

Did You Receive When You Believed?

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It seems there is almost a universal belief in Christian circles today that we automatically receive the Holy Spirit when we first believe in Jesus. To even raise the question may seem almost heretical, yet there are some very clear scriptures that would indicate otherwise. Jesus went to Calvary so that God could indwell each believer by the Holy Spirit, so it is vitally important to get this right. If we try to live the Christian life without the indwelling Holy Spirit, we will miss out on the basic source of grace, and our experience of God will be greatly diminished from what God has intended.

At the end of this article, we will look at some of the scriptures used to back the doctrine of automatically receiving the Spirit, but first let us explore the scriptures that show otherwise. It is not our purpose to deal with every possible argument, but to encourage those who are hungry for more of God to make sure they are living in the reality of the indwelling God. Let us look again at all the scriptures with an open mind and let God reveal where we are, both in our experience and in our understanding, that we may not miss what God has provided for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

"And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' So they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit'" (Acts 19:1-2). When Paul came to Ephesus and found these believers, he evidently detected some lack that caused him to ask this question. Today I believe we can ask the same question. There is often a great lack of the presence and power of God. There is religious activity, but little manifestation of men dealing with the eternal God. Do we want the fullness of God that we read about in the scriptures, or are we content where we are? If we are content, this exhortation will have no meaning. But if we are thirsty for more than we are experiencing, it may be the door into a greater reality of fellowship with God.

Many have dismissed Paul's question because he next discovered that these disciples (believers) had only been baptized by John's baptism. That is true, but if a believer automatically receives the Holy Spirit when they first believe, why would he ask the question? If receiving accompanied believing, his question would be "Have you really believed in Jesus?" or something similar. In this situation, it appears that these disciples had responded to everything they knew (possibly from the ministry of Apollos). It is also significant that even after Paul explained the way more fully and they were baptized in the name of Jesus, they still did not receive the Holy Spirit until Paul laid his hands on them.

There is another case in scripture that is even more obvious. "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:14-17). In this account Luke tells us that these believers had received the word with joy, they had been baptized in the name of Jesus, and there were great miracles worked in their midst. Yet they had not yet received the Holy Spirit, and the apostles were sent to correct the situation. If we automatically receive the Holy Spirit upon believing, how is this account possible?

I trust that these two examples are enough to show that we cannot assume that a person has received the Holy Spirit just because they have believed in Jesus Christ.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Just the mention of baptism "in" or "with" the Holy Spirit tends to provoke a defense from many. There are many reasons for this, but let's look again at a few scripture passages.

"Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, 'I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire'" (Luke 3:15-16).

"And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now'" (Acts 1:4-5).

These two accounts are from the beginning and the end of the ministry of Jesus here on this earth. One introduces His ministry and is mentioned in all four gospels. The other is at the end, just before He departed to be with His Father. Do they not strike you as very important? When a man is getting ready to depart on a long journey, his final instructions are usually quite important. The instruction from Jesus in Acts 1:4 is of this nature. This promise of Jesus was fulfilled in the first 120 believers on the day of Pentecost and is recorded for us by Luke in Acts 2. I think we are all familiar with the account, so I will not repeat that here. However, I do want to point out that the promise was only fulfilled for 120 believers, and there is no statement in scripture to indicate that this baptism with the Holy Spirit is automatic for all believers afterward.

When did the first believers receive the Holy Spirit? Consider the statement by Peter at the house of Cornelius: *"While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, 'Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days" (Acts 10:44-48).* When Peter says "they received the Holy Spirit just as we have," what event is he referring to? His reference to the evidence makes it clear he is referring to what happened in the upper room on the day of Pentecost.

Peter states that the same promise they experienced on that day was also for us: *"■Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one 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 2:36-39).*

We are those who are "afar off." We also need what the disciples experienced in the upper room and what Peter offered to the great crowd on that day. The promise is for us, but we must avail ourselves of it. The Holy Spirit being given on the Day of Pentecost did not make it automatic for the disciples at

Samaria in Acts 8, the household of Cornelius in Acts 10, or the disciples at Ephesus in Acts 19. They all had to receive by a specific act of faith. Listen to what Paul told the Galatians: *"This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?--"* (Gal. 3:2).

In scripture, we don't read of any provision of God that becomes ours automatically. Even though Christ has made all things available to us, everything must be appropriated by faith. Pentecost was truly a historical event marking the beginning of Christ building His church, but it is also an event that is to be repeated in the life of each believer. All of us need our "Pentecost." The specific details may vary from person to person, but the essence of the transaction with God is the same.

