, not the ones who obeyed the Gospel as a result of their preaching. But again, to be sure that this was the way it was, re-read the Scriptures and look at those who were able to do those signs and those who were not able to do them. That should convince everyone that the promise was made to select

believers — the Apostles and those to whom they gave special miraculous gifts, in order to prove that they were of God and to edify the church.

No, there are no Christians today speaking in other languages without studying them. Neither are there Christians today who are casting out devils, miraculously healing the sick, and all of the other miraculous things the Apostles did in their day. If so, why don't they clean out all of the hospitals, raise all of the dead in the cemeteries, give sight to all of the blind, give new arms and legs to those who do not have them, etc.? Do you know why none of them are doing these things? Simply because they do not have such power.

Take note of these recent news reports concerning "faith healers": **"Nigerian Healer's Church Collapse Kills 67 South Africans"**. "T.D. Joshua, born in 1963, is a faith healer who says he can heal cancer, AIDS and other illnesses, according to the church's website. His church has a branch in Ghana and runs a Lagos-based television channel, Emmanuel TV. Three previous churches run by Joshua were destroyed, the group said on its website. A storm blew off the roof of the first, a flood washed away the second and the third 'collapsed due to severe weather conditions,' it said."

This report concerned a crusade by the well-known "faith healer" Benny Hinn [Google: "Benny Hinn Healing Crusade Ends in Controversy"]:

"Evangelist Benny Hinn arrived in Nigeria for his much-advertised Healing Crusade. He flew into the country aboard his Gulfstream III jet with a retinue of bodyguards. But a few days later, Hinn left Nigeria in annoyance and disappointment. He was irked by the low turnout at the event: only an estimated 300,000 people attended the crusade instead of the six million that had been expected."

"Hinn was visibly angry because of the huge amount of money he had invested in the crusade. 'Four million dollars down the drain,' he is said to have shouted on the final day of the event. The vice president of Benny Hinn Ministries, Jon Wilson, gave a breakdown of the money. He said \$3 million was spent on hotel accommodations and technical infrastructure, while \$1 million more was used up by members of the local organizing committee."

"Pentecostalism has therefore become a thriving business in Africa. In fact, it has become the shortest route to wealth and affluence for the continent's teeming population of unemployed youths. Local pastors employ all sorts of tricks and techniques to extort money from gullible folks (as well as foreign friends). They use this money to build magnificent churches, erect costly dwellings, buy luxurious cars and aircraft, and live ostentatiously, while their church members languish in poverty, misery, and squalor."

"In most cases, pastors tell the faithful to give money to God so that God will bless them in return. They tell the people of the divine favors that come to those who pay their tithes and make offerings regularly."

"Africans are suckers for magic, miracles, and paranormal claims. Generally, among Africans, there is a deep-seated belief in supernatural forces that intervene and alter human destinies for good or ill. These spiritual forces are believed to work in magical and miraculous ways, through signs and wonders that confound the human mind. And the evangelical churches are capitalizing on this superstitious element in African thought and culture to peddle and propagate their paranormal services. They promise divine healing and instant solutions for problems and diseases. Pentecostal pastors claim they have the power to make the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, and the infertile give birth...."

Divine Healing or Miraculous Healing?

Some people are obsessed with the idea of miraculous healing. When one denies that God works in this way today, the question is asked, "But you believe in divine healing, don't you?" My

response would be this: “I believe in divine healing, but not miraculous healing.” “But what is the difference?” you might ask. My answer: “All healing is divine, but not any miraculous healing is being done today.”

If we think the only way God can work is through the miraculous, we are mistaken. Yes, He has worked in the past at times through super-natural means, but even during that age, miracles were few and far between. The Apostles and those on whom they laid their hands could be in just so many places. All other Christians were unable to do miraculous things, which means the masses of the people had to depend on divine healing and the effects of the law of nature.

Divine healing means that God is involved in the healing, but *through natural means*. God made the world and all the things therein. He made the plants and herbs, and surely within them is everything the body needs for healing, just as they contain all the nutrients needed to feed and sustain our bodies. Through His blessings, men and women have studied and learned about the physical body and its needs, they have learned about the medicinal properties of plants, and they have developed hospitals to provide for the sick. Humans have the skills, through their study and training, to perform delicate operations to repair different parts of the anatomy. Could we say, then, that God is involved in man’s healing? Most certainly so.

Jesus taught that those who were whole had no need of a physician, but those that are sick (Matthew 9:12). Luke, the author of the books of Luke and Acts, was spoken of as the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14). Jesus told of a Jew who was traveling down to Jericho and fell among thieves and was left for dead. Both a priest and a Levite — religious people — saw him in this great need but passed on by. But a Samaritan, a traditional enemy of the Jew, saw him and had compassion on him. He bound up the man’s wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and took him to an inn to be further cared for. Why did he pour oil and wine into his wounds? Because these were healing agents. Do you suppose the Lord had anything to do with his wounds being healed?

Finally, Paul instructed Timothy, **“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities”** (1 Timothy 5:23). It should be pointed out here that Paul gave this advice in the day when miracles were still being performed! Why didn’t he miraculously heal Timothy? Because Timothy was *already* a believer, and miracles were performed *to make believers*, as we read in Acts 8, and *to confirm the word* (Mark 16:20). They were never intended to be used just for the sake of making people well! Since the New Testament has already been confirmed, and inasmuch as faith is produced now by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), miracles are no longer needed. What would be their purpose today?

In the next place, how does prayer fit into this picture? Do we pray for the sick or our needs because we expect a miracle? If miracles are not being performed today, what is the purpose of prayer? Well, what about a father and his children? When the children make requests of him, does he respond with a miracle? We know that he does not. How does he answer his children? Through natural means that are at his disposal. Furthermore, he grants requests that are in the children’s interest. If they ask something he is unable to give or that is not best for them, his answer is ‘No’. The same is true with God. He is our Father and we are His children. He loves us and wants to give us those things we request. At the same time, He knows what we do not need. If what we want is not in our interest, then He will not give it to us. But if He can give it providentially, and if it is for our good, He will certainly answer our prayer by granting our requests through natural means.

