

Systematic Theology for the Local Church
#49—Pneumatology—Part III¹
The Work of the Holy Spirit Before Pentecost
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The next study, the first on the work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation, will be on Efficacious Grace. Helpful for that study is Reymond, pp.703-718, House, Section 37, David Steele and Curtis Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 2004), 48-56, and John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1084) 88-94. Helpful for the present study is House, Sections 35-36. All of these books are available on Amazon.

Because the Spirit is by comparison much more prominent in the New Testament records, many have assumed that He was essentially inactive in Old Testament times. Quite the contrary. The text tells us that he was active in creation as well as being involved in the lives of many individuals. The biblical record concerning these ministries is significant for what it does and does not tell us, in comparison with His ministry during this age, which, as we see in coming studies, is for crucial reasons far more extensive.

1. The Holy Spirit was active as the agent of creation

The Bible begins with the presence of the Spirit at the creation of the physical universe:

Gen. 1:2: Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Job describes the Spirit's creative work with respect to human beings:

Job 33:4: The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.

2. The Holy Spirit was active as the author of Scripture

As the Person of the Trinity most involved with individuals in the recording of biblical revelation, the Holy Spirit had a nearly continuous ministry throughout the period in which the Old Testament was written. His work thus involved what is described as revelation (disclosure) as well as inspiration (guidance concerning the exact message to be preserved). Recall that revelation is the information about himself given by God to human beings. Inspiration is the term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from him. The word applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved. The key passage on the inspiration of Scripture is 2 Pet. 1:12-21:

¹² So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, ¹⁴ because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵ And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom

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I love; with him I am well pleased.”¹⁸ We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

¹⁹ And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation.²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Peter underscores the superhuman origin of Scripture in two ways. To begin with, it did not arise through discoveries by the prophets who spoke in the Old Testament. Their prophecies as recorded in Scripture did not generate themselves. They were not spontaneous explanations of portions of the plan of the ages. No prophetic Scripture comes into being by its own unraveling of history. It was not as if the prophets had searched and searched on their own and were finally able to unravel the events of history and put together something later regarded as Scripture.

Neither the prophets’ minds nor their wills (v. 21) produced Scripture. They could not do so, because a higher source was needed. Instead, the prophets (and others who wrote Scripture, we assume) were ‘carried along’ (NIV) by the Spirit of God. Acts 27:15-17 provides a beautiful illustration of this ‘carrying,’ using the same word that Peter does of the work of the Holy Spirit here:

¹⁵ The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along.¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure.¹⁷ When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along.

The NIV’s ‘driven along’ provides an evocative description of the effect of the wind on the ship. Note that in the context of the story the ship was completely at the mercy of the wind. As a ship is empowered by and at the mercy of the wind, so also the writers of Scripture were totally dominated by the Spirit—here in bringing the prophetic writings to others. Nothing that the Holy Spirit did not want to be inscribed ever was. And everything that He did want to appear in Scripture was written.

It is not insignificant that the word order in the Greek text puts a strong stress on this controlling work of the Holy Spirit. A very rough translation of 1:21 shows that Peter has placed the Spirit’s activity first in the sentence to highlight it: But by the Holy Spirit being carried spoke from God men. A valid finished English translation (with raised voice indicated in reading by italics) would be: It was *by the controlling work of the Holy Spirit* that men spoke from God.

I will repeat here words from Robert Reymond that I quoted in the thirteenth and fifteenth studies, because I appreciate them so much:

Men could not (and would not) have written the Bible apart from the Spirit’s superintending activity. The Holy Spirit, then, is the author of Scripture in a more profound and original sense than the human writers ever could (or would) have been. God is the primary author of Holy Scripture, with the human writers being the authors of Scripture only insofar as the Spirit mandated, initiated, and provided their impulse to write. Never did the Bible, either in the whole or in the part, exist for a moment apart from its Spirit-mandated and inspired character.²

Other passages provide evidence for the work of the Spirit in authoring Scripture:

² Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 3.

2 Sam. 23:1-2: These are the last words of David: The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs: ² The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.

Mt. 22:43-44: ⁴³ He said to them, How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, ⁴⁴ 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'

Acts 1:15-17: ¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— ¹⁷ he was one of our number and shared in this ministry."

