

# God In Three Persons: Knowing the Holy Spirit.

To know the Spirit personally is as rich in experience as knowing the Father and the Son. Indeed it is not really possible to know one or two Persons of the Godhead unless one knows the Spirit. In fact we only know them truly when we know them simultaneously.<sup>1</sup>

If we are to know the Spirit, we need to set out certain parameters for our approach to the topic. The first is that we can only come to the Spirit as he comes to us. We are not able to have an experience of the Holy Spirit which does not accord with his own being and nature. There are no doubt many who claim experiences of the Holy Spirit who have not come this way, but we have every reason to doubt that those experiences are genuine. So, how can we tell if what we are experiencing is in fact the Holy Spirit? The second parameter is, then, that we can only know the Spirit in terms of the revelation given to us in the scriptures. While there may be rich experiences given to men and women, and there undoubtedly are, these must be examined carefully, not judgmentally, against the Word written, if for no other reason than that we are prone to deception through our own fleshliness and through the subtleties of the evil one. 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 is instructive:

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup>For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive *a different spirit* from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough.

If, as a commencement to this section in our studies, all this sounds negative, then I must add, and this is my major concern, that the gift of the Holy Spirit, and so the *knowledge* of the Holy Spirit, is the most wonderful thing that can ever come to a human being. We read of the disciples being ‘filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 13:52): why should this be any less than it appears? Familiarity with the description of other peoples’ experiences may actually harden us to our own lack of an awareness such as they had. But we can add such comments as: ‘living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, [the church] increased in numbers’ (Acts 9:31); ‘The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17); ‘in spite of persecution, you received the word with joy of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Thess 1:6, literal translation) and so on. None of these comments would make sense were they not describing an experience which could be affirmed, to some degree, by others.

Also, we should see that the scriptures actually appeal to an experience with which the readers could or, at least, should identify: ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ (Acts 19:2); ‘Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law ...?’ (Gal. 3:2). Though startling and obviously transforming, descriptions of people receiving the Spirit are also taken as perfectly legitimate and to be expected: we read of Pentecost (Acts 2), the reception of the Spirit by the Samaritans (Acts 8), by Cornelius and his household (Acts 10) and later by the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1-7).

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Bingham, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2009, p. xif.

## KNOWING THE SPIRIT

The principle I have been presenting is that we know the Holy Spirit is a person because the New Testament gives us a full revelation of who God is, by means of the incarnation of the Son in the person of Jesus the Jewish Messiah. So we know the Holy Spirit *as* a person.

The New Testament, while fully aware of the revelation contained in the Old Testament, which I called ‘the second revelation’ after the first which was creation, simply describes the Holy Spirit in personal terms. Some of these are grammatical; the word πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) is grammatically a neuter word, therefore normally requiring a neuter pronoun, ‘it’.<sup>2</sup> But as we have seen, occasionally the scriptures use masculine pronouns, as in John 16:13 and 14. But there is more to personhood than grammar. This is especially so since the word ‘spirit’, in whatever language, does not primarily refer to the Holy Spirit. In both Hebrew and Greek the word fits into the semantic range of ‘wind-spirit-breath’.

Personhood is discovered in an encounter. We understand a person when we relate to that person and see or experience them in the action of life. Geoff Bingham puts it:

Psychologically we say that a person is one who has intelligence, will and feeling. It can be easily shown that the Holy Spirit has these three elements...

He then adds:

but such a statement is naïve, seeing Scripture shows him to be the Spirit of life, and so the very one from whom we derive our elements of life, namely intelligence, will and feeling.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, we cannot just define the Holy Spirit by terms already familiar to us. We can only use those terms because we have met the Spirit. This is the same as us saying ‘God is like...’ when we have it clearly said: ‘To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?’ (Isa. 40:18, 19ff. and 25ff.).

We can know the Spirit as he encounters us. In particular, while certain things can be said of the experience of that encounter, such as the Spirit falling on people, filling people, moving them and so on, as mere experiences these things could be attributed to many sources. But it is when the Spirit speaks to us that we recognise the person. Thus:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul.<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’.<sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.<sup>4</sup> So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4).

We might note that the Spirit spoke, presumably through the prophets who were present, but what was heard was recognised as *his* voice and not theirs. As a result, the sending out was seen as the action of the Spirit and not of the church at Antioch. We can go further and add that the Spirit is himself the one through whom the risen and ascended Jesus does his work and speaks his word. The sword comes from the mouth of the risen Jesus (Rev. 1:12, lit. ‘I turned to see the voice’, 1:17-18; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14) but always the church is to hear ‘what the Spirit is saying to the

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<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for spirit, רוּחַ *ruach*, happens to be grammatically feminine. English nouns do not have grammatical gender.

<sup>3</sup> *Person and Work*, p. 3.

churches' (Rev. 2-3). And the cry of the church is accompanied by and drawn out by the cry of the Spirit (Rev. 22:17; Gal. 4:6 and Rom. 8:15-16).

We can admit that there may be those who do not understand that this is what is happening in their experience of the work of God. That need not be a problem unless, of course, there is a deliberate rejection of the apostolic teaching which explains the experience and expounds that explanation (Acts 2:42). But when the apostolic word is received in simple faith we will see that the experience of the Spirit takes on richer hues in our understanding.

For our present purpose, we should first give attention to the way the scriptures present the work of the Spirit, keeping in mind that we are reading the Old Testament with apostolic hindsight.

## THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN CREATION

We know that what we experience is genuine when we measure it against what is already revealed. Hence we recognise that certain things are the work of the Spirit now when we see the way the Holy Spirit has worked in history.

There is a principle which is quite clear from the opening statements of Genesis and right through the Old Testament; the Holy Spirit is God.<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word *ruach* is used in the account of the creation, usually translated as wind or spirit<sup>5</sup>:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth; <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2).

If the word is translated as 'spirit' then we would understand it to be a spirit whose presence could be felt (even if not, at that point at least, by human beings). The spirit of God is the wind of God, the breath of God, which comes from him continually. That breath is accompanied by his word ('and God said') since that is always the way God works.<sup>6</sup> The language used is immediately recognisable: the can be no word without breath, be it in a loud voice or a whisper.

And the breath of God is continuous. Were the breath of God to cease coming to the creation, the whole creation would immediately perish.

When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.  
<sup>30</sup>When you send forth your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground (Psalms 104:29-30).

'*Their* breath' is, of course *his* breath (Gen. 2:7; Job 27:3). Creation comes to be and continues to stand firm by the spirit *and* by the word!

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth... <sup>9</sup>For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. (Psalms 33:6, 9).

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<sup>4</sup> See the previous sections of this topic, starting with 'God in Three Persons: Blessed Trinity' (<http://www.newcreation.org.au/studies/pastorstudies/nswmonthly.htm>), where the matter of the Trinity has been expounded.

<sup>5</sup> Translations which use capital 'S' for Spirit in verse 2 are actually reading back from the New Testament into the Old. The Hebrew is not at all specific.

<sup>6</sup> See the hymn, 'By the breath of his mouth, He made all the heavens' (Geoffrey Bingham, *New Creation Hymn Book*, number 4).

There is one God, and he is known by his acts, by what he does, and those acts are performed always and only by *his* breath and *his* word. And those elements are elements of the one God and, within the Old Testament they are never even vaguely hints of, far less evidence of, Trinity.

The continuous presence of God in breath and word is seen in the account of the LORD's presence in Eden after Adam and Eve sinned:

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8).

There is a difference here between the Hebrew and Greek texts. Both are instructive.<sup>7</sup> Traditional translations have followed the Greek which uses the word δειλίνοσ (*deilinos*) meaning 'afternoon', while the Hebrew uses the words לְרוּחַ הַיּוֹם (*ruach ha yom*), 'the breath of the day'. But, while the impression may be the same, there has only been one prior reference to *ruach*, (Gen. 1:2) where it is the wind, breath or spirit from God. Also, the word for 'sound' (also in v. 10) is also the word for 'voice' (as in the older translations) and is translated that way in verse 17. If nothing else, we seem to have here the *ruach* and the speaking of God. Could it be that there is a suggestion that the presence of God to *fallen* humanity is that of the creator, who is still active as 'faithful creator' (i.e. sustainer, 1 Pet. 4:19) to them?<sup>8</sup> As we have seen, were his breath-his spirit and his speaking-his word not present to the creation, all would cease because it would mean he was absent.