Jesus said, **“Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if the son**

ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7-11). Now again, does the Lord have to perform a miracle to answer the prayers of His children? Of course not.

We pray for bread, but God gives us health and the know-how to earn money so that we can have bread. God could create bread and put it in our hands, but He has not chosen to do that, nor has He promised to do so, and neither will He do it. If we or our friends are sick, we may ask God to heal us. He could miraculously heal us, but He has not promised a miracle, and neither will He overrule nature to perform one. He has given us the knowledge to see a doctor, to obtain the medicines and to take them according to instructions, and He would also have us to get proper rest, food, etc. Now when we do that and we get well, who healed us? Did God answer our prayer or not? Or did we just accidentally get well? Or did we heal ourselves?

Christ tells us that God knows what we need even before we ask Him (Matthew 6:8). John says, **"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him"** (1 John 5:14,15).

Yes, God heals today. No, not miraculously. He doesn't have to do anything to prove His power. He has already done that again and again. And He can still do what He wants to do, but He has chosen to work through natural and spiritual laws that He has revealed in His word. The natural laws relate to the physical needs of man and the spiritual laws concern obeying the Gospel, receiving the remission of sins, and having the hope of eternal life.

May God help us to believe in the Lord enough to let God have His way instead of being so weak that we demand God do things our way. The fact is, we cannot impose our will on God, but we must humble ourselves before Him and yield our will to His.

Discussion Questions

- 1. What did Jesus tell the apostles to do just before He returned to heaven? (Mark 16:15-20). What signs would be seen among converts?**
- 2. Some people today believe they can speak in “heavenly” tongues, drink poison, handle snakes, etc., but be protected by the Holy Spirit. Does Jesus’ promise in Mark 16 apply to all people of all time? To whom was He speaking?**
- 3. To review, to whom was the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying miraculous power made? (John 14:26).**
- 4. If Jesus’ promise that “these signs shall follow them that believe” applies to all people of all time, why could only the Apostles do miracles, as recorded in Acts 5:12?**
- 5. If Jesus’ promise that “these signs shall follow them that believe” applies to all people of all time, can all the members of the congregation of which you are a part do these things? Can *any* do them?**
- 6. Recently, a Pentecostal preacher who had a TV program died from a poisonous snake bite. Was this God’s failure to keep His promise or was it a misapplication of Scripture?**
- 7. What happened to a Nigerian “healer’s” church building and to people who were attending his meeting? Did he raise them from the dead?**
- 8. How do Pentecostal preachers take advantage of the African superstitions and beliefs in magic and demons?**
- 9. What is the difference between miraculous healing and divine healing?**
- 10. How can God answer prayers without the use of miracles?**

The Unity of the Spirit

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Ephesian Christians, **“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”** (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Here Paul talks about the unity of the Spirit. He says there is one Spirit. He is a person, a member of the Godhead (Romans 1:20), associated with God the Father and God the Son.

Each one in the Godhead had a part to play, a particular work to do. The Holy Spirit guided and directed various ones in the writing of the Scriptures, including both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Scriptures we have the verbally inspired word of God (2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

The Scripture is also said to be the word of the Spirit, or the Spirit of truth, again and again (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Paul referred to it as the sword of truth (Ephesians 6:17). The Hebrew writer said, **“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart”** (Hebrews 4:12).

The word of the Spirit, which is the word of God, is unified throughout. It is complete and final. Through it, God has said *what* He wanted to say, and *all* that He wanted to say. It does not contradict itself. It will not lead one person to do one thing and another person to do something else. *It is not to be added to or subtracted from or substituted for in any way* (Revelation 22:18,19; 2 John 9-11). Paul said that he had preached the one pure Gospel, being guided by the Holy Spirit of course, and if anyone came preaching another Gospel, even though he be an angel from heaven, the curse of God would be upon him (Galatians 1:6-9).

The Spirit breathed life into the word, and therefore when one takes it into his heart, believing it and obeying it, it becomes the means of saving him. Peter declared, **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”** (1 Peter 1:22,23). Jesus gave the parable of the sower and in doing so He told how the seed, the word of God, fell on



different types of soil. Some seed fell into good soil, was received by good hearts, and as a result it sprang forth and produced good fruit (Matthew 13). Life was in the seed, of course, and the Spirit put that life into the seed, which is the word of God.

The Apostle Paul said, **“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit”** (1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul is not talking here about Holy Spirit baptism, but is referring rather to the fact that the Spirit leads one through His teaching, or through the word of God, to obey the Lord, and a part of that instruction is to be baptized into the *one* body, the *one* church of the Lord.

There are many things attributed to the Spirit that the Spirit, Himself, never authorized in the New Testament, which He inspired. For instance, the Spirit, through the teaching of His word, would not lead one person to be baptized by immersion and another to be sprinkled, etc., to enter the church, and He would not have one person to “join” one denominational group and someone else to “join” another group. Through the one baptism — burial in water — the Spirit adds us to the one church established by Christ, just as is recorded in Colossians 2:12: **“...Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”** We read in and Acts 2:47, **“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”**

When we have entered the one body, the church of Christ, Paul says that we **“have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”** That is, we continue to drink of the Spirit, or to follow the word of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Christ spoke of us partaking of the water of life and the bread of life so that we might no longer thirst or be hungry.

Until the Spirit had completed His job of giving His word to man, He enabled the Apostles and chosen disciples on whom they had laid their hands to do miraculous things to convince the people that they were from God and that they had been sent by God to deliver His message to them. Once the Spirit had inspired various ones to write down God’s word, and the New Testament was given to man in completed form, there was no longer any need for miraculous things, and so they ceased. Paul makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 13.

Notice, then, the unity of the Spirit, and how the Spirit revealed truths that produced unity or oneness. God is not divided, Christ is not divided, and neither is the Spirit divided. Rather, they are one, they are united, they work together, they likewise have spoken words that will unite us and make us one.

