

Doctrine, Passions, and Practices Who is the Holy Spirit and what does He do?

Introduction

Why is understanding the Holy Spirit so important? It's because life is all about experiencing God through Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is the One who gives us this experience.

Sarah Edwards was the wife of Jonathan Edwards. Here's what happened as she was meditating on Romans 8:34 -- "Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" —

"When I was alone, the words came to my mind with great power and sweetness. They appeared to me with undoubted certainty as the words of God, and as words which God was actually speaking personally to me. I had no more doubts of it, than I had of my own being.

"I cannot find language to express how certain this appeared ... My safety, and happiness, and eternal enjoyment of God's love seemed as durable and unchangeable as God himself. Melted and overcome by the sweetness of this assurance I fell into a great flow of tears ... the presence of God was so near, and so real, that I seemed scarcely conscious of anything else." (adapted from Iain Murray's Jonathan Edwards 194f.)

Doctrine

1. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, which means that He is fully God, and that He works in complete unity with the Father and the Son.

^{ESV} **Acts 5:3** But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land ... You have not lied to men but to God."

2. The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force or power. He is a person – the third person of the Trinity – and acts in our lives in personal ways.

^{ESV} **Acts 8:29** And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

(See also Gal 4:6; Heb 10:15,29; I Peter 1:11; I John 5:6; Rev 22:17.)

3. Before Jesus came to earth the Holy Spirit saved people, causing them to be born again (John 3:10), and giving them joy in God's presence (Psa 16:11). But the Holy Spirit's work was not publicized in the Old Testament, because God wanted everyone to understand that no one can receive the Holy Spirit apart from Jesus' death for our sins.

^{ESV} **John 7:39** Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

4. Once Jesus was glorified through His death and Resurrection, God publicized the work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47).

^{ESV} **Acts 2:4, 7, 11** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance ... And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans ... we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God."



5. The reason Jesus came to earth and died on the Cross was so we could receive the gift of the Spirit. It is an astonishing mercy that sinful people like us can be given the Holy Spirit; but we can, through Jesus' death for our sins.

^{ESV} **Mark 1:8** I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

^{ESV} **John 4:10,13-14** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water ... Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us--for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

(See also John 7:37-39; 2Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14.)

6. What is the gift of the Spirit? The gift of the Spirit is not speaking in tongues (a valid gift, but it's not given to everyone – I Cor 12:30); it's not shaking or falling or goosebumps (God's Word never emphasizes these). The gift of the Spirit means having the Holy Spirit living inside me, enabling me to feel the truth of God's glory in Jesus.

^{ESV} **John 6:35** Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

^{ESV} **John 4:10,13-14** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water ... Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

^{ESV} **John 7:37** Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive ...

^{ESV} **Romans 5:5** ... and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 1:16-18** [I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...

^{ESV} **Ephesians 3:16-19** ... that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

When the Holy Spirit enables us to feel the truth of God's glory in Jesus, our heart-thirsts are overflowingly satisfied (John 6:35; 4:13-14; 7:37-39).

7. When do we receive the Holy Spirit? The New Testament teaches that God gives you the gift of the Spirit at the time you are first saved. The normal Christian life begins with a heart-experience of God the Father and Jesus the Son given by the Holy Spirit.

^{ESV} **Acts 2:38** And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

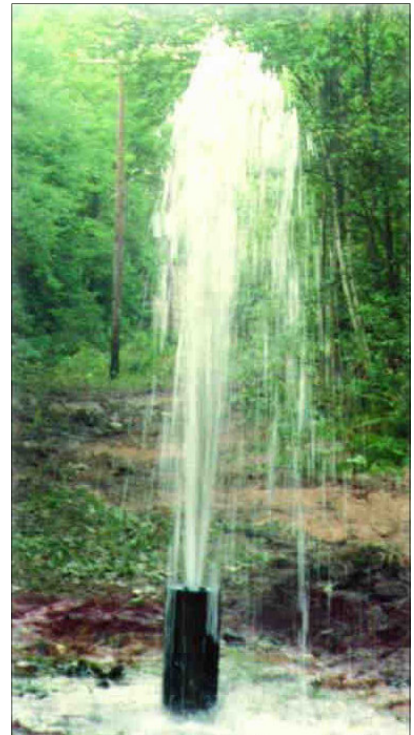
^{ESV} **Romans 5:5** ... and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

^{ESV} **Romans 8:15** For you ... have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...

^{ESV} **John 6:35** Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.

^{ESV} **John 7:37** Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive ...

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 4:6** For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

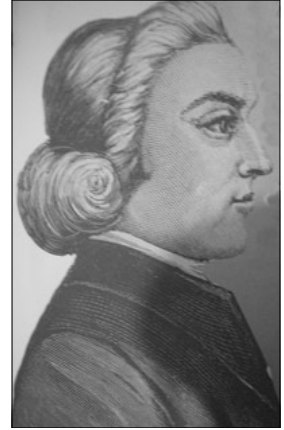


Howell Harris powerfully preached the gospel to Wales in the 1700's. We won't necessarily have a similar experience, but here's what happened when he was saved –

June 18, 1735. When I was praying alone, I suddenly felt my heart melting within me, like wax before the fire, with love to God my Savior. I felt not only love and peace, but longing to be dissolved and to be with Christ.

Then there rose up a cry in my heart which I had never known before – “Abba! Father!” ... I knew that I was His child, and that He loved me, and heard me. There was in me a well of water, springing up to eternal life.

The love of God was poured into my heart by the Holy Spirit ... I was entirely freed from all fears, and found uninterrupted rest in the love and faithfulness of God my Savior. (adapted from Howell Harris: His Own Story pp.17-18)



8. Our experience of the Spirit does not stop at conversion. The New Testament teaches that the normal Christian life involves regular heart-experience of the Spirit – as the Holy Spirit makes God the Father and Jesus the Son real in our experience.

^{ESV} **Acts 2:4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ... ^{ESV} **Acts 4:8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them ... ^{ESV} **Acts 4:31** And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness ... ^{ESV} **Acts 13:52** And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. ... ^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...

^{ESV} **Romans 8:15** For you ... have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...

^{ESV} **1 Peter 1:8** Though you have not seen him [Jesus], you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

David Brainerd was a missionary to the American Indians in the early 1700's. In his diary he records a prayer-time he had on a Sunday afternoon

"I had been trying to pray for half an hour – but felt very dull. But then as I continued to pray, suddenly God broke in upon me with a revelation of His glory. I did not see anything physically. But my soul saw God like I had never seen Him before.

I rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory to see such a God, such a glorious Being; and I was inwardly pleased that He should be God over all for ever and ever. My soul was captivated and delighted with the excellency, loveliness, greatness, and other perfections of God. I continued in this state of inward joy, peace, and astonishment, until near dark." (adapted from David Brainerd pp.69f)

9. What can we do to experience more of the Holy Spirit's work? Pray for more of the work of the Spirit:

^{ESV} **Luke 11:13** If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

(See also Eph 1:16-18; Eph 3:16-19; Jude 1:20-21.)

Think about and trust the truth of God's Word. The work of the Spirit does not come as we empty our minds; it comes as we prayerfully set our minds to trust the truth of God's Word. It's like fire, which requires wood (truth), oxygen (faith), and heat (the Spirit).

^{ESV} **John 6:63** It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:5** Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—

(Passages linking faith with the work of the Spirit:
John 7:37-39; Eph 1:13-14.)



Be sure you are not grieving the Holy Spirit:

^{ESV} **Ephesians 4:29-31** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Even when we take these steps, what we receive is entirely up to God's sovereign grace. In His infinite wisdom and goodness, He can give us just a little taste, or a vast banquet. Our call is to seek Him diligently, and to thank Him for whatever He gives.

10. When, by the Holy Spirit, our hearts experience the presence of Jesus, our heart-thirsts are completely satisfied (John 6:35), we are convicted of sin (John 16:8-10), we are filled with joy, peace, and hope (Rom 15:13), temptations lose their power (Rom 8:13), we have a foretaste of heaven (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14), we love others (Col 1:8), and we love to tell others about Jesus (Acts 1:8).
11. What about spiritual gifts? We believe that God still works through supernatural spiritual gifts such as healing, tongues, and prophecy. There will come a time when these gifts cease (I Cor 13:8), but we believe this refers to the Second Coming of Christ. Therefore God will continue working through spiritual gifts until Jesus returns. That's why we believe these gifts should be pursued earnestly (I Cor 14:12) and biblically (I Corinthians 12-14).

12. The gift of tongues is given to many, but not to everyone (I Cor 12:30). Someone can be completely filled with the Spirit and not speak in tongues (Eph 5:18-20). It can function as a private prayer language not heard by others; in this case there is no need for interpretation (I Cor 14:28). It can also function as a public spoken word that, when publicly interpreted, builds up the church (I Cor 14:13,27). The gift of tongues is a wonderful gift, but it is not the ultimate spiritual experience. The ultimate spiritual experience is the Holy Spirit enabling us to feel the truth of Jesus (John 7:37-39).
13. We are encouraged to pray for the sick, asking God for supernatural healing (James 5:14-18). Sickness is entirely under God's control, purposefully allowed by Him to bring us great good (Exo 4:11). Sometimes the great good is the joy of seeing God glorified through supernatural healing (John 9:3). At other times the great good is the comfort and nearness of God we experience during the sickness (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Passions and Practices

Be filled with the Spirit. Understand that God intends the Christian life to begin and continue with regular heart-experience of the Spirit, as He makes God the Father and the Son real to us.

Pray passionately for more of the work of the Spirit, and spend time meditating on God's Word.

Continue to do whatever else God's Word calls us to do, because God also can pour His Spirit upon us as we do His will (John 4:34; I Peter 4:12-14).

Don't settle for just believing doctrine and obeying commands. God wants to regularly satisfy your heart with His presence by the Holy Spirit. So either be filled with the Spirit – or be passionately seeking to be filled with the Spirit.

Blaise Pascal was a believer who lived in France in the 17th century. He was a brilliant scientist and philosopher and mathematician. And after he died someone discovered that he had sewn a pocket inside his shirt, and that sewn into this pocket was a scrap of paper on which he described a profound experience he had with God. Here is what was written:

"This day of grace 1654; from about half past ten at night, to about half after midnight, fire. Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and the wise. Security, security, feeling, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ.

"Forgetfulness of the world and all [except] God. He can be found only in the ways taught in the gospel. O righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. I have separated myself from Him ... This is life eternal; that they might know You the only true God, and Him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ."
(Quoted in Lloyd-Jones' Joy Unspeakable pp.106f.)



Pray for and earnestly desire spiritual gifts. As the Holy Spirit gives you gifts, use them and share them, for His glory and the good of the church.

For further discussion

1. Think about a time when you experienced the Holy Spirit making Jesus' love real to you. What happened? What brought this about? How did this impact you?
2. Before Sunday's teaching what was your understanding of the Holy Spirit and His work? How did Sunday's teaching change your thinking?
3. Why is it easy to settle for little experience of the Spirit? What happens when we do this? How can we keep from doing this?
4. What can you do to seek more of the work of the Spirit?
5. Take time in your home group to pray for more of the Spirit's work. Give this time. Use Scripture which describes the love of God the Father and Jesus the Son for you. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of your heart to experience the reality of this. Confess any sin that needs to be confessed. Lay hands on each other and pray for God to pour out His Spirit. After you have sought God in this way, what happened? What did you experience? What did you learn?

For further study

Carson, D. A. Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Edwards, Jonathan. A Treatise on the Religious Affections.

Edwards, Jonathan. The Life and Diary of David Brainerd.

Grudem, Wayne. The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today.

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. Revival.

Owen, John. The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded.

Piper, John. Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist.

Piper, John. When I Don't Desire God.

Storms, Sam. Convergence: Spiritual Journeys of a Charismatic Calvinist.