From "With" to "In"

The scriptures above are enough to show that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is available to all, and that through this baptism we experience the indwelling of God. It is by this baptism that we experience what Jesus spoke of in the upper room before He went to Calvary. John chapters 14 through 16 are rich with truth that can help us, but I will quote just a few statements: *"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"* (John 14:16-18). *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you"* (John 16:12-15).

Notice that Jesus said that the Holy Spirit was "with them" but would be "in them." This is a foundational statement and answers many of our questions. When thinking about the baptism in the Spirit, many recount their past experiences with God and think that the Spirit must be within or they could not have experienced those things. The Holy Spirit has been working in all things from the beginning of creation, but He could not dwell within us until Christ paid the price of sin at Calvary. The Old Testament saints experienced the Spirit "coming upon them" or "in them" on many occasions, but He never came to dwell within in the same way He did on the Day of Pentecost. If that had been possible in the Old Testament, Christ did not need to go to Calvary. The Spirit coming to dwell within men on the Day of Pentecost was a new event, never before experienced by any man. The disciples during the time of Jesus experienced many things (including the revelation of who Jesus was) but they did not know "God within" until the veil was torn at Calvary and the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost. We also may have experienced the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, but that in itself does not prove He has come to dwell within, making us alive unto God.

What is the difference between "with" and "in"? Consider this statement of Jesus, together with John's comment: *"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified"* (John 7:37-39). From this statement of Jesus I believe we can say the main difference is that when the Holy Spirit (God) dwells within, there will be a resource coming from our inner man that is clearly divine and

brings a consciousness of God that we did not have before. Paul says that His Spirit is joined with our spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), and this makes our spirit alive unto God in a way we never experienced before. The "rivers of living water" flowing from the throne of God bring us into union and fellowship with God and what He is doing, in His eternal purpose. This union brings an ability that is of God and His resources. But note that John clearly explained this would not happen until Jesus was glorified.

A second familiar statement of Jesus is this: *"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). Many have understood this to be power to minister the gospel: preaching, miracles, and doing the work of God. I agree we do need God's power to do those things, but each of us needs power beyond ourselves to be true sons and daughters of God, and to "live His life." We cannot live the Christian life by self-effort. Whatever level we may attain to by our efforts will always fall short of what God expects. God does not ask us to "live our lives for Him," but to live His life by the faith that He authors in our hearts. Paul said it this way: *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in [or of] the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20). How can we live His life except by having His Spirit indwelling us?

To say this another way, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to make all that Jesus did for us at Calvary real to us and in us. Without the indwelling God, the work of Christ remains as a fact in history but lacks personal and practical application in everyday life. The foundation of our salvation is the work Christ did at Calvary, and everything He is doing in our lives today is based on that. But God does not intend that we try to apprehend in our minds the truth of what Christ did for us at Calvary, then work to apply it in our lives with our natural ability. Rather, He has sent the Holy Spirit to do within us what we cannot do. Our place is to receive the Holy Spirit into our lives, and then in cooperation with Him, by faith, let God work His work as He chooses. *"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure"* (Phil. 2:12-13).

The Way into the Riches of God

What is the way into God's provision for us in His Spirit? A good place to begin is with the statement of Jesus already quoted from John 7:37. Jesus said, "Thirst, come, and drink." If we are not thirsty for more than we have, I sincerely doubt that we will seek more. A man who is thirsty looks for water. Are we thirsty, or are we satisfied with our present experience of God? If we are thirsty for more, here is what Jesus says to do: "Come to Me."

What does it mean to come to Jesus? We may feel that we already have, and I am sure that most who are reading this have initially done so. But throughout scripture we find that God bids us to "come" and "keep coming." In the words of Jesus in John 15: "Abide or live in Me." Our objective throughout our whole life is a greater apprehension and experience of Christ Jesus our Lord. There is no end to this pursuit because there is no end to Christ. God is summing up all things in Christ, and all spiritual reality is to be found in union with Christ. The baptism with the Holy Spirit by Jesus brings us into that union initially, and as we respond to the Holy Spirit, our relationship grows in a never-ending way.

What does Jesus mean by "drink"? When we drink a glass of water, we take it into ourselves. The water becomes part of us. We do not just look at the glass of water--to benefit, we must take it in. It is the same with the Spirit. We must "take Him in." We must receive. God does not force the Holy Spirit upon

us. He has made the union available to us, but we must willingly yield ourselves and receive Him. We can choose to receive or choose to reject. God has made us with the ability to choose, but He does not force how we choose.

