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## **WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?**

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The Holy Spirit is no longer "the unknown Person" of the Godhead. The New Testament exhortation that we be filled with the Holy Spirit has found thousands of receptive hearts.

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### **DIFFERENCES OF INTERPRETATION**

First of all, we must recognize differences of interpretation which distinguish advocates of the Spirit-filled life.

Wesleyans believe that Pentecost brings heart purity and perfect love. Keswickians place emphasis upon the victory and power of Pentecost. Pentecostals and neo-charismatics see speaking in tongues as the sign of the Spirit's infilling.

Some of these distinctions are partly in the realm of emphasis and terminology, while others reach to the very heart of the Christian experience. In order to point up these distinctions I shall attempt a thumbnail summary of each.

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#### A -- The Wesleyan View

From our Wesleyan perspective the Pentecostal baptism with the Holy Spirit purges the heart of the believer from sin, perfects him in God's agape love, and thereby empowers him for effective Christian witness. We penitently acknowledge, however, that many of us have not paid the full price for such a genuinely Pentecostal experience. Too often we have settled for a loveless, passionless profession of holiness which belies the New Testament.

Under the impact of the Spirit's moving in our times many of us who call ourselves Wesleyan are coming to see clearly that the heart of holiness is to be filled, cleansed, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and, further, that the baptism with the Spirit is a baptism of love. Some of us are becoming increasingly concerned that we relate Pentecost to evangelism, without modifying our historic insistence that the baptism with the Spirit personally connotes entire sanctification.

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#### B -- The Keswick View

Closely related to the Wesleyan teaching, and yet distinct from it at certain points, is the viewpoint associated with the famous Keswick Convention which dates from 1875 in Keswick, England.

The Keswick teaching lays stress upon the Christian's being filled with the Spirit as essential to a life of spiritual victory and Christlikeness. Although these teachers stress "the crucifixion of self" and "the cleansed life," they differ with Wesleyans as to the possibility of the destruction of sin in the believer's life. The indwelling Spirit is generally seen as counteracting "the old nature" which remains until death.

In practical emphasis, however, the Keswick message is quite close to the Wesleyan. The differences may be more in words than in reality. For if a person has really died to sin and self and has been truly baptized with the Holy Spirit, he is sanctified in the New Testament sense.

A great many of those who teach and profess the Spirit-filled life would come somewhere within this school of interpretation. One strength of this position is its strong emphasis upon the Christian's obligation to maintain a Spirit-filled relationship and give a Spirit-filled witness to Christ.

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#### C -- The "Pentecostal View

A third point of view is the "Pentecostal," now being strongly urged also by the neo-Pentecostal and neocharismatic advocates of the Spirit-filled life. Many Roman Catholic

priests, nuns, and laymen identify with this position, which until the early 1960's was largely limited to the small Pentecostal churches and sects.

Here the weight of stress is not upon the purifying or perfecting work of the Spirit baptism, but upon the personal and emotional aspects of this Pentecostal effusion and the accompanying evidence of tongues-speaking.

Whereas both the Wesleyan and Keswick schools see holy love as the one unmistakable evidence of the Spirit's full indwelling, the "Pentecostal" insists that speaking in tongues is the indisputable sign. The former place primary stress upon the graces of the Spirit, the latter upon His gifts.

These differences of emphasis generally lead to two entirely different concepts of the Spirit-filled life. Wesleyans and Keswickians place heavy stress on the ethical manifestations of the Spirit's presence. "Pentecostals" tend to overemphasize physical manifestations. Here are distinctions which may lead to real differences.

Wesleyans object that the theory and practice of contemporary charismatics fail to meet biblical standards at three points:

(1) They tend to advocate an unscriptural reception of the gift of tongues. In many cases, psychological manipulation is used to induce glossolalia.

(2) They place an unscriptural evaluation on this gift, putting it at the top of the list rather than near the bottom, as does Paul.

(3) They make an unscriptural claim that speaking in tongues is the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. While some charismatic teachers admit that one may be baptized with the Holy Spirit without the accompanying evidence of speaking in tongues, I have not found any who did not say that every Spirit-filled believer is potentially a tongues-speaker and that he should exercise this gift in order to know the rich meaning of the Spirit-filled life.

The crucial question, then, is: What is the Christian experience of the Holy Spirit? What is the authentic sign of His presence and working in the life of the believer and the Christian community? What dangers, if any, attend a Spirit-centered theology?