Acts 4:24-25, quoting Ps. 2:1-2:

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: " 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.

Acts 28:25, quoting Isa. 6:9-10

²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ " 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." ²⁷ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

We might expect that such a ministry concerning Scripture would continue through the apostolic age, and this is confirmed by our Lord's prediction in the Upper Room Discourse just before His death. There He anticipated the Spirit's ministry in bringing to the disciples' minds the exact details of what He had said (Jn. 14:26) and also giving understanding of that material (Jn. 16:14):

²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

Strictly speaking, the New Testament never says that the Holy Spirit guided the writers of the New Testament. But the fact that New Testament writers considered their words to be on a par with and one piece with those of the Old Testament writers indicates that they were conscious of God's guiding, and, since it was the province of the Holy Spirit to guide in the giving of Scripture *before* the New Testament age, we are safe in assuming that He also did so during apostolic times (Acts 1:16; 1 Tim. 5:18, etc.).

3. The Holy Spirit was active in the lives of individuals.

- a. He indwelt people on a selective basis.

Gen. 41:38: So Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man [Joseph], one in whom is the spirit of God?”

Num. 27:18: So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit,^a and lay your hand on him.

Dan. 4:8: Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

The speaker in this verse is Nebuchadnezzar.

b. The Spirit ‘came upon’ some people.

Jdg. 3:7-11: ⁷ The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. ⁸ The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. ⁹ But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, who saved them. ¹⁰ The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel’s judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. ¹¹ So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

c. The Spirit carried out a ministry of filling some individuals.

Ex. 31:1-3: Then the LORD said to Moses, ² “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—

4. The Holy Spirit’s pre- and post-Pentecost ministries are fundamentally different.

The day of Pentecost marked the beginning of a radically new complex of ministries on the part of the Holy Spirit. It is important that the Bible student understand that what the Spirit is doing during the Church Age is distinctive to the present time period and is linked with unique purposes that God is carrying out in the era that began at Pentecost. What he is doing is part of a larger plan centered on the creation of the Body of Christ. Far too many students of Scripture have assumed that the ministries of the Holy Spirit before and after Pentecost are essentially the same.

This caution should be broadened. There are three interlocking subfields of Bible doctrine or theology: pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit), ecclesiology (the doctrine of the Church, local and universal) and eschatology (the doctrine of future things, or, roughly, unfulfilled prophecy). Only a premillennial interpretation of Scripture with an emphasis on the separation between what God is doing with Israel and what He is doing with the Church now can do full justice to the data in the Bible. Our understanding of the Church is at issue, since the distinction between Israel on the one hand and the Church as the Body of Christ on the other defines the people God is dealing with during this age and marks off a separate people who will inherit promises made to them in the Old Testament.

Where does the work of the Holy Spirit enter the picture? It is his ministry in starting the Church, the Body of Christ, at Pentecost that gives this age its uniqueness. Its formation takes place through the particular work

^aOr *Spirit*

of baptizing individuals, at the point of salvation, into the Body of Christ. That work is continued by ongoing ministries of the Spirit that were never seen before Pentecost. The Spirit's activity in the present age provides the key to the unique character of this Church period. Certainly it will be the Holy Spirit who will bring about the regathering of Israel and the regeneration of a remnant (Zech. 12:10; 10:1) to enter the millennium under the headship of Messiah. But the Bible student must see that particular ministries of the Spirit are tied to certain times and portions of God's program. If we do not do this, endless confusion results.

Since the present works of the Spirit are so unique to this Church Age and provide so many benefits to each believer, every child of God should be fully acquainted with biblical teaching about them. Neglecting what the Spirit can do and wants to do—even already has done—for the believer, is a way of telling God that what He has taken pains to provide doesn't make much difference to us. We will consider each of these works in detail in coming studies. What we need to see here is that the Spirit's ministry to individuals after Pentecost is very different from his ministry before Pentecost.

The pre-Pentecost ministries toward individuals were limited in several ways. First, they were limited in the number of people they affected. As we have seen already in this study, only some people were indwelt or filled or had the Spirit come upon them. Since Pentecost the Holy Spirit carries out the same ministries to all believers. There is no limitation.