To say this another way, Paul says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). When we focus on Jesus (the living Word), we can expect Him to "speak" the Word of God to us. In the word that He speaks, there is direction, and a response is required. Faith is always completed by obedience. Each step of obedience brings us to a new place in God where we are able to receive more.

There are so many scripture passages that speak of the riches that God has opened up to us in Christ, such as: *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise..."* (Eph. 1:7-13)

Whenever we see the term "in Christ Jesus," we can almost always read it "in union with Christ Jesus," and it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes that union. That is why Paul says that we were "sealed" (or "stamped" or "secured") with the Holy Spirit of promise. This encouragement and similar passages were written to those who had received the Holy Spirit during their initial response to the Lord. In the book of Acts, we see that repentance, believing in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, water baptism, and receiving the Spirit are all part of our beginning walk with God. This is what Peter told the crowd on the day of Pentecost: *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.' Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one 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'"* (Acts 2:36-38).

The way we come into an initial relationship with Jesus by the Spirit is the same way that we continue. Here are Paul's statements to the Galatians: *"This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?--"* (Gal. 3:2) *"Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"* (Gal. 3:5). Thus, according to Paul, the way to receive the Spirit initially is "by the hearing of faith" and the way to know a supply of the Spirit is the same, namely "the hearing of faith." Jesus is the author of our faith and the finisher of our faith, so we come to Jesus for the faith we need to receive the Spirit, and He is the one who will complete the transaction by giving us the Spirit. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit within that gives us the ability to make Jesus our Lord in reality: *"Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Cor. 12:3).

The Evidence of Spiritual Baptism

How will we know that we have been baptized by Jesus with the Spirit? How do we know that we are living His life? These and related questions seem to be the source of much disagreement among Christians around the world. What should be a great source of unity and joy seems instead to bring conflict and division. How can we come past this and see a greater experience and testimony of God?

The scripture indicates there are two main evidences of the presence of the indwelling God: the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. Both originate in God. Both are manifested in and through believers, and both require a relationship of faith to be experienced. Gifts are more quickly seen, while fruit takes more time to grow. I Cor. 12:1-11 speaks of the gifts of the Spirit and Galatians 5:22-23 speaks of the fruit of the Spirit. These should go together and reveal God in and through each member of the body of Christ.

There seems to be very little disagreement about the fruit of the Spirit, but a discussion of spiritual gifts seems to bring questions and controversy. Why should this be? Don't we need all that God has provided? Would God ever make a gift available to us that is not needed? Would God ever keep anything from us that is needful? God's provision is perfect in every way. Our place is not to reason about what we need or don't need, but to press into God to experience everything He has provided for His purpose and glory.

The controversy usually seems to center on "tongues," which is recorded in several accounts in Acts as an initial and supernatural evidence of the Holy Spirit's incoming. "Do I have to speak in tongues?" is a frequent question. No, you don't have to do anything, but don't you want everything God has provided? Paul says that "he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself." Don't we all need edification? We may not understand what we need in the beginning, but God does. Did Cornelius know what he needed? God did, and He moved to provide that need.

There is no scripture to support the common teaching that certain spiritual gifts have passed away or have been replaced by the Bible. To accept such an idea is to overlook the riches that God has provided. If you have been affected by this teaching, search the scripture for yourself and ask God to reveal the truth. The book of Acts is especially important, because there we see the gospel being proclaimed by the early church, with accounts of what happened to the first believers. I believe any lover of truth should be able to read these accounts and know from God whether they have received the Spirit or not. Be a lover of truth and enter into the fullness that God has made available to all!

Hindrances

Why have so many seemingly missed this very important aspect of the gospel? I do not have all the answers, but I will suggest what I believe to be some of the main reasons.

Incomplete teaching and presentation of the gospel is probably the main reason. The gospel preached today is often very shallow. It is an "easy believism" that may not require genuine dealing with God. Seekers are told to repeat a "sinner's prayer," then assured that they are now saved, have the Holy Spirit, and are eternally secure. At this point, real repentance may not be evident, nor any observable evidence that God heard their prayer. People tend to believe what they are told, so if they are assured that their sins are forgiven and God dwells within, they will normally believe that. Thus, the biggest blame falls on those who present the gospel in this shallow way.