The Spirit reveals in the word that there is but one Gospel, one way to be saved. Christ has said, **“Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”** (Mark 16:15,16). If all will hear that Gospel, believe it and obey it, then all will be saved the same way — the Lord’s only way of saving the lost. One cannot be saved in any other way.

The Spirit tells us in the word that there is but **one baptism** (Ephesians 4:5). The world says there are different baptisms, but the Spirit says there is one, that it is **a burial** (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12), and that it is **for the remission of sins** (Acts 2:38).

The Spirit, through the written word, also tells us that there is but **one body** or **one church** (Ephesians 4:4). Again, we hear constantly from man that there are many churches. Even those who claim to have the miraculous guidance of the Holy Spirit are to be found in churches that are not even mentioned in the word of God. Would the Spirit reveal in His word that there is but one church — and of course that is Christ’s church (Matthew 16:18) — but then lead some to be mem-

bers of churches that are not mentioned in His word? Surely not. The Spirit is not divided, and He would not lead some people to be something religiously that would be in contradiction to what He has said in His word.

Paul wrote, **“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting”** (Galatians 6:7,8).

The Fruit of the Spirit

Paul listed some of the works of the flesh and, in contrast, he now talks about the fruit of the Spirit. He said, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another”** (Galatians 5:22-26). To the Ephesian Christians Paul said, **“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), proving what is acceptable unto the Lord”** (Ephesians 5:8-10).

Now what does it mean to have the Spirit? Peter said that on obeying the Lord we receive *the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38). That means the Holy Spirit is given to us, to dwell within us, to make us alive again to God: **“And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.** (Acts 5:32). The seven disciples chosen to receive special miraculous power through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands were men who were full of the Holy Spirit: **“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.** (Acts 6:3).

Paul tells us, **“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience, and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by *the Holy Ghost which is given unto us*”** (Romans 5:1-5). Again, he said, **“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”** (Romans 14:17).

Paul continued by saying, **“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace....**

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.**

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:1-17).

Explaining how the Spirit works in the Christian, Paul says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: **but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.** And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26,27).

Paul wrote to Titus, “**For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and *renewing of the Holy Ghost*; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life**” (Titus 3:3-7).

Again, what does it mean to have the Spirit? In the verses of scripture we have read we see that *all of those who obey God receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, that is, the indwelling of the Spirit.* The Spirit dwells in the Christian as God and Christ dwell in him (1 Corinthians 8:6). Paul said that **the physical body is the temple of the Holy Spirit** (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20).

The Spirit helps us to bear our infirmities and makes intercession for us according to the will of God. Knowing that we have obeyed the words of the Spirit, as revealed in the pages of the Scriptures, the Spirit — the words of the Spirit — agrees with our spirit that we have done God’s will and therefore we are the children of God.

Having the Spirit, and following the direction of the word of the Spirit, we bear the fruit of the Spirit. Paul speaks of this fruit as being love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance or self-control, and righteousness. There is no need to define these terms because all of us know their meaning. They are good things that no law would forbid. Neither would it take a miracle or the guidance of the Holy Spirit, separate and apart from the word, to produce this type of fruit. This fruit is produced when we obey God and continue to walk according to the word of the Spirit.

The Scriptures have much to say about the Christian and the Spirit’s role in his life. The sad part is that so many see the Spirit only in relation to the miraculous. Many Christians shy away from studying about or talking about anything that has anything to do with the Spirit lest they be accused of believing in miraculous works in the lives of Christians today. In denying one error, we must not go to the other extreme and create an error of our own by “... **having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...**” (2 Timothy 3:5). Rather we must see the work of the Spirit in regard to the miraculous as in the days of the Apostles, but we also need to see the work of the Spirit in relation to Christians today. We don’t want to teach that the Holy Spirit is doing things today that He does not, but neither do we want to reject His present role in the lives of Christians. If we live, it is because He lives in us, making us the children of God.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there division among those who claim to believe in Christ?
2. What is the basis of the unity God wants? (Ephesians 4:1-6).
3. What particular work was done by the Holy Spirit? In Scriptures we have the verbally _____ word of _____ (2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).
4. When we study, believe, and obey the word of God, the Scripture becomes the means of _____ us from our sins (1 Peter 1:22,23). As christians, what does it mean that we have all been made to drink into one Spirit? (1 Corinthians 12:13).
5. Through inspired Scripture, the Spirit tells us that there is one _____, one _____ (Ephesians 4:4) What does this say about all the division in the religious world, with thousands of denominational churches?
6. Being born of the Spirit, what fruit are we to bear as Christians? (Galatians 5:22-26).
7. We are _____ by faith and have _____ with God through Jesus. How is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts? (Romans 5:1-5).
8. If, as Christians, the Spirit of God dwells in us, what are we promised in Romans 8:11?
9. Our body is the _____ of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20). How does He help us (Romans 8:26; Ephesians 3:16-21).
10. When people equate the Holy Spirit with miracles, they are missing the meaning of many passages of Scripture that show His involvement in our lives as Christians. Review the work of the Holy Spirit during the days of the Apostles. Review the passages we have studied that show His work in the lives of Christians today.

Lesson 12

The Sin Against the Holy Spirit

The Bible teaches that **“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”** (Romans 3:23). It also says that all who will believe in God, repent of their sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and are baptized in water can be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Naturally, those who will not obey these commands cannot be forgiven. The Scriptures were given through the power of the Holy Spirit, so in dealing with the word of the Spirit, we are not dealing with man, or even with the Apostles, but with the One who has given God’s final revelation to man. Much depends on how we look at the Holy Spirit, our attitude toward Him, and whether we accept Him or reject Him.



The Scriptures talk about “the sin against the Holy Spirit”, stating that those who commit that sin cannot be forgiven in this world or in the world to come. Christ said, **“Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come”** (Matthew 12:31,32). Mark makes a similar statement in Mark 3:28,29.

There are other such verses found in the scripture. For instance, John spoke of a sin that is unto death. He said, **“If any man sees his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death”** (1 John 5:16,17).

Paul made this statement: **“Quench not the Spirit”** (1 Thessalonians 5:19). The Hebrew writer declared, **“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame”** (Hebrews 6:4-6).

The Hebrew writer says again, **“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for the judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer**

punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him that hath said, vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:26-31).

Peter wrote, **“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.** For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

In all of these Scriptures, I think we can see some similarities. We have read about “the sin against the Holy Spirit”, “the sin that is unto death”, “quenching or putting out the Spirit”, “crucifying unto themselves the Son of God”, “sinning willfully”, and “going back into the world to remain there”. In other words, **the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit or the sin against the Holy Spirit and the sin that is unto death is simply the rejection of the miracles and the inspired testimony of the Holy Spirit of God.** I think the story of Ananias and Sapphira is a good case in point here. Peter said that they had lied to the Holy Spirit, and they were struck dead on the spot for that sin (Acts 5).

The Holy Spirit came to reveal God’s word. He empowered Christ to do the miracles that proved He was the Son of God. When Jesus made the statement in Matthew 12 about “blasphemy of the Holy Ghost”, what was the scenario? Jesus knew that there had been false Christs before; He knew that He looked like an ordinary Galilean; He knew that people could have questions and doubts about Him being Who He claimed to be, so they could learn the truth and could be forgiven. But the miracles He did by the power of the Holy Spirit as evidence of the truth of His claims could not be denied. They were real, and they were the last word of proof. However, if on-lookers could see those miracles, and then conclude that they were done by the power of Beelzebub — Satan — there was no evidence left for convincing them. They had rejected the Spirit, and of course when one rejects the word of the Spirit and the knowledge of the sacrifice that Christ made that one might be saved, then there is no means left by which he can be saved. There is no way to reach him. There are many in this lost state, and it is one of the saddest things in the world. Whatever you and I do, let us never go so far as to reject the Holy Spirit and His revelation concerning Christ and the salvation that we have through Him.

Any sin that man commits is bad and wrong, and can finally cause him to be condemned in the judgment. He may not intend to leave this world without obeying God, but because of putting off salvation and never getting around to repenting and being born into the body of Christ, he will be lost. Others who have become Christians may choose to go back into the world, to deny the Lord and to live a life of sin. In some cases, they have so hardened their hearts that no one can say words to them that will turn them back to God. They would be the blighted souls described in Hebrews 6:4-6: **“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.”**

All kinds of possibilities have been suggested as to what constitutes “the sin against the Holy Spirit”. Some think if one commits that sin, that even though he or she wants to repent, God will not allow him to be forgiven. Of course, this is not true. Some of those on the day of Pentecost who obeyed God and were saved, and were added to the church, were among those who took part in crucifying Christ. Surely if they could be forgiven, anyone can be forgiven, provided they repent and obey God.

Paul remembered the time when he persecuted the church. This bothered him, and he referred to himself as the chief of sinners, yet he obeyed the Lord, his sins were washed away, and he became a great worker for God (Acts 8,9,22; 1 Timothy 1:15). Surely if Paul could be forgiven of his sins after all he did in opposing Christ, then anyone today who will submit themselves to the Lord can also be saved.

Those who *could not be forgiven*, and *cannot be forgiven*, are those who really believe that the works of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in the New Testament, were *the works of Satan*. Why will they not be forgiven? Because there is no tool left with which they can be brought to faith and repentance. Their sin is “unpardonable” because of their staunch unbelief.

And those who were obedient to the Gospel and knew the fullness of the Scriptures but have turned away from that faith are also in a perilous state. Why? Because there are no words that anyone can say to them to bring them back to God. Unless they decide, themselves, to turn [and that is highly unlikely], no outside voice can bring them to renewed faith.

Regardless of the sin one has committed, if he dies with his sins, he will be lost. The Scriptures nowhere teach that there will be a second chance or that family members and friends can pray one out of his lost state so that he can eventually be saved. The Catholic doctrine of “Purgatory”, and that money can be paid to get a soul out of that lost condition is nowhere in the Scriptures. Instead, the Bible tells us that *now* is the time to prepare to meet God (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 9:27).

“Ye Know Not What Ye Ask”

“And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, ‘Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.’

“Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom.’ But Jesus answered and said, ‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able.’ So He said to them, ‘You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father.’

“And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you, but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:17-29).

According to Mark 10:35, the sons of Zebedee were James and John, and their mother requested that they occupy chief positions next to Jesus in His kingdom, or church, once it was

established. Jesus immediately responded by pointing out that she did not know what she was asking. She did not understand that Jesus would die and that He would be baptized with suffering on the cross. The Lord asked if they would be able to bear such torture and then answered by saying that even though they might be able to do so, still it was not in His power to grant their request. It appeared that the mother of these disciples was interested in securing positions for her sons, either out of selfishness or motherly concern, but Jesus explained that if they wanted to be great, they should minister to others.

The point I want to make here, however, is that many in our day don't know what they ask when they request of the Lord those things that He has never promised. I am thinking especially of those requests that are related to the Holy Spirit.

For example, many ask for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Lord would say to them, **"Ye know not what ye ask."** This baptism was never promised to believers in general. The Comforter, or Holy Spirit, was originally promised to the Apostles only (John 14:26; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Cornelius and his household also received the baptism of the Holy Spirit to convince the Apostles that the Gentiles had been accepted by God as well as the Jews. This is clearly brought out in Acts 10 and 11. But if these people would only read and study the Scriptures they would not ask the Lord for that which He will not give them.

The same individuals think that the baptism of fire is administered by the Lord in our day. They are also in error about this. The baptism of fire is something that will be carried out in the future. At that time the Lord will cast the wicked into the lake of fire and punishment, and this will be the baptism of fire. Surely no one would ask for this baptism if he were really aware of what it is. Please read Revelation 21:8.

The Pentecostals and charismatics demand that the Lord perform miracles through them. They say that they have the power of the Holy Spirit and they command, "Heal! Heal!" No, these people do not have the power of the Holy Spirit and neither will the Lord respond to their shouts that He miraculously heal the sick, or raise the dead, or whatever else they may tell Him to do. We read in the Scriptures that only the Apostles and those on whom they laid their hands were able to perform miracles (Acts 2:43; 8:6,7). Since we do not have any Apostles today, and none of those to whom they gave miraculous spiritual gifts are still living after 19 centuries, there is no one present who can perform miracles by God's authority.

Many claims are made, but one after another of the famous "miracle workers" have been exposed as frauds. When the Apostles did miracles, everyone knew that true miracles had been performed. They raised the dead, cast out devils, and did other things that were recognized to be miracles, beyond a shadow of a doubt. Remember, the real purpose of miracles was to make believers and, in the first century, that was the result. Today only claims are made: unseen maladies are "healed" but no arms are restored, no sight is given to the blind, no dead people are raised. It would be good for gullible people to remember Jesus' warning in Matthew 24:24: **"...there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."**

There are denominational preachers today who are asking the Lord to cast out devils, but as Christ said, "Will Satan cast out Satan?" Surely if the Lord was going to give the baptism of the Holy Spirit to anyone today to enable them to do miracles, to cast out devils, etc., he would bestow that power on those who obey Him, who are members of His church, and who wear His name according to the Scriptures. Of course, He has not promised that power today, even to people who are in the church. Those who expect to have miraculous power know not what they ask.

Many of these same people ask the Lord through prayer to save them and those who respond to their preaching. Surely they know not what they ask. **God has no where in the Scriptures said that salvation from sins is the result of prayer.** *After* one becomes a Christian, when he fails and commits a sin, he is told to repent and to pray for the forgiveness of those sins, according to James 5:16; but to *become* a child of God, Jesus said **“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned”** (Mark 16:15,16).

Isn't it strange that the people who claim to have the power of the Holy Spirit are not even knowledgeable about what the Holy Spirit has said through the written word? They even ask the Lord to speak to them today as though He has something special to say to them. They seem not to know that God has spoken in the New Testament and has said all that He wanted to say. If He had wanted to say more, He would have done so, but if He was going to say something more, it would be for everyone — not just some select person, here and there. And we can know for a fact that He would not tell somebody something that would contradict what is written in His Word.

We must not be deceived. We certainly have a right to call on God, but we should not do so in ignorance and ask Him to do things that He has not promised to do. Rather, we should know what the Lord has said, and then we have His assurance that He will hear and answer our prayers if they are in harmony with His will (1 John 5:14,15).

Discussion Questions

1. Since Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned, how can sinners be saved? (Mark 16:16).
2. Can sinners be saved in any other way? Are there many “ways of salvation” taught in the denominational world today?
3. Jesus said that all kinds of sin (even words spoken against Himself) could be forgiven except blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (Matthew 112:31,32). Why? Is the Spirit greater than Christ? [Contemporaries, only seeing the ordinary Jew that the physical Man seemed to be could be forgiven of their initial unbelief when they saw the miracles that were done through the power of the Holy Spirit. That power provided the proof that Jesus was truly the Son of God, as He claimed. If onlookers attributed that power to Beelzebub, there was nothing left with which to convince them and to bring them to obedience.] Rejection of the power of the Holy Spirit meant that there was no tool left with which to bring them to faith and obedience -- so they would die in their sin, unforgiven.
4. How would you define the “sin not unto death”?
How would you define the “sin unto death”?
If a person repents of his sin, will he be forgiven?
If a person dies without repentance, will he be forgiven?
5. If a person fully understands the truth and obeys the Gospel, but then turns his back on it, why do his brethren have no additional truth with which to bring him to repentance? If he returns, it has to be from his own conscience and change of heart, not the reasoning of others.
6. Again, why is it worse for one who knows the truth and falls away than for someone who has never come to that knowledge (2 Peter 2:20-22)?
[Because he knows what he is leaving and no longer treasures it.]
7. “The _____ of the _____ or the _____ against the

Holy Spirit and the _____ that is _____ is simply the _____ of the miracles and the _____ of the Holy Spirit of God” (Matthew 12:31,32).

8. Who are the people who *cannot* be forgiven? [those who do not repent]
9. Discuss some of the things people wrongly ask of God during this age.
10. What warning are we given in Matthew 24:24?

Lesson 13

“When That Which Is Perfect Is Come”

For the final lesson in this series on the work of the Holy Spirit, what could be more appropriate than to consider the words of the Apostle Paul, when he said, **“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”** (1 Corinthians 13:10) According to him, something perfect was coming and something that was in part would be coming to an end. What was the “perfect” to which he was referring in this statement? And what was he talking about when he spoke of “that which is in part”?

Again and again we have talked about Christ sending the Comforter or the Holy Spirit to miraculously guide the Apostles to make certain that the truth was preached and that no mistakes be made. Also, select disciples were chosen that the Apostles might lay their hands on them to give them the miraculous power of the Spirit so that they might have help in the work of evangelizing the world. All of this was done to convince the people that the Apostles and teachers had been sent from God, using the miracles to confirm the word they were preaching and to make believers out of those to whom they were preaching. Finally, when the New Testament was completed and given to man, this miraculous period passed away. From that time down to this day, those who would know of God and His will for them have only to go to the New Testament for that information. Paul tells us that faith now comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).

But let us turn to 1 Corinthians 13 and read that well-known chapter to see what Paul had to say about the coming of the perfect will of God. Hear him, as he says, **“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.**

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we



know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

“When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13).

While this chapter is primarily known for its emphasis on love, and especially with its concluding remark, “**And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,**” still there are other statements that need our special attention.

Please notice that Paul says, “**Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.**” Paul lived in the miraculous age. He was an Apostle and therefore he had been baptized with the Holy Spirit. This being the case, he was able to do miraculous things, such as speaking in other tongues or languages, etc. But he said that while charity or love would never fail, miraculous prophecies, speaking in other languages, and inspired knowledge would come to an end. In other words, the natural order of things would continue, but those things of a miraculous nature would cease.

