

God's Empowering Presence

By Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

There is a true story told about a man named Ira Yates, who owned a sheep ranch in Texas during the 1930's. It was during this decade that the United States and much of the world, was going through a great financial depression. Even though Mr. Yates owned a sheep ranch, he found it very difficult to make a living. With little money for food and clothing for his family, like a lot of other people at the time, Yates and his family survived on a government subsidy.

Day after day as Yates grazed his sheep, he worried about how to pay his bills and care for his family. But then one day, a seismographic crew from an oil company came into the area and convinced Yates that there might be oil on his land. They asked for permission to do a test drill and Ira Yates agreed. As they began to drill, at 1,115 feet they hit a huge oil reserve. That first well came in at over 80,000 barrels a day! Translated into today's market value, that's about three million dollars a day from that single well. That was only the beginning! More wells were found and some were more than twice as productive as the first one.

To top it all off, after the oil had been pumped for more than forty years, a government test of just one of the wells showed it still had the potential to put out 125,000 barrels a day, and the once poor sheep rancher, Ira Yates, owned it all. Once Yates worried how to pay for food and clothing, all the while he was sitting on a treasure he never knew was there.

Now, this story is an apt illustration of how many Christians are sitting on a spiritual treasure infinitely more rich than a thousand oil fields. That treasure is the gift of God's holy Spirit. This gift dwells deep within the heart and soul of every child of God. Too many Christians live frustrated and fruitless lives, simply because they do not know the vast power and resources that belong to them in the gift of the holy Spirit. Psalm 62:11 boldly declares,

God has spoken once; twice I have heard this: That power belongs to God (Ps. 62:11).¹

The dictionary tells us that power is the ability or capacity to perform effectively to gain specific results. Psalm 62 tells us that God has all the power and resources necessary to carry out His will to gain specific results. Power belongs to God! In the light of this truth, it is amazing to read what Jesus Christ said to his disciples shortly before his ascension into heaven.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Jesus Christ promised his disciples that they would receive power, godly, divine power, through the holy Spirit. And this promise was not just for that select group of people. This promise is for everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the apostle Peter proclaimed at the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Christ.

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:38, 39)

Has the Lord God Almighty called you? Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Then the promised gift of the holy Spirit is yours, and so are all the rich resources of God that are in this gift!

The Bible tells us that those who are led by the Spirit, are the sons of God (Romans 8:14). We are told that we are regenerated, or born again by the Spirit and made heirs of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7). The Word of God tells us that every Christian can manifest the Spirit for the common good of the whole church (1 Corinthians 12: 7). We are also told that this promised holy Spirit seals us for the day of redemption. It is the guarantee of our future

¹All Scriptures, unless otherwise noted are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

inheritance of glory (Ephesians 1:13). And it is the Spirit that provides us with godly strength in our inner man (Ephesians 3:16).

Within every Christian there is a power that will enable us to make a grand moral transformation (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18). Deep within every believer there is a rich resource from which we can produce the divine qualities of love and joy and peace (Galatians 5:22, 23). And deep within every child of God, there is in the gift of God's Spirit, a unique blending of spiritual abilities making us all capable ministers of the gospel and effective witnesses for Christ (1 Corinthians 12:4-11). If we are ever going to live lives of godly power and wisdom, it is essential for us to have a solid biblical understanding of the gift of the holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, there is almost no aspect of the Christian life that is so misunderstood! The truth about the holy Spirit has been muddied by misleading Bible translations, faulty interpretations, and by man-made religious traditions. In addition, the evidence and power of the Spirit in the lives of many believers has been stunted by emotional fears, and by extremely bizarre ungodly activities wrongly attributed to God's Spirit. In this book, my goal is to give you as much clear truth concerning the Spirit as I can. My purpose is not to simply fill your head with theological knowledge, but to set your heart on fire, and give you the confidence needed to experience this gift in your life. For as we experience the Spirit we can appropriate the salvation gained by Christ into our lives.

What is the holy Spirit?

So, what is the holy Spirit?¹ The holy Spirit is the very life force and power of God in action. In the book of Genesis, we have the first occurrence of the word "Spirit" and this will give us an indication of its usage and meaning. In Genesis we read,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was

¹ This work will use the term "holy Spirit," with a small "h," instead of printing "Holy Spirit," which Bible translators have used to denote the third person of the Trinity. The Bible teaches that there is only one God, and one person who is God, and that is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The holy Spirit is the Spirit of God himself.

hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light (Genesis 1:1-3).

