

Getting to Know the Holy Spirit

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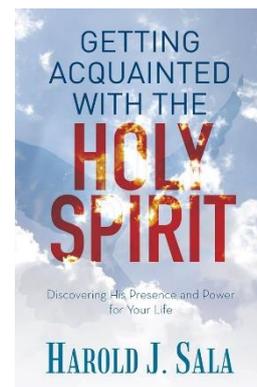
Introduction

Pentecost Sunday is the birthday of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is the celebration of Christ pouring out the Spirit in power as was prophesied in Joel 2:28-32, the story of which is recorded in Acts 2. Alas, we evangelicals tend to ignore this, the second most important festival of the Christian calendar.

This festival is a good time to stop and reflect on who the Holy Spirit is. I approach this subject with much fear and trepidation for several reasons, the first being that there is so much controversy about the Holy Spirit and how His work in the church should look like. The Devil likes to use experience and opinion to divide us on the facts and make us ineffective in our worship and witness.

Though I approach this topic with trembling, being very much aware of the pot I will be stirring, I want to look at what is clear in Scripture about the Spirit and make some observations and applications from that. For some this will be repetitive, but repetition is good for reminding and I beg you to bear with me. If you are offended by what is said, I encourage you to consider why you are offended by my statements. Use that as an excuse to dig deeper into the Word and uncover whatever understanding is causing the offense, be it yours or mine.

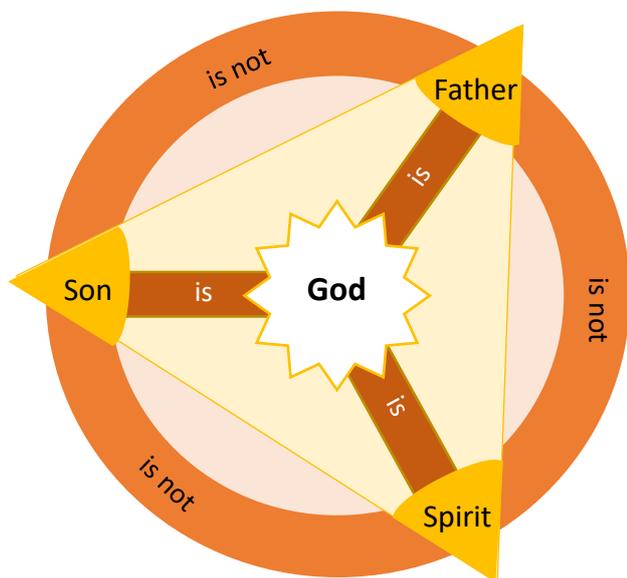
During my preparation I read Dr. Harold J. Sala's book [Getting Acquainted with the Holy Spirit](#) (Manila, Philippines: OMF Literature Inc., 2017). I recommend this book to you as a very balanced, warmly written, challenging resource about the third person of the Trinity.



While much of this treatise is going to be pretty heavily theological, my goal here is to help us get to know the third person of the Trinity better, thus allowing us to have a better relationship with Him. The goal of all doctrine is application; and only right doctrine can lead to right application. So, let's pray for God's leading before we talk more about His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit in the Trinity

First, let's take a look at who the Holy Spirit is in relation to the Trinity. As Christians we accept one God, in whom there are three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and co-eternal, but unique and distinct from each other. Scripture makes it clear that Father, Son and Spirit each know everything, are all-powerful, everywhere and eternal.



Each person has different roles in the Godhead. Most of us tend to have a clear picture in our mind of God the Father and God the Son, the Planner and the Savior. However, when it comes to the Spirit, I at least tend to struggle a little more.

The Spirit is a Person

Perhaps it begins with the fact that the word "Spirit" is a reference to wind or breath. It is not quite as concrete as a Father or a Son. This has led some to view the Spirit as an impersonal power. This is true even of some of us evangelicals, for though we pay lip service to His personhood, we tend to treat Him more like power to be channeled than someone who has a will, mind and feelings.

Scripture shows us the Spirit is a person. He has emotions and desires: He yearns (Jas. 4:5); He can be

grieved (Isa. 63:10-11; Eph. 4:30); He speaks to people (see Rev. 3:6; Ac. 8:29). Another argument for His personhood can be made from Paul's odd use of pronouns in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7.

