

# Keep in Step with the Spirit

*The Holy Spirit and His Work in our Lives*

by Steve Hixon



## Looking at Current Issues from a Biblical Perspective

### INTRODUCTION

The power and presence of God the Holy Spirit is an awesome thing. J.I. Packer, in his book *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, says that in 1908 some missionaries in Manchuria wrote home as follows:

*“A power has come into the church that we cannot control if we would. It is a miracle for stolid, self-righteous John Chinaman to go out of his way to confess to sins that no torture of the Yamen could force from him; for a Chinaman to demean himself to weep and ask for the prayers of his fellow-believers is beyond all human explanation.*

*Perhaps you will say it's a sort of religious hysteria.*

*So did some of us... But here we are, about sixty Scottish and Irish Presbyterians who have seen it – all shades of temperament – and, much as many of us shrank from it at first, every one who has seen and heard what we have, every day last week, is certain there is only one explanation...that it is God's Holy Spirit manifesting Himself... One clause of the Creed that lives before us now in all its inevitable, awful solemnity is, ‘I believe in the Holy Spirit.’”*

Although the Holy Spirit is crucial to our growth in Christ, many Christians are baffled as to who the Holy Spirit is, what He does, and how we are to relate to Him. Hopefully the following questions and answers will help you to “keep in step!”

### WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Holy Spirit is not a “thing”; He is a person who has **intelligence** (1 Cor 2: 10-11), **feelings** (Ephesians 4:30), and a **will** (1 Corinthians 12:11). He is equal with God; therefore He is God. Charles Ryrie writes, “Works which only God can do are said to be done by the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is recorded as creating the world, inspiring Scripture, begetting Christ, bringing men and women out of spiritual death into life and causing them to grow spiritually. Only God can do these things! The following verses record some of the Spirit’s attributes:



SCRIPTURE	ATTRIBUTE
<i>1 Corinthians 2:10-11</i>	Omniscience
<i>Genesis 1:2</i>	Omnipotence
<i>Psalms 139:7</i>	Omnipresence
<i>1 John 5:6</i>	Truth
<i>Luke 11:13</i>	Holiness
<i>Romans 8:2</i>	Life-Giving
<i>Isaiah 40:13</i>	Wisdom

## WHERE WAS THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

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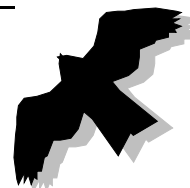


The “role” of the Holy Spirit was not as evident in the Old Testament as in the New (in fact, the church age in which we live is known as the “age of the Spirit”). Before Christ, the Spirit indwelt people on a selective basis (see Genesis 41:38, Numbers 27:18, Daniel 4:8, Judges 3:10, 1 Samuel 16:13), enabled believers for special occasions (Exodus 31:3, Judges 14:6), and generally restrained sin (Genesis 6:3). Charles Ryrie writes: *“His personal relationship to people in the Old Testament was limited, for not all experienced his work nor was it necessarily permanent in each case.”* Therefore, Old Testament believers did not experience the ministry of the Spirit in the same way we do.

We see a sudden increase in the ministry of the Holy Spirit right from the start of the New Testament. In the life of Christ, He was instrumental in Jesus’ conception (Luke 1:35). Christ was anointed, sealed, led and empowered by the Spirit; He was with Jesus in his death and in his resurrection. Later, the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the New Testament books so that what they wrote was exactly what God wanted, without losing the personality of the individual writers.