The prior question is: Who is the Holy Spirit? How does the New Testament refer to the Spirit? It is the Wesleyan understanding of the Bible that He is preeminently the Spirit of Christ, in and through whom Christ himself comes to the Church to indwell, sanctify, and continue His ministry of reconciliation, until He is revealed at the end of the age to consummate His kingdom.

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Some of us have seen a kaleidoscope, that box of colored glass fragments which yields an ever-changing pattern of symmetrical beauty when viewed through the triangular tube of mirrors which multiplies and coordinates their "broken lights."

The Bible doctrine of the Spirit is kaleidoscopic. In the Book we see an ever-changing pattern of beauty with respect to the Spirit, from the opening lines of Genesis where He is brooding over the chaos to the closing chapter of Revelation where "the Spirit and the bride say, Come."

The New Testament, however, sums up the doctrine in one phrase: "the Spirit of Christ." To John the Baptist, God said, "Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost" (John 1:33). As the promised Messiah, Jesus was the Bearer and Baptizer with the Holy Spirit.

At His baptism Jesus was revealed as the Bearer of the Spirit. The descending dove marked Him as the Anointed of God. Pentecost disclosed Jesus as the Spirit-Baptizer.

In these twin events the Spirit of God became the Holy Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, never to be separated from Him. Jesus the Christ became the supreme Manifestation of the Holy Spirit, as that Spirit became the Medium through whom Christ comes to indwell and sanctify His Church.

Christ is the Pattern of the Spirit-filled life. His entire life -- from the moment of His miraculous conception to that climactic moment when He offered himself "by the eternal Spirit" (Hebrews 9:14) as our perfect Sin-Offering -- was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is therefore the Christ-Spirit. "The fruits of the Spirit are the virtues of Christ," in Schleiermacher's fine phrase. God gave the Spirit "without measure" to Jesus (John 3:34), so that He becomes the Norm of the Spirit-filled human life.

It was not until Jesus gave up His life forgivingly on the Cross that that pattern was complete. "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps . . . who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Peter 2:21-23).

As H. Wheeler Robinson says, the Spirit of Jesus is "the Spirit of the Cross." The only kind of spirituality the New Testament recognizes is that which makes us Christlike in our suffering, forgiveness, compassion, caring.

Christ's glorification is the absolute condition of the Gift of the Spirit. At the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus announced, "The man who believes in me . . . will have rivers of living water flowing from his inmost heart" (John 7:38, Phillips). [1] John immediately comments, "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (v.39).

The Spirit was active through the ancient dispensation. Yet the New Testament says unequivocally: The Holy Spirit was not given until Christ was "glorified" -- that is, not until after the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension.

Peter makes this clear in his Pentecostal sermon: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33).

What does this mean with respect to the Christian's experience of the Spirit?

First, that the Pentecostal baptism with the Spirit is a gift specifically for the Christian dispensation. This is that "better thing" reserved for New Testament saints (Hebrews 11:40). It was this baptism of which the Ephesian disciples had not heard (Acts 19:2). Dwight L. Moody confessed: "For the first seven years of my Christian life I was as ignorant of the Holy Spirit as the disciples at Ephesus." What about you?

Secondly, this means that Christ himself is personally present in our hearts by the indwelling Spirit.

Concerning the promised Paraclete, Jesus said, "I will come to you" (John 14:18). Earlier in this chapter He had promised His literal coming at the end (vv. 1-3); here He speaks of His spiritual return in the Spirit (see 14:22-23). Again He prayed: "Sanctify them . . . that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:17, 26). So Paul can equate "the Spirit of God" with "the Spirit of Christ" in the experience of the believer and then refer to Him as "Christ in you" (Romans 8:8-10).

The Christian experience of the Holy Spirit means, primarily, to have "Christ formed" in us (Galatians 4:19). The very Christ who was formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit is formed in our hearts by the selfsame Spirit! In the new birth, Christ constitutes himself our very Life, so that we can say, "For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21).

But the full meaning goes far beyond conversion. Paul prays for God's saints who are now the "habitation of God through the Spirit" "that Christ may dwell in . . . [their] hearts by faith" (Ephesians 2:22; 3:17). The Greek verb is quite specific. It means "to take permanent residence [as against transitory]." Thus Good News for Modern Man renders, "That Christ may make his home in your hearts." That is, that He may become the Host who makes your heart His holy dwelling place, so that He sanctifies every nook and cranny of your being.

This is the same as being "filled with all the fulness of God" (3:19), since in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead" (Colossians 2:9). All this is in Paul's thought when he later urges these Christians: "Be filled with the Spirit" (5:18).

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is the Spirit of Christ. He is self-effacing. He does not speak of himself, but of Christ. His work is to reveal Christ in us and through us.

Any concept of spirituality which promises some advance beyond Christlikeness through the indwelling Spirit is spurious.

Paul's version of Pentecost is found in Romans: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5, RSV). His word here (agape), says F. R. Barry, "describes what human life begins to look like when the Spirit gets to work on it.

Jesus himself was the perfect Incarnation of agape (God's kind of love). When the Spirit sanctifies and indwells us, the fruit of His working is Christlike agape. This is why Paul said, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Romans 8:9). This is a supernatural test -- our lives are the gift and work of Christ's Spirit. It is also an ethical test -- "For we realize that our life in this world is actually his life lived in us" (I John 4:17, Phillips).

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### THE WESLEYAN ANSWER

Who is the Holy Spirit? The New Testament is clear. On the pages of the Christian Book the Holy Spirit is always and everywhere the Spirit of Jesus Christ. By His glorification "the last Adam became a life-giving spirit (I Corinthians 15:45, RSV). Paul can even say, "Now the Lord is that Spirit" (II Corinthians 3:17). In the Holy Spirit the resurrected One manifests His resurrection power.

"Just as we have borne the image of the earthy," Paul writes, so "we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (I Corinthians 15:49, NASB). [2] Christ will finally change our lowly existence to be like His glorious heavenly existence, "by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:21, NASB).

We are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son, "that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). And so we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (II Corinthians 3:18, NASB). The Holy Spirit is the sanctifying Spirit of Christ.

It was the spiritual genius of John Wesley that he saw with penetrating clarity that this sanctifying ministry of the Spirit lies at the very heart of Christ's redemptive activity.

In his classic interpretation of John Wesley, George Croft Cell says:

"Wesley's theocentric doctrine of Christian experience is first, last, always a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Holiness is the primary attribute of the Christian Church. Holiness is the essential quality of Christian experience. Holiness is the third term of the Trinitarian revelation of God. This is the highest conceivable position for the doctrine of holiness in the Christian faith and interpretation. One of Wesley's earliest Oxford Sermons notes that 'the title Holy applied to the

Spirit of God does not only denote that he is holy in his own nature, but that he makes us so; that he is the great fountain of holiness to his Church. The Holy Spirit is the principle of the conversion and entire sanctification of our lives." [3]

Cell then observes that "Wesleyan theology was preeminently a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The experiential witness of a spirit of holiness as the necessary companion of Christian faith may even be called a special interest of Wesleyanism. It has in this respect a certain individuality of tone. But this is no afterthought or separate thought of the Christian revelation; it is of the essence of it."

The doctrine of sanctification is therefore no "theological provincialism" of Wesleyanism. It is rather our witness to the grand New Testament truth that the Spirit of Christ is the sanctifying Spirit and that all His ministrations are to the end of making us holy and Christlike persons.

The finest New Testament scholarship supports the correctness of this high Wesleyan estimate of the Holy Spirit as the hallowing Spirit of Christ. Just as Christ redeems us through His blood, He also transforms us into His own image by the Holy Spirit. This is what the New Testament is all about, and this is what Wesleyanism has always tried to say.

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#### 4 THE ERROR OF CORINTHIANISM

We are now in a position to evaluate another view of the Spirit's work which misses this central biblical teaching.

In the Corinthian church, Paul was face-to-face with some who seemed to believe that the Spirit's ministry effected a level of spirituality which elevates one to a point beyond "mere" Christlikeness and holiness. According to an able recent study, the Corinthians of this party "maintained that glossolalia is the main (or only) evidence of possession by the Spirit . . . only those Christians who have this gift are classified as spiritual."

In dealing with this teaching that true spirituality moves the believer beyond the Lord into a realm of mysticism and ecstasy, Paul reminds these persons that before they were Christians they had these very same kinds of experiences they were now making the hallmark of the Holy Spirit of Christian experience.

"You know how," he writes, "in the days when you were still pagan, you would be seized by some power which drove you to those dumb heathen gods" (I Corinthians 12:2, NEB, margin). [4] "There is no doubt at all," Shrenk comments, "that Paul intends to say here, 'The truly spiritual is not marked by a being swept away; that is precisely the characteristic of your previous fanatical religion.'"

Paul then continues: "For this reason I must impress upon you that no one who says 'A curse on Jesus!' can be speaking under the influence of the Spirit of God. And no one can say 'Jesus is Lord!' except under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:3, NEB).