Second, these ministries did not have continual duration. So we find the Holy Spirit leaving Saul:

1 Sam. 16:14: Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

David pleaded with God not to take away the Spirit:

Ps. 51:11: Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

The fact that David asked that the Spirit not be withdrawn shows that it could actually happen. This cannot happen to a believer during this age.

A third key difference between the ministries of the Spirit toward people before Pentecost and afterward is found in Jn. 14:17, where Jesus says that the Spirit would be *in* believers, whereas he had previously been *with* them. While the Spirit had certainly been in some, this new ministry would provide indwelling for all who know God.

In future studies we will look further at these important distinctions between the pre- and post-Pentecost ministries of the Holy Spirit.

Study questions

1. How did the Holy Spirit bring about Scripture?
2. What in the ministry of the Spirit toward individuals was the same as today and what was different? Was anything the same?

Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiration* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.
10. Textual criticism: The science and art of attempting to discover the original text of a literary work for which the original document does not exist. It is especially important for biblical studies, and the foundational endeavor to all subsequent investigation of the Scriptures.
11. Canon: Transliterated from a Greek Word meaning standard; as used of the Bible, it refers to books authenticated as possessing divine origin and therefore authoritative; the Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, the Protestant of sixty-six and the Catholic of eighty (including apocryphal books).
12. Inerrancy is a term applied to the Bible, although not specifically found in it; it denotes that the Bible, as originally written, possessed no humanly induced deviations from the message God intended to be recorded and that it is true in every respect; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:19.
13. Infallibility: Although some assert that this term has a different meaning from inerrancy, the two terms are, for purposes of biblical study, synonymous; the Bible is infallible because inerrant, and inerrant because infallible.
14. Illumination is the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God that imparts understanding of the message of Scripture to the believer; not to be confused with inspiration, which in the Bible is used of the work of God in giving Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); 1 Jn. 2:20; Jn. 16:13.
15. Spirituality: God is not physical, but immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and alive.
16. Self-existence/Aseity: God exists independently of anything else. He is self-existent.
17. Immensity: God is infinite in relation to space.
18. Eternality: God is infinite with regard to time.
19. Simplicity: God is not a plurality and cannot be looked at as divisible into parts.
20. Pure actuality: There is nothing about God that is potential. He is not unfinished in any way.
21. Necessity: God is uncaused and exists because he must exist.
22. Immutability: God is unchanging and unchangeable.
23. Impassibility: God is incapable of being changed or disturbed by what he experiences and is incapable of suffering.
24. Transcendence: God and the world are distinct; he is not part of the world, and the world is not part of him.
25. Immanence: God is present in the world.
26. Infinity: There are no limits to God's person and his perfections.
27. Omnipotence: God can do whatever he wills.
28. Omniscience: God knows everything there is to know.
29. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere in his creation

30. Holiness: God is morally pure and separated from all moral evil and sin.
31. Goodness: A quality that describes or includes his love, benevolence, mercy and grace
32. Truth: God's person, actions, knowledge and revelations correspond to reality
33. Love: God's continual communication of himself to his creatures.
34. Benevolence: God's goodness toward his creatures.
35. Mercy: God's goodness toward those who are helpless.
36. Grace: God's goodness toward sinners.
37. Glory: The greatness of God's perfections.
38. Trinity: There is only one true God, existing as a single Being comprised of three Persons who are equal in every way, yet distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity.
39. God's decree: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
40. Providence: God's care for and upholding of his creation.
41. Sovereignty: God's control over his universe.
42. Christology: The study of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
43. Incarnation: The joining of deity and humanity in one person forever. The word is based on the Latin word for flesh: the Lord Jesus Christ is God joined with human flesh.
44. Pre-existence: Used of the Son, it means that he existed before Bethlehem.
45. Theophany: An appearance of God.
46. Christophany: An appearance of Christ.
47. Priesthood: The system that God established to remedy the problem of alienation between a holy God and sinful human beings.
48. Son of God: A name for Jesus that describes his deity and his approval by the Father at the resurrection.
49. Son of Man: A messianic name for Jesus that emphasizes his humanity backed by deity and his role of taking humans to God through suffering and humiliation.
50. Messiah: A transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one'; used of the expected national deliverer of Israel; the linguistic equivalent of Greek *christos*, 'Christ'.