One further point should be made, and it is most important: the creation of the man (Gen. 2) meant that for him to be a living being, he must have the breath of God within him. Genesis 2:7 and Job 27:3 show us that it is the spirit of God in the man<sup>9</sup> that makes him fully human, fully the image of God. Mere animation<sup>10</sup> is not the purpose of God for his image. Apart from men and women in their created unity knowing the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, creation is other than God intended and men and women less than they are created to be.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PLAN OF GOD

The story of history is the story of the acts of God. As such, it is far bigger than the history of Israel but can only be understood from that perspective, since, as we have seen, God specifically gave to Israel 'the oracles of God' (Rom. 3:2); true glory, true worship, true law etc. are only given to Israel (Rom. 9:4). But that does not imply that God was not at work across the whole of humanity. We see him stirring the Philistines to come from Caphtor (Amos 9:7), determining palace coups in Assyria

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<sup>7</sup> The Greek word for garden is παράδεισος (*paradeisos*, paradise), which ought to assist us to make sense of Jesus' statement to the thief on the cross.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, while advocating a slightly different interpretation from 'afternoon', nonetheless adds: 'I do not doubt that some notable symbol of the presence of God was in that gentle breeze' (*A Commentary on Genesis*, John King trans, Banner of Truth, London, 1965, p. 161).

<sup>9</sup> That he cannot be all that God intended apart from the woman is made clear later in Gen. 2:18-25. As bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, she participates with him in his full, i.e. spirit filled, humanity.

<sup>10</sup> From the Latin *anima*, soul cf. Greek ψυχή *psuchē*. We may note that Paul's criticism of the Corinthians was that they were merely *psuchikos* (1 Cor. 2:14, wrongly translated as 'unspiritual'), those living in their own resources and not those of the Spirit, humanly alive, animated, *soulish*, but not filled with the Spirit. This started in Eden.

(Isa. 37:5-7, 36-38), setting the history of Media for his purposes (Isa 44:28–45:1-7) and so on.

The story of the Old Testament, and of Israel especially, is beyond our scope here.<sup>11</sup> But what we can observe is that God's intention for all humanity was particularised in Israel. They were everyone 'writ large'.

Although there is no understanding of God as triune within the Old Testament, there is still the God, the LORD, who is never known apart from his spirit and his word. God speaks to Israel, through the prophets, and also the spirit of God comes upon men and women for various tasks, including prophecy. Isaiah 61:1, Ezekiel 2:2 etc.; Hosea 9:7 and Micah 3:8 show this.

The pattern for prophecy in Israel was Moses, who was a man of the spirit (Num. 11:17). Similarly, the spirit of God was also given to the 72 elders of Israel who also prophesied (Num. 11:16-27). Once again, Israel as a paradigm for all humanity is expressed in Numbers 11:28-29:

And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them!' <sup>29</sup>But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!'

The goal is the whole people of Israel filled with the spirit and prophesying. But as we know from the purpose of God through Israel, this blessing is for all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3). Gal. 3:13-14 makes this plain:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'—<sup>14</sup>in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Galatians 3:13-14).

We can also see that Israel was a nation which knew the presence of the spirit of God in other aspects of life. Exodus 28:3 speaks of those who made Aaron's vestments as having been given 'a wise spirit', and in Exodus 31:3 Bezalel, in order to work on the tasks of preparing the tabernacle, was 'filled with the spirit of God'. The judges of Israel, meaning those who were raised up to judge Israel's enemies, were, of themselves, mostly unimpressive, but were used as the spirit of the LORD came upon them (Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 8:3; 9:23 etc.). Also Saul (1 Sam. 10:6) and David (1 Sam. 16:13) were able kings as the spirit of God worked in them. In Num. 14:24 Caleb is described as having a different spirit from those who did not obey the voice of God.

God, the LORD, was present with Israel, so that it was his spirit by which they were taught (Neh. 9:20). If God was present then it was his spirit that was with them, as the parallelism of Psalm 139:7-12 shows:

Where can I go from your *spirit*? Or where can I flee from your *presence*<sup>12</sup>?

<sup>8</sup>If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

<sup>9</sup>If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,

<sup>10</sup>even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.

<sup>11</sup>If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night',

<sup>12</sup>even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

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<sup>11</sup> See my *The Story of the Acts of God* and Geoff Bingham's *Salvation History* for simple treatments.

<sup>12</sup> Heb. פָּנֶיךָ *pnh* 'face'; the same word was used in Gen. 3:8, where 'the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God'.