Paul goes on to say, “**For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.**” Again, he is having reference to miraculous knowledge and prophesying. He says that they were *in part*— that is, *only select people in the church had those gifts, and the gifts themselves were but for a limited time.* They were props or like scaffolding around a building during the time it is being constructed. The church had only recently been established. It was young and growing, and it did not have the New Testament in completed form to lead or direct it. So these miraculous helps were there to give the needed assistance until the New Testament could be given in written form.

Paul concludes, “**But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.**” Those things that he describes as being in part were the miraculous things that were given for only awhile or until “the perfect thing” would come. Some try to explain this by saying that Paul had reference to the coming of Christ, but this is not so. Why? Because his wording is referring to “that” — a thing— not “He”— a person. Also, Paul says that three things would remain — “**faith, hope, and love**”— after the perfect thing had come. It would be obvious that he could not be having reference to the coming of Christ because faith and hope will then end in eternal reality!

Since Paul was prophesying about a “thing”, we must conclude that he is referencing the completion of the **New Testament**, the completed and perfect will of God. How do we know this? Because **there is no other perfect thing in this world!** How providential is it that the Apostles’ deaths, the normal ending of life for those to whom they had given the miraculous gifts, and the completion of the New Testament would all have taken place during the latter part of the first century! With God’s word available to mankind, the miraculous things were no longer needed, and therefore they came to an end. James supports this when he said, “**But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed**” (James 1:25).

Paul illustrates by saying, “**When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.**” He was simply showing that in the infancy of the church, all of these miraculous helps — these childish

things — were needed, but once it grew to maturity and had the New Testament to guide it, these miraculous things ended.

He illustrated the point again by saying, **“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”** He was explaining that, in the miraculous period, individual Christians knew only part of the whole word of God. It was like looking in a mirror in a dark room; that is, one couldn’t see his whole image clearly. But the promise was that the day would come when every soul would be able to look into the New Testament and see himself as he really was. This is exactly what James says in James 1:22-25. Paul concluded with the fact that at that time he knew only in part, but the time would come when all people could fully know God’s will.

We must understand that the miraculous age ended with the coming of the New Testament. God has fully revealed His will, and if one wants to know what the Lord would have him to do with his life he must go to the New Testament. God is not speaking to man separate and apart from His word.

Today we have so-called miracle workers telling those who want to be saved to come forward and to repeat the sinner’s prayer: “I believe that God for Christ’s sake has pardoned my sins”. How dare they claim that God is working through them? ***Can you read anywhere in the Scriptures where Peter, Paul, or any other Gospel preacher asked their hearers to come forward and to say the sinner’s prayer if they wanted to be saved?*** There is no such prayer given in God’s word!

The Spirit works today, but only through, and in harmony with, His word. While the Holy Spirit is not working in human beings in a miraculous way, He works through the word to make known God’s will and to reveal Christ who is able to save man from his sins. What greater work could He do than this?

Does God Work in our Lives Today?

[This part of the lesson has been incorporated from lessons written by J.C.’s wife, Betty.]

At this point in our study, some might conclude that God has completed His active involvement with the affairs of this world. He allowed His Son to die on the cross for our sins, enabling us to obey His Gospel to be saved and to become a part of His Family, the church. The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the Bible so that we would have specific words to guide us in our obedience to God and in the living of our daily lives. The Book of Revelation closes with the promise that one day Jesus will come on the clouds of heaven, ending this world and bringing all humans to judgment.

It is true that the miraculous age has ended because the work of salvation, of establishing the church, and of confirming the fact that the men speaking and writing God’s message was completed during that first century. However, if we notice carefully, throughout the pages of the Old Testament as well as the New, we will see that ***most of God’s work has not been of a miraculous nature!*** The miracles were the exceptions to the rule, when a new prophet had to be authenticated, or a new message was being spoken by the inspiration of the Spirit. We see miracles with Moses’ work of freeing the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and the preservation of the nation during the wilderness years (Exodus). The three Hebrew “children” and Daniel were saved from Nebuchadnezzar’s wrath by God’s obvious intervention (Daniel 3 & 6). We see miracles when Elijah called down fire from heaven to destroy the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18).

Today when people harden their hearts to God and the Bible, it’s like they are shaking their fists in His face and shouting, “There’s no God!” But God doesn’t send a bolt from Heaven to burn

them to cinders! He's not doing miraculous punishments anymore. Instead, in the Bible He warns **EVERYBODY** that the same Jesus who died to save us from our sins will come back one day **TO BE OUR JUDGE**. Jesus Himself said that the righteous obedient ones will go away to everlasting life, but He will say to the disobedient, **"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"** (Matthew 25:41).

We can see a strong dividing line in God's dealings with humans. From the creation until the Bible was completed after Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, God spoke directly to some people, and His messengers and prophets did many miracles to prove that they were speaking God's words. But after the Bible was completed, God has worked through what is called "providence". Let's go to the Bible and see some additional examples!

There is the story of Jonathan and his armor bearer in the fight they had with the Philistines. We can see providence in God's help there:

"Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, 'Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few.' So his armorbearer said to him, 'Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart.'

"Then Jonathan said, 'Very well, let us cross over to these men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say thus to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place and not go up to them. But if they say thus, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up. For the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this will be a sign to us.'

"So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, 'Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden.' Then the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armorbearer, and said, 'Come up to us, and we will show you something.'

"Jonathan said to his armorbearer, 'Come up after me, for the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel.' And Jonathan climbed up on his hands and knees with his armorbearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan. And as he came after him, his armorbearer killed them. That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armorbearer made was about twenty men within about half an acre of land.

"And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled; and the earth quaked, so that it was a very great trembling. Now the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and there was the multitude, melting away; and they went here and there" (1 Samuel 14:6-16).

Now, some questions: Did God tell Jonathan to go and fight the enemies of Israel? No. Did God tell Jonathan what he should use as a sign that God would help them win the battle? No.