In verse 2 we read that "the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." In other words, God's Spirit was in action, moving intensely, and with purpose over the cosmos. God was about to begin the great work of bringing life and order and form to His creation. The Hebrew word for "Spirit" in the Old Testament is the word ruach. In the New Testament it is pneuma. The root idea running through both of these words is the idea of an invisible but highly effective force. It is a power of force that can be exerted in varying forms and manifested in many ways. We get our English word "pneumatics" from the Greek word pneuma. Pneumatics has to do with operating something mechanically by the force and power of air. Air is invisible, but it can be a force with incredible power! The manager of a granite quarry in North Carolina was quoted as saying, "We supplied all the granite for the municipal building in New York City. We can lift an acre of solid granite, 10 feet thick, to almost any height we desire for the purpose of moving it... We can do it as easily as I can lift this piece of paper."²

How did they do it? Pneumatically, with air! If you contain air in hoses and put enough pressure behind it, it will drive a hammer through concrete, stop a train pulling over one hundred cars, or move an acre of solid granite, 10 feet thick, anywhere you want! In Genesis 1:2 the Spirit of God moved over the cosmos, and when God said, "Let there be light", there was light. That's powerful!

The Spirit of God is the very essence of God. It is His very life, His character and power. It is His life force in manifestation and action. Thus from the first use of Spirit the testimony of the Scriptures is that it is God's invisible, divine power manifesting itself. In Genesis it brought order and life to creation. Let's look at two other similar sections of Scripture, one from Job and the other from the book of Psalms.

By His Spirit He adorned the heavens...(Job 26:3)

² Billy Graham, The Holy Spirit, Word Books, Waco, Texas, pg. 24

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. (Psalm 33:6)

The word “breath” in Psalm 33, and the word “Spirit” in Job 26, are both translated from the Hebrew word ruach. By the Spirit of God, by His invisible divine power, all the galaxies in the universe were set in their place! And what God has done in the universe, He desires to do by His Spirit for every man and women today. God, by His mighty Spirit desires to bring order and life and fruitfulness to our lives.

The Spirit of God is the very life force of God. It is all that He is. And though we cannot see this Spirit, we can see its power and influence. We can see its manifestation. For example in Genesis we read that the Spirit of God made Joseph wise to discern Pharaoh’s dream.

And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. (Genesis 41:38, 39).

In Exodus 31, God’s Spirit gave a craftsman by the name of Bezaleel great artistic skills for the building of the Tabernacle.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying; “See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. (Exodus 31:1-3)

In the book of Judges, God’s Spirit gave the leaders of God’s people power and strength, and wisdom.

When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel...the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he judged Israel. (Judges 3:9, 10)

And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him [Samson], and he tore the lion apart...(Judges 14:6)

God’s Spirit also inspired His prophets to speak for Him.

But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgressions and to Israel his sin. (Micah 3:8)

These are just a few examples of how God’s holy Spirit was understood and how it was manifested in the Old Testament. But it is when we come to the New Testament, that we gain a clearer understanding of what the holy Spirit is. Let’s begin in Luke with a record concerning the conception of Jesus Christ.

Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born, will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:30-35)

In this account the angel tells Mary that she will bear the Son of God. And then he tells her the means of conception: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.” We have here a vital piece of information about the nature of the holy Spirit. The two terms “Holy Spirit” and “power of the Highest” do not refer to two different things, but to one and the same thing: God’s power in action. The phrase “power of the Highest” defines the term “Holy Spirit. Simply stated, Christ was conceived by the power of God and, as the Gospels show, all that he did in his ministry he also did by the power of God’s Spirit (Acts 10:38).

The truth is, that in the gift of the holy Spirit believers have power from on high. In the gift of the Spirit, God’s empowering presence is in us giving us vast resources to live all of life with godliness and

spiritual victory. The holy Spirit is not simply a nice little sidelight to the Christian faith. It is at the heart and soul of what it means to be born again. This gift is what marks us off as God's special people, distinct from the rest of humanity (Romans 8:8, 9, 15, 16).

It is through the Spirit of God that the love of God floods our hearts (Romans 5:5). The Spirit of God gives us new abilities (1 Corinthians 12:4-11), and a new sense of security as to our salvation (Ephesians 1:13, 14). The gift of the Spirit is our "Helper" enabling us to be all that God has called us to be, and to do all that he has called us to do. The holy Spirit is God dwelling in His people, in fulfillment of His promise:

"And I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (1 Corinthians 6:16 quoted from Leviticus 26:12; Ezekiel 37:27)

Throughout the rest of this book we will be exploring what the Word of God says about the gift of the Spirit. And we will discover how to utilize this gift in the best possible way, for the blessing of our lives and for the glory of God.

[This article is adapted from Chuck LaMattina's forthcoming book *The Power of the Holy Spirit*. The book may be ordered from Grace Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL. 60645]