Israel's failure was essentially moral. The holy LORD (Lev. 11:44-45) required holy living from them because he was with them in his holiness (Hos. 11:9). So Isaiah described their failure:

But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore he became their enemy; he himself fought against them. <sup>11</sup>Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit? (Isaiah 63:10-11).

The offence was against his *holy* spirit. They were set for the glorious role of being a light to the nations but instead copied Adam, avoiding the *holy* presence (see Gen. 3:8), God's face. The *ruach* of God was in the garden (Gen. 3:8) and Adam hid from the presence, and the *ruach* of God was in Israel and they offended the same holy presence.

Finally we see that the promises of restoration for Israel related to the pouring out of the spirit on them. We have already seen Moses' desire that the spirit of God should be poured out on the whole people in Numbers 11:29:

Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!

Moses' concern was for the LORD's people, yet the scope of God's plan was the whole earth, 'all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD' (Num. 14:21), a purpose reiterated later in Isaiah 11:9 and Hosea 2:14 (cf. Rev. 21:11). This was to take place through the covenant people as they were people of the spirit and so of the word (i.e. a prophetic people).

Sadly, the covenant people were in constant breach of the covenant. But the purpose of God through them was never rescinded. Joel 2:28-29 specifies this:

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. <sup>29</sup>Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

Pentecost was the fulfilment of this promise to the covenant people. As a consequence, Judah was soon reunited with the northern kingdom, represented by the Samaritans (Acts 8) and so the nations became participants in the experience of the new creation. It is this which explains the rest of the passage in Joel (2:30-32) where the pouring out of the spirit on all flesh relates to the dramatic final upheaval of creation.

Of course, the promise to 'the house of Israel' as it is restored to its inheritance and cleansed from its moral pollutions also relates to the restoration of the spirit and to the pristine creation being restored:

I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. <sup>25</sup>I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. <sup>26</sup>A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>*I will put my spirit within you*, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. <sup>28</sup>Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. <sup>29</sup>I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. <sup>30</sup>I will make the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field abundant, so that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. <sup>31</sup>Then you shall remember your evil ways, and your dealings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds. <sup>32</sup>It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and dismayed for your ways, O house of Israel.

<sup>33</sup>Thus says the Lord GOD: On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the towns to be inhabited, and the waste places shall be rebuilt. <sup>34</sup>The land that was desolate shall be tilled, instead of being the desolation that it was in the sight of all who passed by. <sup>35</sup>And they will say, ‘*This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined towns are now inhabited and fortified.*’ (Ezekiel 36:24-35)

Were that not sufficient, Ezekiel then recounts his vision of the way the dry bones of ‘the whole house of Israel’ are renewed by the word and spirit of God. The description concludes:

‘I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act’, says the LORD. (Ezekiel 37:14).

Similarly, this promise is also followed by a promise of renewed unity among the divided people, (Ezek. 37:15-27), the unity brought by the word and spirit, as the dwelling place of God is again with them (verse 27-28). The power of such promises is seen in the way they guided the writers of the New Testament, as in Ephesians 2:19-22; Revelation 21:1-3; John 14:2, 15-17, 23-24 and so on.

Far from all this being a mere gathering of texts of scripture, all we have seen provides part of the foundation for knowing and understanding the transforming work of the Holy Spirit as described in the New Testament.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This heading is possibly inadequate; the truth is that the Holy Spirit was and is always the Spirit of God and what is given in the New Testament is a more fully developed revelation of him. But our attention must now turn to the way the New Testament presents the person and work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

But although we have just examined the matter, we should be reminded that the coming of the Spirit in a special way was not surprising to those who knew the prophetic promises in the Old Testament. For instance, Luke 24 sums up the issues: first there were the two on the Emmaus road. Their dejection concerning the death of Jesus, which meant to them that Israel would not be redeemed (cf. Luke 1:68-79; 2:25, 38; 4:18-21), was explained by Jesus himself as based on them being ‘fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken’ (24:25). This evaluation was followed by Jesus ‘beginning with Moses and all the prophets [and] interpret[ing] to them all things about himself in all the scriptures’ (24:27). Shortly after this, Jesus met with the eleven and their companions. The same principle was applied:

Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ <sup>45</sup>Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’ (Luke 24:44-49)

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<sup>13</sup> Full details are beyond the scope of this study. Within the range of NCPI books, Geoffrey Bingham’s books, *The Day of the Spirit*, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, *The Holy Spirit: Creation and Glory* and *Spirit-Baptism: Spirit-Living*, are helpful. Also, soon to be published (2011) is my *Rivers of Living Water*, which examines the presentation of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John.