The sign Jonathan had spoken was that the Philistines would tell them to come up the side of the steep hill. Being on their hands and knees would make it easy for the Philistines to kill them as they were climbing, so it took a lot of faith on Jonathan's part to start that climb, but he did. And they had a great victory! The Bible doesn't say that any angels were seen killing the bad soldiers, but there was a strong earthquake! Now, do earthquakes happen, just naturally? Yes, they do! So we would say that God used nature to providentially help Jonathan and his armorbearer defeat the enemies of Israel.

Another time that God fought for Israel, behind the scenes so that nobody saw an angel or knew that God was doing it, was when King Sennacherib of Assyria was camped around Jerusalem, planning to totally destroy the city.

“After this Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem ... to Hezekiah king of Judah, and to all Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria: “In what do you trust, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem?” And they spoke against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth — the work of men’s hands.

“Now because of this King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried out to heaven. Then the Lord sent an angel who cut down every mighty man of valor, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. And when he had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there” (2 Chronicles 32:9,10,19-21).

The Scriptures tell us that God sent an angel, but historical records say that the whole army died of some terrible disease that struck them that night! Nobody actually saw an angel!

According to Hebrews 1:14, **“Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”**

One time the king of Syria was making war against Elisha the prophet. This is the record in the Bible of what happened: **“Therefore he [the king] sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, ‘Alas, my master! What shall we do?’**

“So he answered, ‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ And Elisha prayed, and said, ‘Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:14-16).

So the whole place was filled with angels, there to protect Elisha, even though nobody could see them! That’s God’s providence at work!

Too often, today, people will exclaim, **“That was a miracle!”** about some unexpected thing that happened in their lives. ***But what is a real miracle? It is the setting aside of the law of nature: raising the dead, restoring a lost arm or leg, giving sight to the blind.***

In contrast, let’s consider another excellent biblical example of God’s work through “providence”. ***What is providence? It is God’s “behind the scenes” use of anything and everything at His disposal, without overruling the laws of nature which He set in motion as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve.*** In Romans 15:30-32, Paul made these requests of the church in Rome: **“Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you *strive together with me in prayers* to God for me, (1) that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and (2) that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, (3) that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.”** God answered those prayers, but not through miracles.

The **second thing** for which the Roman Christians were to pray was that Paul would be received by the church in Jerusalem. **Acts 21:15-20** records that brethren from Caesarea and Cyprus accompanied Paul, **“And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, *they glorified the Lord.*”**

How did God deliver Paul from those who sought his life in Judea, which had been **his first prayer request?** **Acts 22:22-25:** When the Jewish mob began to cry out that Paul was not fit

to live, **God used the commander of the Roman army to rescue him.** Acts 23:11-22: After his arrest, **God used Paul's nephew to bring word to the commander** that the Jewish leaders were plotting to kill Paul when he would be brought to the council to defend himself. Acts 23:23-31: In response, **the commander called two centurians and had them to gather 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen (with a mount for Paul to ride on) at the third hour of the night, to bring the prisoner safely to Felix.** Acts 25:12: Again, when the Jewish leaders laid charges of treason against Paul, as a Roman citizen he appealed to Caesar, **using the Roman law as his shield.**

Paul's **third request** concerned his desire to come to Rome, to strengthen the church there. Following his arrest in Jerusalem, Acts 27 & 28: When Paul was being taken as a prisoner on a ship to Rome, a bad storm came up. After many days, Paul urged the sailors to take food, assuring them that everyone would be saved. **"And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.**

"And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land" (Acts 27).

So in this case, God used **a Roman ship, sailors, and soldiers** to take Paul to testify of Himself in Rome! ***Even things that belong to governments really belong to God! So Rome got to pay for Paul's trip!*** Do you see again that, without the use of miracles, God providentially did what needed to be done so that Paul could safely reach Rome and make the appeal to Caesar? Of course, while he was there he was allowed to have his own rented place so that he was able to have interaction with the church, to impart spiritual gifts to Christians, and to strengthen the body of Christ. Prayers answered!

Providence at Work Today

In a similar situation today, the communist Chinese government, as a whole, does not "allow" the teaching of Christianity. However, because English is the international language, they want that language to be taught in their colleges, so what do they do? They bring in teachers to do that work. Through the years, many **American Christians** have lived in China, faithfully teaching the English language. **Their fare to China is paid by the government, they are supplied with living quarters, and they are paid a salary.** While there, ***they are also teaching the Gospel in private settings,*** which is a known fact by government officials, but those officials don't interfere as long as no disturbance is caused. ***What irony, that the atheistic communistic government in China is paying for the country's evangelizing, which it actually forbids!***

Another example of God's providential working in this age: Missionaries were about to move to a new country. For years they had been trying to go to India, but now a family of American Christians working in the little country of Sri Lanka was asking someone to come there and help them start the Lord's church. What to do? What to do? The missionaries were praying for God to open the right doors and to close the wrong doors. Their part was to apply for visas [permission to live in the country]. The husband had an Indian visa, which meant that there should be no problem getting a visa for the family. So they said, "If the family gets a visa, we'll conclude that God wants us to go to India. If we can't, we'll believe He wants us in Sri Lanka."

The visa was denied, so they moved to Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, and began to teach the Gospel to anyone who would listen. The missionary advertised a two-week school for those who might be interested in studying the Bible. A certain well-educated man, who had just gotten out of a business with his father-in-law, and currently had no job, saw the ad. He said to himself, “I’m not working. This is an opportunity to go to a Bible school.”

Before the end of the two weeks, he was baptized and became a great helper in having home Bible studies. In a few months the missionary family moved to India. As they were studying with people, and able to begin the church in New Delhi, they looked into the possibility of having programs over the radio stations operated by the Indian government, but they were told that Christian religious broadcasting wasn’t allowed in that Hindu nation.