And you know what currently restrains him, so that he will be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one now restraining will do so until he is out of the way,

Paul shifts from a neuter pronoun "what" to a masculine pronoun while referring to the same thing or person. Since the word for "Spirit" in Greek is neuter, it makes sense to use the neuter pronoun, not the masculine one. However, Paul clearly sees the Spirit as a personal "he", not as an impersonal "it", making a case for the personhood of the Spirit.

The Spirit Provides the Power to Execute the Father's Will

So, what role does the Spirit have within the Trinity? As we study Scripture, we see that he works in close concert with the Father and the Son in creation and redemption. He is there at creation, hovering over the waters, ready for action (Gen. 1:1-2). Over the course of redemption, he empowers the people whom God has chosen to carry out His will. He is the member of the Godhead that works most closely in and with humans to bring about the Father's will. Thus, he is the one who empowers the Son for his ministry on earth (Lk. 4:14). He is also the one who restrains evil until its time comes to be unleashed (2Th. 2:6).

The Spirit Glorifies the Son

Another important role the Spirit has is found in John 16:14.

He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you.

The Spirit glorifies the Son. As such, He remains in the background behind the Son and the Father as they plan and execute; but neither the plan, nor the execution is possible without the Spirit.

Here we see an amazing reality in the Trinity, both hierarchy and mutual submission. The Father plans, the Son implements, the Spirit empowers. The Son and the Spirit submit themselves to the Father's will. The Father and the Spirit submit themselves to the Son's carrying out of said will. And the Father and the Son submit themselves to the power of the Spirit to make that will possible. From this we learn that mutual submission is a part of the very nature of God and when we submit to Him, who is worthy of all submission, and then to one another, we are acting as mirror images of God.

What we can see here, is that the Spirit essentially functions as the background worker in the great plan of redemption. He has a pivotal role, without which God's plan cannot be completed, but He does it quietly, pushing all glory towards the Son, who then glorifies the Father. It seems the Spirit's joy is in the fact that Jesus is glorified, not in His own recognition. A dear friend of mine reminds me a bit of this, as he is an excellent teacher and does many things behind the scenes, but would rather that no one notice him once his service is done, desiring for praise to go to God.

So, let me then pose this question: Does the Spirit really want us to put Him front-and-center in our worship as we do? Or is He disturbed when we focus so much attention on Him that Jesus, whom He seeks to glorify, is seen as secondary? Do we perhaps worship the Spirit too much in this day and age? I do not say we should ignore Him, because He is integral to our Christian walk and life as we shall see in a minute or two. I'm questioning if we ought not sing so many Holy Spirit songs and focus more on glorifying the Son and the Father in our personal and corporate worship. They are after all one God; one in essence, nature and purpose, though different in personality and role. We must worship God as one, not focus undue attention on any single person in the Godhead.

The Holy Spirit in the Church

This being said, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Family of Father God would be impossible without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Let's take a look at how He makes the Christian walk possible.

Before I begin, though, I want to open a little parenthesis about the passages we will be looking at. Some are narrative passages that tell us about events that happened. The others are didactic passages, which state facts or make clear assertions. The narrative passages need to be treated carefully, as they are things that happened once and never again. We can extract principles from these, as long as we support them with didactic passages. Basing teaching solely on narrative passages is dangerous, as we try to take something that God did once and make God do

it over and over again the same way. He does not change and is faithful to His nature, but He is also infinitely creative, and a study of Scripture makes it clear that He does nothing the same way twice!

The Spirit Empowers

The Spirit's first ministry to the Church and believers is recorded in narrative passages. In the book of Acts, we see over and over again how the Spirit empowers Jesus' followers to boldly proclaim the Gospel, to do miracles and to point people to Jesus. In each case these bold men are "filled with the Spirit", a state that is obviously recognizable by the people around them; and in each case the powerful filling of the Spirit results in obedience and self-sacrifice on behalf of those filled with Him.

Paul shows us the results of this empowering in Galatians 5:16-26 and Ephesians 4:1-6

I say then, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, we must also follow the Spirit. We must not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal 5:16-26)

Therefore I, the prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:1-6)

This empowering is first and foremost to walk as Jesus walked (Col. 2:6). Then it is given, so that the followers of Jesus will be unified, drawing people into the church (Jn. 17:21). Any signs and wonders that are worked are for this purpose: to glorify Christ and to grow His church.