When you were still heathen religionists, Paul is saying, the essence of your worship was this feeling of being "carried away" by some spirit; now, however, you experience the Holy Spirit, and you experience Him supremely when He leads you to submit yourselves absolutely to Jesus Christ and confess Him as sovereign Lord of life -- in intelligible speech and ethical behavior.

Some scholars think these Corinthians were actually cursing Jesus in the ecstasy of their tongues-speaking. More likely, from their supposed position of exalted spirituality, they were saying, "Anathema Jesus," in contempt of "mere" Christianity which places supreme emphasis upon the Incarnation and the experience of "Jesus Christ, and him crucified." All this was too elementary for these super-religionists! It was too tame and unexciting for these persons who must have visions and revelations and ecstasies.

Paul, however, refused to acknowledge such a view as representing the Holy Spirit. Rather, the apostle goes on to show with great tact, skill, and gentleness that the real proof that we are spiritual is that we have been cleansed from such spiritual egotism and transformed into the image of Him who said, "I am among you as he that serveth."

The gifts of the Spirit are not "spiritual things" (pneumatika, I Corinthians 12:1) for personal aggrandizement or individual spiritual superiority. They are rather "grace gifts" (charismata, 12:4-11) which make us loving and humble like Jesus. They are gracious endowments which enable us to contribute to "the common good" of the undivided body of Christ. It may even be questioned whether a gift can be said to "exist" for the individual if it is not employed for the sake of building up the body of Christ in loving unity.

Then Paul comes to the lofty pinnacle of New Testament truth when he pens, "And now I will show you the best way of all" (NEB), without which any and all gifts are absolute zero -- the way of agape love. To understand I Corinthians 13 we must see it in this setting which shows that Christlike love is THE GIFT of the Spirit.

With characteristic genius John Wesley makes Paul's point clear:

"Another ground of a thousand mistakes is, not considering deeply, that love is the highest gift of God; humble, gentle, patient love; that all visions, revelations, manifestations whatever, are little things compared to love; and that all the gifts are either the same with, or infinitely inferior to, it.

"It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this -- the heaven of heavens is love. There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way.

"And when you are asking others, 'Have you received this or that blessing?' if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them

upon a false scent. Settle it in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you have reached Abraham's bosom." [5]

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## ENDNOTES

1 The New Testament in Modern English, copyright J. B. Phillips, 1958. Used by permission of the Macmillan Company, New York, and Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., London.

2 New American Standard Bible, copyright 1963 by the Lockman Foundation, La Habra, Calif. Used by permission.

3 George Croft Gell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley (New York: Henry Rolt & Co., 1935), p.353.

4 New English Bible -- New Testament, copyright 1961 by the Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press.

5 A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, reprint), pp.98-99.

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THE END

Nonetheless, understanding exactly who the Holy Spirit is can be difficult. It's not too hard to imagine God as a creator or a father-like figure. And Jesus is a tangible person who we can read about and study. But the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is more mysterious and evasive. A few images might help our understanding. Describing the Holy Spirit. So what is "or who is" the Holy Spirit? One image used in the Bible comes from nature. The word often translated "spirit" from Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible, also means "breath" or "wind." In this sense, the Holy Spirit is like the wind "you can feel its effects when it blows but you cannot pin it down. Jesus described it this way: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. The Holy Spirit was present during each stage of Christ's life. When the angel appeared to Mary, the mother of Jesus, he declared: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). Later on, at the baptism of Jesus, which marked the beginning of His public ministry, the Holy Spirit was present and, on this occasion, could be seen in material form. "When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water." Jesus skillfully expresses the essence of this experience: "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?" (Lk 11:13).

3. The Holy Spirit is Here. John Bevere mentioned in one of his books that, "If Jesus could physically minister 14 hours a day, He would see 840 people for 60 seconds. It will take 1,190 days (3.26 years) to see 1 million people and 2,147,239 years to see 7 billion people." Hence the need to value Holy Spirit and His desire to connect with us. I love the Word, but I also love the Spirit who guides me through it! Reply. Vlad Savchuk. God the Holy Spirit is a Person. He is not a power, an effect, or just energy. God the Holy Spirit does have energy (limitless), can affect things, and does have power (God's power), but He is much more than these attributes. Almost every single time that the New Testament mentions "the Spirit" this is in direct reference to God the Holy Spirit. There are three members of the God Family. This family includes God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and God the Holy Spirit. God the Father draws them (John 6:44), Jesus saves them (John 3:16), and the Holy Spirit tells us Who that Savior is "Jesus of course. Each member of the Trinity has a part in a person's coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit's Work in Us.