Secondly, there are many who actively preach against any observable supernatural working of the Holy Spirit through spiritual gifts, sometimes even calling them the work of Satan. This tends to create fear and extreme caution toward anything supernatural. Such fear hinders faith and confidence before God. Even though the Holy Spirit may be working to lead believers into a greater experience of God's grace, their minds take over and quench the Spirit. To overcome this, we must let the Holy Spirit wash our minds with truth and bring us to a place of rest, so we can move in faith before God.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit can only come to indwell a cleansed vessel. That cleansing comes through genuine repentance and belief in Jesus and His work on the cross for the forgiveness of sin. Repentance includes works of repentance, not just words of repentance (see Matt. 3:8). Instructing the Corinthians, Paul explains it this way: *"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter"* (2 Cor. 7:10-11). The Holy Spirit is faithful to bring conviction of sin (John 16:8-10). A lack of response on God's side may be due to unrepented sin or unbelief. If we stay before God, He is faithful to reveal such things so they can be made right.

Finally, God is looking for those who are willing to give themselves to Him as Lord without reservation. The very essence of the gospel is to be brought from independence from God (the self-life) to being under the authority of Christ as Lord. Jesus can only be the Savior of the one who has willingly yielded all to His control. The Holy Spirit comes as an administrator of the authority of God. Having reservations toward His authority will hinder our relationship with God and must be resolved. To be "filled" with the Spirit is to be "controlled" by the Spirit. This is a sensitive place, and sometimes it takes time for us to completely yield. It has often been said that the Holy Spirit is a "gentleman" and does not force, but waits to be invited to come in and take control. God is willing to wait, and knows when the matter is settled.

God is giving us the most precious thing He can give: Himself. Ephesians 5 compares our relationship with Christ to marriage. Doesn't anyone seeking to be married want to make sure of the commitment of the other? If God seems to delay filling us with the Spirit, we must not give up easily. *"And He said to them, 'Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him'; and he will answer from within and say, 'Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you'? I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!'"* (Luke 11:5-13)

The whole theme of this passage is persistence: "Seek and keep on seeking." God knows when all conditions have been met. He is good, has our best at heart, and is faithful to reveal anything on our part that hinders. We receive the Spirit through the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2). *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder*

of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

Perhaps we feel we have done everything we know to do and yet God has not answered, at least not in the way we expected Him to. Here is where our confidence in the character of God may be tested. Jesus says that God wants to come and dwell within us, far more than we know, but our experience seems to show otherwise. What do we do? Well, can God communicate with us? Can we hear Him? There is a very important truth that applies in this situation. The faith that we need originates in God, not in ourselves. Consider this scripture carefully: *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-2).*

This scripture tells us that Jesus "authors" faith in our heart and he also "finishes" it. Our place is to draw near to Him, acknowledging that "apart from Him we can do nothing." No amount of self-determination can force God to do what only He can do. Instead, we draw near to Him, waiting on Him, praising and worshiping Him, and presenting ourselves to Him to do what only He can do. This is not a place of struggle--it must become a place of rest. Yes it is a place of perseverance, but not a place of *trying* to do what I cannot do. There is a certain amount of mystery in this, because we may not understand why God seemingly delays. But in the process, God is bringing us to the end of ourselves and what we can do, and leading us into the riches of what He can do. He may be after something deep within our heart that we may not understand at first, but His time and His way of answering is always perfect. He is God.

Walking in the Spirit

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25). It seems that there is a misconception among many, that once we receive the Spirit we are now "spiritual." An attitude of "Now I've got it and can rest easy" has misled many and brought confusion and harm to others. It is clear in the scripture that one who has begun in the Spirit is only a babe in Christ, and now the focus is to walk in the Spirit and grow up into maturity as a son or daughter of God. We must begin, and we must also continue.

The Galatians are an example of believers that began but did not continue to walk in the Spirit. Paul says that they received the Spirit and also knew a supply of the Spirit. But for some reason they allowed themselves to be misled and brought to such a serious condition that Paul said they had been "severed from Christ and fallen from grace" (see Galatians 5:4).

The Corinthian church is another example in the scriptures that shows that believers can receive the Spirit and yet be unspiritual in their expression. Paul said that these believers came behind in no spiritual gift, yet he spoke to them as "babes in Christ" and "carnal" or fleshly. Being alive to God is essential to the pathway of spiritual maturity, but it is no guarantee that we will continue to the end. If we see that clearly, it answers many questions that seem to have hindered many when considering the baptism in the Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, the main question we are addressing in this short exhortation is whether a believer automatically receives the Spirit when they believe in Jesus. We have briefly touched on related issues and questions, hoping to encourage you to press into God past every hindrance. I hope this is enough to show that nothing in our relationship with God is automatic. Every step is a step of faith, looking to

God, hearing God, believing His word, and obeying Him in all things. If we want to justify our current understanding or condition, I think we can always find a way. But such an attitude will hinder our progress. Spiritual progress only comes by continually seeking God for a fuller experience of His grace in all aspects of our lives.