The Spirit's Other Ministries

The Spirit ministers in several more ways which are outlined below. Note that these are actions for the Church corporately, though many of us will experience these individually, as well.

- In John 14:16-17 He is our Counselor, though the word can also be translated advocate or comforter. He will teach us what to say in difficult situations (Lk. 12:11-12) and guide the church when making decisions.
- Jesus says in John 16:8-10 that the Spirit is the one who convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement with a view to leading to repentance. Without the Spirit's activity no one can truly understand their need for Jesus.
- In John 15:26 and John 16:13-15, Jesus calls Him "the Spirit of truth" who "will guide you into all the truth." He teaches and makes the Truth about Jesus known to us.
- The Spirit reveals God's truth to us through the inspiration and illumination of Scripture (2Ti 3:16; 1Pe 1:11-12; 2Pe 1:21; 1Jn 4:2-3)
- The Spirit transforms us individually and corporately to become more like Jesus Christ, in mind and action (Rom 8).
- The Spirit grants the members of Christ's Body gifts to build up the Church.
- The Spirit helps Believers to pray properly.

The Spirit's Gifts to the Church

Let's elaborate on the last two points of the Spirit's ministry to the Church, because they are more easily applied.

The Spirit has given the Church the spiritual Gifts in concert with the other members of the Trinity (1Co. 12:4-6), which are recorded in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4 to foster unity and maturity in the Church (see Eph. 4:1-6). He is the One who unifies us, so we can reflect Christ together and bring glory to the Father. Brothers and sisters, the reason for the multiplicity of gifts in these lists is that the Spirit requires all of us to participate in the growth of the church and the salvation of souls. These gifts are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). You have them and use them if you're filled with the Spirit or not. You can use them for good or for evil. God gives you that choice! They are gifts: you can't earn them, you can't purchase them, you can't exchange them. What you've got is what you've got. The Spirit, being God, knows your skills and your abilities. God created you, after all. We come with empty hands and let Him fill them with His gifts so that we can use them for Him.

If you are not using your gifts in the local body somehow, you're not living a Spirit-filled life, you're being selfish. The gifts are not for you or me alone: they are for the edification of the Body of Christ. Paul reminds us that we are called to serve "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently keeping the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us" (Eph. 4:2-3).

If you don't know what your gifts are, ask the Spirit to show you. Talk with people who know you and ask for the Spirit to guide you into ways to use your gifts for the edification and growth of the church. This may end up being very unglamorous and unrewarding, because we live in a fallen world. But we're called to be faithful, not successful. It is the Spirit who moves as He will. We must see where He is moving and join Him rather than trying to make Him do as we desire!

The Spirit Helps Us Pray

Which is what brings us to the next way the Spirit helps the church: He helps us to pray. One of my professors once described prayer as, "Launching my little canoe into the great stream of God's will." Yet, how can I know what God's will is? Through His Spirit. We know much of it from Scripture, but what if the situation is unclear? Look at what Paul writes in Romans 8:26-27.

In the same way the Spirit also joins to help in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unspoken groanings. And He who searches the hearts knows the Spirit's mind-set, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Wow! God even empowers our prayers to be in line with His will, if we will listen to Him.

However, this brings me to a question that has troubled me for some time: are we supposed to pray to the Holy Spirit? This is common practice in many Protestant churches these days, so much so that no one questions it. Here are a few injunctions from Scripture that should show us the way.

I assure you: Anything you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. (Jn. 16:23)

You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you that you should go out and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. (Jn. 15:16)

I assure you: The one who believes in Me will also do the works that I do. And he will do even greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. (Jn. 14:12-14)

According to these passages we can ask of the Father and the Son, and they will do it. So in essence we pray to the Father and Son. However, the passages that deal with the Holy Spirit and prayer are as follows:

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. (Eph 6:18)

But you, dear friends, as you build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. (Jude 20)

We are called to pray in the Spirit. This means we are to pray under His control, in line with His guidance, through His wisdom and in His empowerment.

Also, there is no text in Scripture where we are enjoined to call the Holy Spirit to "come" to us. There is no text where prayers are addressed to the Holy Spirit. They are always addressed either to the Trinity or to the Father (see e.g.

Eph. 1:3-6,17ff; 3:14ff). So, considering these facts and the role of the Spirit in the Trinity, are we right to pray directly to Him?

We should unquestionably acknowledge the Spirit, but the example in Scripture is to pray to the Father. I would strongly urge you to consider your prayer practice in light of these passages, as living according to the clearly revealed will of God in Scripture will enhance your walk with Him, no matter how odd it seems to you. For the Spirit is not merely interested in empowering the Church, but each one of us individually.

The Holy Spirit in the Individual

The Spirit Brings Each Individual into God's Family

In considering the work of the Holy Spirit for the individual, after the conviction He brings, which leads to faith and repentance, He is the one responsible for bringing us into the Family of God. See what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

We are in the body because of His baptizing us into it. The context makes it clear that Paul is using the baptism reference here to our salvation, because he then talks about how each individual is a member of the body of Christ, elaborating on the use of the Spirit's gifts, which are clearly given to followers of Jesus. Paul echoes this sentiment in Ephesians 4:4.

Peter also states in Acts 15:8 that the proof of the Gentiles' acceptance into the Church was due to the Spirit having been poured out on them. So, if you believe that Jesus is your Savior, then the Spirit is living in you now.

The Spirit Guarantees Our Salvation

In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul states,

When you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed in Him, you were also sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory.

Having the Spirit within you guarantees, without anything you have to do, that God will redeem you and bring you into His kingdom. We can rely on it, because, "The Spirit Himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16). This can give us the certainty necessary to bear up under any negative circumstance. God is with us, within us. He will not leave us. He will see us through.

The Spirit Yearns for Us

In 1 Peter 1:2, Peter points out that we are "set apart by the Spirit for obedience". What this means is that the Spirit calls us to obey His will and guidance. He is jealous for us (Jas. 4:5), that we will walk as Christ desires us to. And those who walk in concert with the Spirit yearn for the coming of Christ, as "Both the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" (Rev. 22:17).

However, God always has and always will respect the freedom of choice that He has granted us. For this reason, we can decide against what the Spirit desires, even if He lives in us. We can "grieve" (Eph. 4:30) or "stifle" (1Th. 5:19) Him, choosing our own way, our own desires, our own strength, our own glory rather than His. These negative choices have great impact upon our walk, our witness and whether or not people will turn to Jesus and be saved. The divisions in our churches, the lack of Christian witness, the many who leave the Faith are all due to those of us who do not walk with the Spirit, who yearns for us.

Walking with the Spirit

So, how does one walk with the Spirit? How does one get filled with the Spirit? This is a rather thorny and controversial topic, as there are those who insist that in order to start truly walking with the Spirit a "second blessing" or "deeper surrender" incident is needed. In my study of Scripture, I was unable to find a clear, unequivocal

statement that a specific second experience is necessary to be “filled” with the Spirit. So, I cannot address that contention from a scriptural perspective. However, here is what I’ve observed:

In the narrative passages in Acts 2:1-4; 4:19-20,23-31; and chapter 10, the outpouring of the Spirit was preceded in each case by prayer and either by active obedience or the will to obey. In Acts 2 the disciples are doing as Jesus told them and praying while waiting for the Spirit to come. They do not move until He arrives in power.

In Acts 4, the disciples beg the Father for the courage to continue boldly proclaiming the Gospel, resulting in another filling.

In Acts 10, the Gospel and the Spirit come to the Gentiles first after the prayer and obedience of Cornelius and then the prayer and obedience of Peter.

Prayer and obedience: the Spirit seems to demand these things to be able to work in our lives. Whether or not it will result in a spectacular experience is up to the Spirit. Jesus says, “The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (Jn 3:8).

The danger lies when we make a personal experience with God – whether our own or that of another Believer – the measure for how we or other Christians should experience God. Brothers and sisters, we are each different. God treats us each as unique individuals and He gives us whatever experiences, whatever knowledge and whatever wisdom we need to know Him uniquely. But each of those unique experiences and that unique knowledge is not for us individually; it is for the building up of the body of Christ. To put it bluntly, my being filled with the Spirit is not primarily for me: rather it is for God’s glory and for your growth. We must remember this, brothers and sisters.

So, what does being “filled with the Holy Spirit” look like? In my studies in Scripture, the narrative passages show us that those who were filled with the Spirit are steadfast and courageous, speaking about Jesus forcefully and wisely, calling sinners to repentance. They are recognized as people who live righteous lives.

In the didactic passages we find many lists describing the Spirit-filled life, which overlap. I’m going to address four of them here. Ephesians 4:2-3; Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-7 list attributes and Ephesians 5:18-21 lists actions Spirit-filled people take.

Regardless of how the filling of the Spirit comes about in your life, if you are filled with Him, these are the attributes that you will exhibit. Note also on this table which ones are repeated, which means there is more emphasis on them.

| Eph. 4:2-3 | Gal. 5:22-23 | 2Pe. 1:5-7 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Humility | | |
| Gentleness | Gentleness | |
| Patience | Patience | |
| Accepting one another in love | Love | Brotherly affection, love |
| Unity | | |
| Peace | Peace | |
| | Joy | |
| | Kindness | |
| | Goodness | Goodness |
| | Faith / faithfulness | Faith |
| | Self-control | Self-control |
| | | Knowledge |
| | | Endurance |

- A Spirit-filled person is humble, which means they have a right understanding of who they are with all their weaknesses and strengths.
- A Spirit-filled person is gentle, which is measured strength applied properly.
- A Spirit-filled person is patient, both in their personal circumstances, which is expressed by Peter’s word “endurance”, as well as with others around them. This is one I struggle with.
- A Spirit-filled person is loving, as God loves. That means loving, knowing we’ll be hurt. Accepting the person across from us, no matter what the hurt, enduring patiently, pouring ourselves out for them.

“Brotherly affection” speaks to the liking of those whom we love. It’s beyond the choice to the emotional bond between us. Note that love is the only item in all three lists and is even *twice* in Peter’s!

- A Spirit-filled person is zealous for the unity of the Body of Christ and thus is a peacemaker. They have peace personally and hold out peace to those around them.
- A Spirit-filled person is kind. This means that what they say and do is done in a manner that is not abrasive, not backhanded, but thoughtful and focused on the well-being of the other.
- A Spirit-filled person is good. What they do is good. What they say is good. It is in line with God’s desires.
- A Spirit-filled person exhibits faith in God and faithfulness to Him. This word can swing either way, because our abstract faith is exhibited in through our very concrete faithfulness in life to God.
- A Spirit-filled person is self-controlled. They do not explode in anger or do whatever they feel like. They do not easily get swept away by the moment. They know when it is proper to let go in worship and when not. This attribute is emphasized in the list in Ephesians 5:18, as well.
- A Spirit-filled person can endure. They bear up under persecution and pain, under slander and reviling, under rejection and being ignored. A Spirit-filled person knows where their true home is and that in this broken, fallen world we are called to shine Christ.

In Ephesians 5:18-21 we see how a Spirit-filled person acts. They are not reckless or thoughtless. They encourage other believers. They praise God continuously both through music and in thanksgiving. And they submit to their brother and sister Christians, because they fear Christ.

So, then comes the question, how do I measure up to these lists? Are these attributes growing in mean in increasing measure? Or am I unfruitful and useless in the knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s be silent for a moment, looking at this list of what it means to be Spirit-filled. Do you see these attributes in your life?

If you aren’t seeing these attributes in your life, has the Spirit shown you something where you are not being obedient? Remember, we observed that each of the miraculous fillings of the Spirit described in Acts was preceded by prayer and obedience. Are you sure that you’re doing both? And are you being patient? God waits until His timing is right; and that is usually not in our time.

Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time thing. It is a continual, constant discipline. It is new every morning. It will take effort, but the Spirit grants strength. And it will result in true freedom: not the ability to do whatever you want, but the ability to do what is right, no matter what.

So, brothers and sisters, on this day on which we celebrate the first corporate outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God’s people, I call you to surrender to the Holy Spirit. Open your hearts to Him. Pray for God’s blessings. Agree to obey Him, no matter what. Ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door shall be opened to you. For our God is a loving Father who loves to give good gifts to His children. How much more will He give of His Spirit if we ask for it!

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25 – ESV)

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