All that Jesus accomplished was ‘written’. This did not necessarily refer to detailed promises. There is no precise Old Testament reference to the suffering of the *Messiah* (24:26; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4), but had the disciples been men of faith (as distinct from mere assent to doctrinal statements) they would have been consciously living in the flow of the action of God and would have been alert to that action even if the precise direction of it was not previously clear. The final statement by Jesus, ‘I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high’, is instructive. Where do we have any record of the Father promising the bestowal of power from on high, which we understand from Acts 1:4-8 to refer to the Holy Spirit? The answer is we do not have one in those terms but the answer also is that the whole of the action of God until that point demonstrates the utter necessity of the gift of the Spirit.

Without the Spirit being given there could be no climax to the purposes of God. We have looked at the language of the account of the creation, earlier in this chapter, but the principle is plainly repeated in the gospel of John.<sup>14</sup> The gospel commences with ‘In the beginning’ (John 1:1) and that is soon associated with the incarnate word taking away the sins of the world and baptising with the Holy Spirit (John 1:29, 33). The climax of the gospel (chapter 20) commences with ‘early on the first day of the week’ (so Gen. 1:5) and that is followed by the gift of the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins (John 20:22-23).<sup>15</sup> There could be no new creation apart from the gift of the Spirit. The forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit are all of a one.

This is also expressed in Acts chapter 2. Peter has explained how it is that he and the others have been so transformed (Acts 2:14-36). God has raised Jesus from the dead. The transformation is as a result of the risen Jesus having been exalted at the right hand of the Father. That alone would give us the explanation we need. Jesus’ exaltation is no less than the restoration of humanity to glory — in him. But Peter continued:

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. (Acts 2:33)

Now that the man Jesus, whom God has made both Lord and Messiah! (Acts 2:36), has been given such exaltation, he now reigns at that right hand of God (so verse 34). The mark of his triumph is that he pours out the Holy Spirit on those in him. They are made participants in the new creation over which he is Lord. The enemies may still be active, but ‘he must reign until he (i.e. God) has put all his enemies under his feet’, then he as the second man, the last Adam, will gladly submit to the one who has so highly exalted him (1 Cor. 15:24-28). The gift of the Spirit is the whole goal of God in Christ for us. All that the first Adam had as Son of God and which he should have passed on to those in him, he gave up. All that Adam passed on was sin, and death though sin (Rom 5:12).

We are ‘in Christ’ because his Spirit dwells in us. If the love of God is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39) then that would be no more than a mere concept to be

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<sup>14</sup> The forthcoming volume, *Rivers of Living Water*, will examine this in more detail; the papers which have been used for that volume may be found in the 2005 Sydney Studies at: <http://www.newcreation.org.au/studies/pastorstudies/nswmonthly.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> The language of verse 22 seems deliberately to reflect Gen. 2:7. In *Rivers of Living Water* I contend that it is misleading to attempt to fit John’s account into that of Luke. Each gospel writer tells the story in his own particular way.



pondered unless that love was actually poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Romans 8:4 is a stunning statement of what has happened to us:

so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The verb ‘might be fulfilled’ indicates a single action.<sup>16</sup> That just requirement has been fulfilled by a single action. That single action, according to Romans 5:18, was by one man, Jesus Christ. His act of righteousness fulfilled all that the Law required. Sin was condemned in his flesh (Rom. 8:3). In other words, the Law demanded death because of sin and he died to sin, once for all, with the result that we must now see ourselves as dead to sin (Rom. 6:10-11). But that does not end it. That fulfilment of the just demands of the law means that we must also see ourselves as ‘alive to God’ in him (Rom. 6:11). We have died and our life is hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3). We live, nevertheless we do not live because we have resources of our own, we live because it is Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20). So we are now set to live in ongoing fulfilment of the just demands of the law. This is ‘new creation’; we are ‘in Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:17). So Paul continues in Romans 8:4 by describing us as those who ‘are walking’ not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. While there is an obvious obligation in all of this, it is first a simple statement of fact. It is the Spirit who has us and who holds us.