Here is the attitude Paul had near the end of his life and ministry: *"But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind"* (Phil. 3:7-16).

May God find this same mind in each one of us today. If this is true of us, we will press past every hindrance to experience the fullness that God has made available to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us go on! The door is open and the time is short.

Comments on John 20:22

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:22). Based on this event, some maintain that now all who believe in Jesus automatically receive the Holy Spirit when they believe in Jesus, and that a reference to receiving the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost is a second reception for power for service. For those who may have this understanding, the following points are provided for consideration:

Thomas was missing. When did he receive the Spirit? What about the rest of the 120 in the upper room? If Pentecost is a "second reception," when did they receive the first time? When Peter referred to "receiving the Holy Spirit as we did" (Acts 10:47), he mentioned events relating to Pentecost (not the upper room). Jesus "blew" or "breathed" ("on them" is not in the original text). If that was the actual event of breathing the Spirit into them as some maintain (such as in Genesis 2:7), then why did he tell them to "receive"? He should have said "now you have received." No record is given of any steps taken to obey Christ's command. What did He expect them to do on that occasion to receive the Spirit? According to John 7:39, the Spirit could not have been given at this time because Jesus was not yet glorified. In order to overcome this objection, one has to argue that Jesus ascended that day to Heaven (the Father) and then returned to earth. It is not stated in scripture that He did such a thing, so to accept that idea is speculation and reasoning. In John 16:7 Jesus does say that He is "going to the Father." He also said the same thing to Mary. But there are many statements throughout the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension that are general in nature and all-encompassing regarding the whole plan of God. They are not listed in careful chronological order specifying an exact sequence of events. Those that dethrone Jesus from being God in the flesh use His statement to Mary: "to your God

and my God." In other words, there is a certain amount of mystery and generality in the record of these events. To use John 16:7 and 20:17 to prove that Jesus had already gone to the Father and received the Holy Spirit is very questionable. If this were the reception of the Spirit long anticipated by the saints of old, it is rather amazing that it is not mentioned anywhere else. Would such an important event be relegated to a few words by Jesus in a relatively obscure passage of scripture, with no account of further evidence that it actually happened? Pentecost was the pouring out of the promise, and it was done in public with much evidence of divine action and presence. That is when Peter said he and other apostles received the Spirit (Acts 10:47). Also he said that "this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." Peter specifically says in Acts 2:33 that Jesus did not receive the promised Spirit to pour out on others until He was "exalted to the right hand of God." If this was in fact the first of a "double reception" of the Spirit, where else in scripture do we see any such mention of the need for two receptions? Receiving the Holy Spirit is critical to the New Testament gospel. Would we not see much more mentioned in other scriptures? If the disciples in the upper room actually did receive the Holy Spirit on that occasion, how is it possible to draw the conclusion that now all who believe in Jesus also automatically receive the Spirit? Where do we see that in scripture or even in logic? We assume that the disciples had undergone water baptism at some point. Does that mean that all believers now are automatically water baptized? To support the teaching that all believers now automatically have the Spirit, some quote scriptures that remind believers that they were "sealed with the Holy Spirit" (such as Eph. 1:13). However this is arguing in a reverse order. The majority of the New Testament letters do assume that believers have received the Spirit, and they are constantly reminded of God's provision in this regard, but for the most part they do not address how or when this happened. Receiving the Spirit was a fundamental aspect of the early church gospel, but in Acts we see that this experience was a specific act of faith accompanied by observable evidence. Finally, I believe that an important doctrine must not be based on one scripture verse, especially one that is not clear. The unclear scripture needs to be interpreted in light of other scriptures that are clear. I understand that this was a command by Jesus to receive the Holy Spirit (similar to Acts 1:4). Then the disciples received Him on the day of Pentecost.

Comment on Acts 2:38

When Peter said "you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit," some have taken this to mean that when we are water baptized, we "have" the Holy Spirit. If this were the case, Peter should have said something like this: "Repent, be baptized, and then rejoice for the Holy Spirit now dwells in you." But all he said was that these steps would lead to receiving the Holy Spirit. This verse does not expand on how this was to take place. The International Standard Version translates this verse as follows: *"Peter answered them, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the Holy Spirit as a gift'"* (Acts 2:38, ISV).

Questions to consider regarding the Samaria believers (Acts 8)

How did the apostles know that these believers had not received the Holy Spirit? They had accepted the Word of God, they had been baptized, miracles were being done, and "there was great joy in the city"-but the apostles came because they had not received the Spirit. What did Simon see that led him to offer money that he might have power to lay hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit?