

Alpha 7: Who Is the Holy Spirit?

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This morning we continue with our series of messages tracking the questions discussed in our Alpha class on Wednesday evenings. These are the core questions people ask about the Christian faith. If you missed out on Alpha, I hope you will consider attending when we offer it again next fall.

Our question today is “Who is the Holy Spirit?” The Apostle Paul experienced a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light. When Paul opened his eyes he could not see for three days. God sent a man named Ananias to baptize Paul. Let’s see what happens. Before his conversion, Paul was known as Saul.

Acts 9:17-19

Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

How do you respond when you hear the words “Holy Spirit”? Some people find the idea of a Holy Spirit a little scary. The King James Version of the Bible referred to him as the Holy Ghost. That really sounds scary!! Other people have no clue about the Holy Spirit—he is not as easy to relate to as God the Father or God the Son, Jesus Christ. Other people are obsessed with the Holy Spirit. They almost forget about the Father and the Son, talking exclusively about the Holy Spirit. They talk about miracles and speaking in unknown tongues. Others know the Holy Spirit as God’s presence and power with them. They have experienced him as Comforter when they grieve, as the One who guides them, and the One who gives them courage to share their faith with others,

I want to share with you my earliest experiences with the Holy Spirit this morning. I came to Christ through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ when I was a junior in high school. One of their speakers at a meeting taught from the Bible about how to be filled with the Holy Spirit through faith. He told us that we could not live the Christian life in our own

strength because it requires supernatural power. The Holy Spirit provides the power for us to live the Christian life. That night I prayed and asked the Holy Spirit to fill me.

A couple of years later, I was hired as youth minister at FUMC in Seminole. After a few days the pastor of an Assembly of God (AOG) church came by to welcome me to town. After a few moments of conversation, he said: "I sense that you have been filled with the Holy Spirit." I replied, "Yes. I asked him to fill me a couple of years ago." He said, "I thought so." The following week the pastor of the UMC asked me to come to his office. He asked me if I had the gift of speaking in tongues. I told him that I did not. He said the AOG pastor had been telling folks that I had the gift of tongues. I said I had no idea why he would say that. The pastor asked me to tell him about my conversation with the AOG pastor. I told him about our conversation. He replied, "The Assembly of God church believes that a person will speak in tongues when they are filled with the Holy Spirit. They consider it the evidence of being filled with the Spirit."

I went by to see the AOG pastor and clear things up. I told him that we had a misunderstanding. "I have been filled with the Holy Spirit, but I don't have the gift of tongues." He replied, "You are the closest to being filled with the Spirit of anyone I have ever met, but you are not filled with the Spirit yet. When you are, then you will speak in tongues." He gave me several books to read about the experiences of people who had been filled with the Spirit and spoke in tongues. I decided that if this was something I needed in order to be filled with the Spirit, then I wanted the gift of speaking in tongues. I prayed and prayed for days for the gift to come, but nothing happened. I told the AOG pastor about my experience, and he said there must be some unconfessed sin in my life or I would receive the gift. I went home and confessed every sin I could think of and some I had only heard about!! Still nothing. I decided I was going to pray all night until something happened. I knelt beside my bed and begged God to give me this gift. I wanted all of Him I could get. For hours, nothing happened. Then about 2

am, I sensed the presence of God fill the room. I heard that still, small but clear inner voice of God say to me: "Bill, you asked me to fill you with my Spirit two years ago. I kept my promise and filled you with my Spirit. That is all you need to know. Go to sleep." I still do not have the gift of tongues, but from that day to this I have not doubted that God kept his word and filled me with the Holy Spirit.

I want to talk about the gift of tongues at the beginning of this message to clear up what I think are misunderstandings about what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The gift of speaking in tongues is one of the gifts of the Spirit. It is a valid gift, and several of you have that gift. I affirm the gift of tongues and rejoice with those of you have this gift. There are many gifts of the Spirit and we each have different gifts. Paul says in his letter to the Romans: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." (Romans 12:6) We pray and ask the Holy Spirit to fill our lives and he determines what gift we receive. We do not tell him what gift we prefer. Listen to Paul words to the Corinthians about he gifts of the Spirit:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and **he gives them to each one, just as he determines.** 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

The gift of speaking in tongues is a gift of the Spirit. It is not the only evidence of being filled with the Spirit. I wanted to clarify what I believe the Bible teaches about this because there is so much confusion. Now let's explore some key questions about the Holy Spirit: Who is the Holy Spirit? What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? How can we be filled with the Spirit?

Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is God. He is not an "it." He is God - with all the attributes of deity. He is the third person of the Trinity - co-equal with God the Father and

God the Son. There is only one God, but He manifests Himself in three persons, whom we call the Trinity. I cannot define the Trinity. No one can. Dr. Wilbur Smith, a seminary professor said, "The man who denies the Trinity will lose his soul. The man who tries to understand the Trinity will lose his mind." We, who are finite, cannot comprehend God, who is infinite. We try to illustrate the concept of the Trinity, but the attempt is wholly inadequate. For example, I could describe H₂O as a liquid, a solid or a vapor, depending on whether it was water, ice or steam. Which one is H₂O? Or, a man is a husband, a father, and a son - yet, he is one man. No illustration is adequate. At best, it can only suggest what God is like. The Father is God for us. The Son is God with us. The Holy Spirit is God within us. The Father is Creator. The Son is Redeemer. The Holy Spirit is Helper—God's presence and power within us. He is nothing to be afraid of.