No matter how potent the flesh seems to be, Paul continues:

you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.<sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.<sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. (Rom. 8:9-11)

Christ has poured out the Spirit on us. That means Christ himself is in us. And it therefore means that the Father has his dwelling place in us, with the Son and the Spirit (John 14:23).

Consequently we see that we are under no obligation to the flesh (Rom. 8:12). In this context ‘flesh’ does not mean only God given natural human appetites. It means those appetites which stand over against God, demanding to be fed and satisfied in their own right. The obligation is to recognise what God has done and to live in that:

If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit are children of God.<sup>17</sup> (Rom. 8:13-14).

Obligation and the truth go hand in hand. The truth is that:

you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’<sup>16</sup> it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:15-17)

The gift of the Spirit means our adoption. We cry ‘Abba! Father!’ because we are now participants with Christ in all God has purposed and all that God is doing. We share his inheritance. Any uncertainty we may have as to the intentions of God concerning our future and the future of the rest of creation are dispelled when we

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<sup>16</sup> Gk. *πληρωθῆ* (*plērōthē*) is an aorist passive.

<sup>17</sup> Is this a reference to the identity of true Israelites over against those who boast in the human descent, a point developed in Romans 9?

observe that we have received the ‘first fruits of the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:23). The first fruits are the evidence that the harvest has indeed begun.

Our present weakness is unpleasant: we along with all creation, groan inwardly as we wait for the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:22-23), bodies which presently carry outward evidence of death (Rom. 7:24). But our weakness does not hinder or limit the work of God.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.<sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom. 8:26-27)

This intercession by the Spirit is one with the intercession of:

Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.<sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom. 8:34-35)

Further, we are in Christ because we have been drawn by the Father (John 6:44), and we have received the Spirit because the Father has given him to us at the request of the Son (John 14:16). But Jesus’ full statement is even greater:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.<sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.<sup>17</sup> This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. *You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.* (John 14:15-17)

The disciples, here prior to the cross, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, were living in the presence of the Spirit. He was in action in the man Jesus who was *the* man of the Spirit. From his conception onwards, Jesus never did one thing apart from the Spirit.<sup>18</sup> This was his fundamental distinction from the first Adam who hid from the presence, when the *ruach* was there in the garden. But the promise is that ‘he will be in you’. This is the promise of the new covenant. So, now, if we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). And as we long for the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13), ‘through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness’ (Gal. 5:5). In the meantime, rather than continuing in sin, we are simply, and sensibly urged to ‘go on being filled with the Spirit’ (Eph. 5:18, which is the same as having ‘the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly’, Col. 3:16). Still the word and the Spirit are one.

## THE GIFTS AND THE SPIRIT

Discussing the ‘gifts’ has sometimes resulted in division and even acrimony. We should doubt that this is anything else but the flesh and the evil one setting out to destroy the work of Christ. Disputes over gifts given and received usually results in their misuse or disuse, or even their withdrawal. So how should we see the matter? We should see the gifts described in the New Testament in the context of the purpose of love for which they were given.

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<sup>18</sup> Consider Jesus’ conception: Matt. 1:20; his baptism: Matt. 3:16; his temptations by Satan: Matt 4:1; the commencement of his ministry: Luke 4:14, 18-21; his exorcisms: Matt. 12:28; his rejoicing: Luke 10:21; his death: Heb. 9:14; his resurrection: 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Tim. 3:16; his post-resurrection teaching: Acts 1:2; his present empowering of the church: Acts 2:33 and his continual speaking to the church: Rev. 2-3. Here is the last Adam, filled with the only genuine power which any man or woman may know.

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup>But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup>Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people.' <sup>9</sup>(When it says, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? <sup>10</sup>He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) <sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were ... (Eph. 4:1-11)

Ephesians is a document in which Paul sets out the place of the church in the purposes of God. In that purpose there is no place for division, since the blood of the cross has brought divided fallen humanity into 'one new man' (Eph. 2:13-15). We, those joined to Christ, have been made to be 'a holy temple in the Lord... a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (Eph. 2:21-22). As such, the church is called to be the declaration of the wisdom of God to the hostile rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (Eph. 3:10).