Then they heard some exciting news: the radio station in Sri Lanka, called “The Giant of Asia” was allowing Christians to use their towers for broadcasting! The coverage was most of the Eastern side of the globe! What a great blessing of God! The missionary knew preachers in India who spoke several of the major languages, so he was sure everything could be arranged — but what about a reliable person to manage the contracts with the radio station? Oh yes! ***God had been looking ahead, and a zealous, trustworthy Christian was already in place in Colombo!***

What happened? Through the years of the “team” working together, millions of people in India have been able to know that Jesus died for them, and many have obeyed Him in baptism! God does work all things together for good!

I’ll tell you another story that shows His providential care. You know that Jesus has told Christians to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, and *our work* really is to go and to teach so that people will want to learn more about God and to obey Him. But God knows that there are those who are already looking for Him, even though nobody has come to teach them. Those are the people *He takes care of through providentially* pulling many things together!

A man in Burma worked at the airport in **Rangoon** as an air controller. One day he met a man from **India** who was also an air controller. They began talking, and the Indian man said that he was studying a Bible course from an **American** missionary in **Thailand**, sponsored and supported by **American Christians**. He gave the address to the **Burmese** man who wrote for the course. Then he and he and his family very carefully studied each lesson. They became convinced they needed to be baptized, so the missionary from Thailand flew over and studied further with them and baptized them into the body of Christ! That was the beginning of the church of Christ in Burma! Now there are many Christians in that country, and even Bible training schools! But look at God’s reach in this: from **India** to **Burma** to **America** to **Thailand** and back to **Burma**, and working over several years of time! God’s hand is not shortened that He cannot do whatever is needed, and He looks ahead in His preparations, and He never forgets the work He’s weaving together!

Later it was found that **literature** printed in **Northeast India** had been shared across the border among people in **Western Burma**, and numerous congregations of the church had developed. One of the converts had gone to **South India** to a **Bible school**, and then had returned to Burma. When he learned about the existence of the church in **Rangoon** [Yangon], he settled there, working with the church in **a local Bible school** and **in evangelizing cities and villages throughout the country!**

Another amazing thing happened to a missionary in **Pakistan**. One day a man came to the gate and was looking at the sign that said “The Church of Christ Meets Here”. He came inside to find out more about the church, actually checking to see if he could worship with them in good conscience. Through several hours of discussion, the missionary learned that the man, a doctor, was from the

mountainous area of **Iran, bordering Russia**. He said he was a part of a group of Christians there, and that the church with which he worshiped numbered about 5,000!

Their history? He said that **some of the men who had seen the star of Jesus were of his tribe**, and they had followed the star to **Bethlehem**. After they returned home, they waited until the baby would be grown up and would be able to do the work He had been born to do. They returned to Israel and were there in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, among the crowd that heard Peter and the other apostles preaching that at last the kingdom of God had come! They were baptized and waited there for some time, learning from the apostles and writing down what they called “The Sayings of Christ”. When they came home again, they taught their families and their tribal people what they had learned, so that they became Christians too.

The doctor had a very correct understanding of the Gospel and of how to become a Christian and to worship God. He said that his people had been persecuted to the point that they had isolated themselves in the mountainous regions. Later, when the missionary was in Iran again, he went to the area the doctor had told him about, at the edge of the mountains. The only way he could go further would have been by horseback and with an interpreter, so the journey had to stop there. People in the area did tell him, though, that lots of Christians used to live there but they had moved into the mountains.

So you see how God can bring people together, to supply what is needed for someone who is already looking for the Truth!

Conclusion

Jesus’ promise to His disciples — and to us — **“I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you”** (John 14:18), is the certainty on which we build our lives. He never promised that we would be shielded from all negatives; in fact, He warned that there would be persecution. But He is with us and He has given us the strength of the Holy Spirit at the time of our baptism to aid us in our Christian walk:

Romans 8: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

“Therefore, brethren, we are debtors — not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

God does what is best for us and for the particular situation in which we are being challenged. If we do our part, trusting in Him to do what is beyond our ability, He will not fail.

Discussion Questions

1. The miraculous working of the Holy Spirit would end when “_____” (1 Corinthians 13:10).
2. Many would wonder why God does not do miracles today, feeling that an overwhelmingly powerful tool has been laid aside. We should remember, though, that even in the age of miracles there were the sorcerers who deceived people with their claims. Separating the real from the lies would have been difficult, especially if one only *heard* of the “miracle” and did not see it himself. Today, magicians do amazing things that could easily pass as “miracles” if they were in the “religious business” instead of the “entertainment business”. There are multi-millionaires who demand, “Heal, heal” and people believe they are genuine, in spite of the false doctrines they teach.
3. What is the tool used today to make believers and to nurture new Christians?
4. Is God’s word — the New Testament — the ultimate, world-wide, all-time authority, telling us God’s unchanging will?
5. If we didn’t have that word, confirmed by the miracles of the writers, and if we were at the mercy of people here and there all over the world who were claiming to be speaking for God — claiming to do miracles — how would we be able to verify what would be true or false? With communication as it is today, living in one country, we might hear of some amazing claims made by a Hindu “holy man” or a witch doctor or a “faith healer” in a country on the other side of the world. If we did not have God’s word to prove or disprove their teachings, how could we judge the validity of the “miracle” they would be claiming? Thank God, we live in the age of “_____” (1 Corinthians 12:31).
6. How did God save Jonathan and his armor bearer through providential aid rather than miracles?

- 7. What happened to Sennacharib's army, according to God's revelation? What did the historians record about the cause of death of the army?**
- 8. Discuss the three things for which Paul asked the Roman Christians to pray in Romans 15:30-32.**
- 9. Did the brethren in Jerusalem approve of Paul's work with the Gentiles, after hearing the details?**
- 10. What were the tools God used, providentially, to rescue Paul from the Jews who wanted to kill him? Were any of these miraculous?**
- 11. How did it become possible for Paul to live in Rome and aid the Christians there?**
- 12. People from how many nations were involved in bringing the Gospel to Rangoon (Yangon), Burma?**
- 13. Was it vital that converts were made in Sri Lanka before the opening of the opportunity to preach the Gospel over their radio stations?**
- 14. What account did the man in Pakistan give of his people in Iran?**
- 15. Discuss the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian, according to Romans 8.**