## WHAT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT'S MINISTRY IN MY LIFE RIGHT NOW?

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- ◆ On the day of Pentecost, forty days after Jesus left the earth, the Holy Spirit came to begin his ministry of **convicting** (John 16:8-11), **regenerating** (Titus 3:5), **indwelling** (1 Corinthians 6:19), **baptizing** (1 Corinthians 12:13), and **sealing** people in Christ (Ephesians 1:13). Paul uses this last term to explain that all Christians are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit as a “pledge” (which literally means “down payment”) that we are truly going to heaven.
- ◆ While we live here on earth, we cannot see, hear or touch God. Sometimes that makes trusting Him difficult, and we long for some way to know for sure that He is there. One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to provide us with that **assurance**, creating a sense deep in our spirit that we belong to Him.  
*“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”*  
(Romans 8:15,16)
- ◆ As the Spirit works in Christian men and women, He lets us know when we sin and urges us to deal with it by confessing (acknowledging) it before God. Christ has already paid for that sin, so we don’t need to “work” for forgiveness, but we do need to experience it.
- ◆ We become **filled** with the Spirit as we choose to rely on Him more and more (Eph 5:18, Galatians 5:16). That **filling** is evidenced by growing maturity and fruitfulness (Acts 6:3, Galatians 5:22). At times there is also a temporary “filling” or empowering for a particular task, such as Peter experienced while speaking (Acts 4:8).  
*“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them...”*  
(Acts 6:3)
- ◆ The Holy Spirit is also active in **teaching** us (John 16:12-15), **guiding** us (Rom 8:14), and **praying** for us, even when we don’t know what to ask for! He not only enables us to not sin, but gives us the power to do what is right, (and quite often, He even provides the “want-to”!).  
*“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”* (Rom 8:26)
- ◆ Another major ministry of the Spirit is in giving **spiritual gifts** to Christians causing those gifts to develop, and orchestrating the Body of Christ so that those gifts work together to build up the church into maturity. (See 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4.)  
*“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”* (1 Cor 12)

## HOW DO I “KEEP IN STEP” WITH THE SPIRIT?

*“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25)*

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Keeping in step, or walking by the spirit, implies a conscious dependence upon God. Since the Spirit is to be our source of power, life, joy, and freedom, then keeping in step means staying in touch with His presence. Whatever keeps us in touch with our need for Him, combined with a heart that is willing to follow Christ, keeps us in step with Him. Therefore, prayer, Bible reading, honest relationships, communion, worship, taking spiritual risks, authentic ministry – *anything* that surfaces our weakness and causes us to cry out for His strength – keeps us in step with the Spirit. And then the results of that kind of lifestyle become evident as the fruit of the Spirit – recognizable as qualities that only God can produce.



This kind of walking / keeping-in-step lifestyle also produces what Paul calls for in Ephesians 5 when he tells us to *“be filled with the Spirit.”* As we depend on Him, he graciously and generously fills our lives in a way that eventually becomes noticeably Christ-like. For example, in Acts 6, when the apostles looked for good men to wait tables, they looked for 7 men who were “known to be full of the Spirit”. What did they look for? They looked for men whose lives, although imperfect, nevertheless consistently exhibited a willingness to follow Christ and to depend on the Holy Spirit and not their own strength. Being filled with the Spirit, therefore, is a lifelong process of conscious dependence – the same kind of lifestyle that Jesus led.

*“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22)*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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### ***What is the “flesh”?***

The “flesh” is sometimes used in the Bible to describe our physical bodies, but often Paul uses it to describe the ability we still have as believers to choose to disobey God and try to live our lives as if He did not exist. The works of the flesh are diametrically opposed to the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:19-23)



### ***Do I have to do something special to receive the Holy Spirit?***

No! The Holy Spirit comes to live in you (“indwell”) at the moment you become a Christian. Although there was a brief “delay” in some early situations in the book of Acts, that was not the norm for the 1st century, nor for today. (Romans 8:9, Ephesians 1:13)

### ***What is the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit?***

This is really just another term for the Spirit entering our lives when we come to Christ. It is not a separate act, nor is it something only for special, “super-Christians”! It is true of all believers.

*“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” (1 Cor 12:13)*

### ***What does it mean to “grieve” the Spirit?***

Contrary to what some people may think, God has emotions, and when we disobey, (which ends up causing us pain), God’s response is sadness. (Ephesians 4:30)

### ***What does it mean to “quench” the Spirit?***

This means the same thing as disobedience, in that it hinders the work the Spirit is trying to do. For example, God wants to unify believers, so bad attitudes, gossip and divisiveness tends to “pour cold water” on the Spirit’s work. (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

### ***Can I lose the Holy Spirit?***

No. Once the Holy Spirit comes to live in a person, it is for eternity. To lose the Spirit would be to lose Christ. *‘And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.’ (Romans 8:9)* When Paul used the terms “seal” and “pledge”, he was referring to the lastingness of the Roman emperor’s promise. If an earthly king means business when he makes a promise, how much more worthy is God’s word of honor! A Christian can, however, walk *“in the flesh”* to the point where he or she does not experience much, if any, spiritual fruit, and the void that is felt might be mistaken for “God has left me!” But God never moves from His commitment to us.