Thus Ephesians 4:1-6 sets out the reality of our unity. There is one Lord, one Spirit and one God and Father of us all. The Father is above all and through all and in all. In the ultimate, the Son and the Spirit are concerned to show us the Father, to bring us to the Father and to sustain us in him. There is more to be said, though, since our place in the Father and the Son and the Spirit is our place as the bride of the Son (Eph. 5:22-33). And here we should observe the way the Son is described:

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. <sup>22</sup>And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:20-23)

Once again it is the *man* Jesus who is in Paul's mind. Only the man Jesus was raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places. Further, the words, 'he has put all things under his feet' are a strong allusion to Psalm 8 (and Ps. 110:1?), which describes the glory of created Man. Christ's headship over all things, however, is 'for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all'. The other references to Christ's body are in Ephesians 4:11-16 and 5:29-32. In both we see the exquisite unity of the body with Christ. The body is to grow up into him, as it grows in love. And Christ loves his bride for she is his body.

It is as true Man that we see Christ. When Adam was created he was to fill the earth and subdue it, to have dominion over all things. The picture is not one of foolish, arrogant dictatorship but of Adam, male and female, filling all the earth. As we have seen, the male could not fully be the image of God apart from his bride (Gen. 2:18-25) and Paul recognises that this is an anticipation of the last Adam and his bride, the church (Eph. 5:32). So just as Adam was to fill the earth, Christ is to do that, and to do it with his bride. She is his fullness so that he might fill all things. She is the fullness of him who fills all in all.

So Ephesians 4:7-11 makes it clear that the church has been given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. His gift is the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> His bride cannot truly be

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<sup>19</sup> A case can be made for saying this, as the word *δωρεά* (*dōrea*) is always, or mostly, used in the New Testament with reference to the Spirit. See James D G Dunn, 'Δωρεά as the Gift of the Holy Spirit' in *The Christ and The Spirit: Volume 2 Pneumatology*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998, p. 207-209.

his bride unless she participates with him in the fulness of God. And as her lover, he endows his bride with all the gifts she requires to be his fulness. He will not fill all things through a partially supplied bride. So I Corinthians 1:7: ‘you are not lacking in any spiritual gift (χάρισμα, *charisma*) as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ’. The gifts given to the church are with the sole purpose of the church being full with all that is required for Christ to fill all things. Without these gifts she cannot grow up in every way into him and be built up in love.

The same issue applies in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Discussions concerning the individual ‘gifts’ usually distract from the heart of the matter. It cannot be proved, but it does seem that the lists of gifts in this passage, Romans 12 and 1 Peter 4 are somewhat *ad hoc*. They are descriptive and not prescriptive. They are descriptive of Christ meeting the needs of the church at particular times. Of course, it would be supremely arrogant to assert that certain gifts are not needed in any age, even our own. That decision is never left to the recipients. All we can say is that if someone submits to the lordship of Christ then that is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives (1 Cor. 12:3). And if there are gifts in the church then they come from that same Spirit and should be received as such. The gifts are the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the church. Those who are spiritually alert will discern this. The differences in gifts are perfectly sensible: the body is diverse and so are the gifts. What is central is the love which binds all together. Where there is no love then there is every reason to doubt that the Spirit is at work. Where there is love in action, ‘your love in the Spirit’ (Col. 1:8), then it is more unlikely that what is described in 1 Corinthians 12-14 will be an issue. Where the Spirit is at work in the church, then the aim is that the church may be fully functional. In other words, where there is a need, if you can, meet it. That is the action of love. But introspective discussions concerning ‘my gift’ are generally pointless. The Holy Spirit has greater things to reveal.

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There is a great deal more which we could say about all these things. This chapter is simply intended to show us that we know the Spirit and must go on to know him more, just as his service to us is to reveal the Son and so to reveal the Father. In a sense, it matters little what words we use. Arguing over words is rarely helpful. While we should take care how we say things, especially where we are teaching others, the ultimate concern should be the discernment of the Holy Spirit in the lives of others and in our own lives. When that is seen, then there will be no place for pride or self assertion, since all will be seen as gift.

In it all, we will see that it has been give to us to know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is good to examine the scriptures to uncover the wonders that are there for us. But it is better for us to do this with a humble and contrite heart. These chapters have been presented so that we might be refreshed in, perhaps overwhelmed by, an awareness of the triune God, especially since he has come to us, cleansed us and renewed us and made us his own. We are the bride of his dearly beloved Son and we are filled with his Spirit. So let us go on being filled with the Spirit, go on letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly, and let us go on in faith till we hear the words in the new earth: I am your God and you are my sons.