

The Outpouring of the Spirit, #2 The Holy Spirit's Work in the NT Church

Intro: In our first lesson we looked at Joel's prophecy of the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all flesh. Joel stressed that the outpouring of the Spirit would result in the revelation of God's word through prophecy, visions, and dreams and that, unlike the past, people of all segments of society would receive the outpouring of the Spirit. Both John the baptizer and Jesus revealed that the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy was near, pointing out that the outpouring would identify the Messiah and equip His people with signs to receive and confirm the gospel message.

We showed that the fulfillment began with the apostles in Acts 2; but did not end there. Instead we were able to see that wherever the apostles went, the Spirit was similarly "poured out" upon the new believers in each congregation established with the evidence of the Spirit's presence being manifested by miracles.

But, why was this necessary? And what did God hope to accomplish through this outpouring upon the early church? For an answer let's look tonight at some key verses on the Spirit's work.

The purpose of the outpouring upon the apostles

Jesus indicated a number of things the Spirit would do for the apostles when they received the outpouring of the Spirit.

The Spirit would be their "helper" (paracletos) by:

Teaching them all things and reminding them of what Jesus had taught
"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26)

Bear witness of Jesus

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me, and you will bear witness also, because you have been with Me from the beginning. (John 15:26-27)

Convince the world

"And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (John 16:8-11)

Guide them into all truth, revealing Jesus' word and convincing the unbelieving that Jesus was the Christ

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He

*hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.
(John 16:13)*

In Acts we see the Spirit doing these things through the apostles leading to the salvation of the world

*And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. (Acts 2:42-43)
And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. (Acts 4:33)*

"For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:28-29)

Thus the Hebrew writer offers a useful summary of the apostolic ministry how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. (Hebrews 2:3-4)

Among the proofs of the apostolic testimony were the "gifts of the Holy Spirit" that were given through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

The purpose of the outpouring upon the disciples the apostles made

Mk. 16:17 shows that "believers" who heard the apostolic message would perform signs, but the most complete listing of these gifts is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. The Holy Spirit worked through the people in each local church to assist them in their teaching and work.

Paul shows that the reception of the Spirit was a unifying factor for the Corinthian church—"we have all been made to drink of one Spirit". Here again we see allusions to Joel's prophecy of the outpouring and Jesus' promise of "living water" (Jn. 7:37).

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:8-10)

When the church met, the Holy Spirit provided by spiritual gifts the needs of the church. Any categorization of the gifts would be a human construct put upon the list; but it may be helpful to do that to get a sense of how the gifts functioned.

Some gifts were revelatory (assisted the knowledge of truth)

Prophecy
Distinguishing of spirits
Word of knowledge
Word of wisdom

Some gifts were confirmatory (assisted the belief of truth)

Tongues
Interpretation of tongues
Gifts of healing
Effecting of miracles
Faith

1 Corinthians 14 gives us a glimpse into the function of these gifts:

They served to instruct the assembly when the church came together

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

They served to convince unbelievers when the church came together

So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe. (1 Corinthians 14:22)

Conclusion: Clearly the work of the Spirit in the early church was to provide a means of revelation and confirmation of Christ's message which was being given gradually as needed to these new congregations.

But what blessings came as a result of this process of revelation and confirmation? That is the topic of our next study of the outpouring of the Spirit.