What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? To be filled with the Holy Spirit is to be filled with Christ. The word "filling" means to be controlled, led and empowered by the Spirit. It means that Jesus Christ walks around in my body and lives His resurrection life in and through me. In Galatians 5:22, 23, Paul explains, "When the Holy Spirit controls our lives He will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control..."

When we are filled with the Spirit, the things that matter to God matter to us. Let's do a little self evaluation. Do I desire to join with God in his work of redeeming the world? Do I care for persons who are lost—who have no relationship with God? Do I care for the poor, the struggling, the homeless, the orphan? Do I have an interest in joining with God in an Impossible Dream of making a difference for his kingdom? Do I invest joyfully my financial resources in the work of his kingdom? If we said "no" to some of those questions, it could indicate that we need to be filled with his Spirit. When we are filled with the Spirit, the things that matter to God matter to us.

How can we be filled with the Holy Spirit? First of all, we have to overcome our fear of the Holy Spirit! We are often reluctant to ask the Holy Spirit to fill us because we fear losing control of our lives. You need not worry about what is going to happen to you. Maybe you are afraid that He will take away your pleasures, cause you to leave your career, take away your wealth, or terminate a friendship or love affair. You may fear that He will send you, as a missionary, to some remote part of the world where you will lose your life for Him. He may indeed ask you to do one or more of these things, and again He may not. Trust that whatever the Holy Spirit leads you to do, it will give you more joy and fulfillment than whatever you had before. Last fall many of us read [The Hole in Our Gospel](#). Richard Stearns told his story of living a luxurious life as CEO of Lennox. He made a seven figure salary and enjoyed an affluent lifestyle. He tithed and taught Sunday school and thought that was enough. Then the Holy Spirit called him to become the president of World Vision. He knew his lifestyle would be dramatically altered. He struggled with the changes and sacrifices it would mean for him and his family. Reluctantly he accepted the call. Now after serving as President of World Vision for over ten years, he has experienced more joy and fulfillment to his life than he had ever known. He would never go back to his old life. God loves you and wants you to experience life at its fullest. Trust him and let go.

We are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith. How did you become a Christian? By faith. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." You receive Christ by faith. You live by faith. Everything you receive from God, from the moment of your spiritual birth until you die, is by faith. Do you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit? You can be filled right now, by faith.

You do not have to beg God to fill you with His Holy Spirit. You do not have to barter with Him by fasting or weeping or begging or pleading. Though you are filled with the Holy

Spirit by faith and faith alone, it is important to recognize that several factors contribute to preparing your heart for the filling of the Spirit.

First, you must desire to live a life that will please the Lord. You have the promise of our Savior, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Second, be willing to surrender your life totally and irrevocably to Jesus Christ. Paul says in Romans 12:1,2: "I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Third, confess every known sin which the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and experience the cleansing and forgiveness which God promises in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." The late Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, called this process "Spiritual Breathing." Just as you exhale and inhale physically, so you also breathe spiritually. You exhale spiritually when you confess your sins. You inhale when you ask the Holy Spirit to fill you.

You are not filled with the Holy Spirit because you desire to be filled nor because you confess your sins or present your body a living sacrifice - you are filled by faith. There are two very important words to remember.

The first is "command." In Ephesians 5:18, God commands you to be filled: "Be filled with the Spirit." Not to be filled, controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit is disobedience.

The second word is "promise" - a promise that makes the command possible: "This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him." 1 John 5:14,15

Now, is it God's will for you to be filled and controlled by Him? Of course it is - for it is His command! Then right now you can ask God to fill you - not because you deserve to be filled, but on the basis of His promise. When we are filled with the Spirit, it may or may not be an emotional experience. Spiritual highs are wonderful but they are not the basis of our relationship with God. Our relationship with God is based upon faith—our trust in God and his Word.

If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit already dwells within you. The Holy Spirit is "included" when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. Therefore, you do not need to invite Him to come into your life. He did this when you became a Christian. By faith, I ask the Holy Spirit to fill me, to take control of my life and lead me wherever he wants me to go. The command to be filled with the Spirit in the original language is an ongoing process. It literally means, be continually filled with the Spirit. Being filled with the Spirit is not a one time event. It is a continuous process. It is like filling a balloon with air. I blow some air into a balloon. Every part of the balloon is "filled" with air, but I can breathe more air in the balloon and its capacity increases. So it is with the Holy Spirit. We ask him to fill us and he fills us. But as he lives in us our capacity for more and more of him increases. We are to be continually filled.

Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? Would you like to be? You can by faith right now.