

The Work of the Spirit in Relation to Salvation

This is probably one of the most indispensable aspects of the Holy Spirit's work, because the Holy Spirit plays an essential role in the process of salvation. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit the believer is regenerated and baptized into the body of Christ. He is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and permanently sealed for eternal life. The Holy Spirit's role in salvation is frequently mentioned and clearly explained in New Testament, but not mentioned whatsoever in the Old Testament.

Remember that every mention of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament has to do with a ministry of empowering specific individuals for specific tasks in relation to the chosen nation of Israel. This has created a great deal of confusion throughout church history and is still hotly debated today. In fact the work of the Holy Spirit in Salvation has proved to be one of the most debated and controversial aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry during our age.

Certainly the Holy Spirit came alongside certain national leaders of Israel (i.e. Moses, Joshua, the judges, Saul and David), empowering them to lead the nation of Israel. Certainly the Holy Spirit came upon the Old Testament prophets to move them along in the process of speaking forth and writing God's Word. Certainly the Holy Spirit empowered the tabernacle and temple craftsmen in the building of the nation's places of worship. But the Old Testament never mentions the involvement of the Holy Spirit in relation to regeneration, indwelling, filling, baptizing, sealing etc...

Some hold positions that the Holy Spirit is involved in these ways in the Old Testament by way of implication from the New Testament. They claim that since there is evidence of believers in the Old Testament then they must have been regenerated, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit just as the New Testament believer is. However, this is a difficult position to hold.

It is best to say, we know that certain Old Testament individuals came to faith in the coming Messiah. For instance, Hebrews chapter 11 mentions several of these Old Testament saints. Although, the general trend of Old Testament Israel was faithlessness and turning away from God, there were individuals who lived during the Old Testament dispensation who are considered righteous, faithful and believing. But they are never spoken of as being regenerated, indwelt, sealed or filled by the Holy Spirit.

An examination of the passages in the Old Testament, where the Holy Spirit is mentioned reveals that the Holy Spirit comes upon or empowers individuals, but never indwells or fills them. Jesus' statement in **John 14:17** gives good support for this position: "*{that is} the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, {but} you know Him because **He abides with you, and will be in you.***"

The preposition "*with*" [PARA] means to "come alongside." The idea is that prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was with or came alongside believers, but did not indwell them. The statement, "*and will be in you*" is speaking of the time when the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and will from that point forward permanently indwell believers.

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This verse along with the apparent absence of teaching about the Holy Spirit in relation to salvation in the Old Testament would suggest a definite difference between the two dispensations. This is not at all unexpected since the Old Testament is focused on the nation of Israel as a whole and not on individual believers. This is also not unexpected when one recognizes that the Old Testament is laying the foundation for what is to come.

Certainly, the Holy Spirit was involved in Old Testament times and there are some similarities in His ministry with the New Testament, but it is best not to read the New Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to salvation into the Old Testament.

We can possibly conclude that since the Holy Spirit is said to be *with* the disciples during the time of Christ, which is still considered the Old Testament dispensation that the Holy Spirit was involved with Old Testament believers (i.e. leading, guiding etc...). However, this is once again an implication based off a New Testament passage. We must be careful not to infer too much about the Holy Spirit's involvement with individuals during the Old Testament time unless it is directly mentioned in Scripture. So, what is the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Salvation:

The Holy Spirit Regenerates believers.

One work of the Holy Spirit in relation to our salvation is that of regeneration. Regeneration is the impartation of eternal life to the believer. The Greek word *regeneration* [PALINGENESIA] is appropriately translated, "*rebirth, renewal, reproduction or recreation.*" It only appears twice in the New Testament.

It is used eschatologically (regarding the end times) in **Matthew 19:28** for the renewing of the earth in the time of the Millennium (cf. Revelation 20:1-15), "*And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the **regeneration** when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

It is used soteriologically (regarding salvation) in **Titus 3:5** to speak of the rebirth of a redeemed person, "*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of **regeneration** and renewing by the Holy Spirit."*

Regeneration simply means, "to impart life" and specifically speaks of the act in which God imparts spiritual life to the one who believes.

There are verses that speak of regeneration as being a work of God accomplished by His own power.

- **John 1:12-13**, "*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, [even] to those who believe in His name, **who were born** not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **of God.**" The idea of "being born" is that of regeneration. This verse makes it clear that physical birth is **not** the subject, "*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man.*" It is a spiritual birth (i.e. regeneration) that is spoken of here and it is a work of God.*

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- **2 Corinthians 5:17-18**, "*Therefore if any man is in Christ, {he is} a **new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, **new things have come**. Now all {these} things are **from God**...*" The idea of being a new creature is speaking once again of regeneration and the Emphasis is that regeneration is from God.

- **Ephesians 2:4-5**, "*But **God**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*" The phrase, "**made us alive**" is speaking of regeneration. We were spiritually dead in our transgressions and God made us alive in Christ. Once again God is at work in regeneration.

- **James 1:18**, "*In the exercise of His will **He brought us forth** by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures*" The phrase, "brought us forth" is once again speaking of our regeneration. Who brought us forth? The "He" is pointing back to the phrase, "Father of lights" in James 1:17, who is none other than God.

There are verses that speak of regeneration as being linked with Christ.

- **John 5:21**, "*For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so **the Son also gives life** to whom He wishes.*" Some refer to this verse as speaking of Christ's involvement in regeneration. They use the phrase "gives life" to refer to regeneration, "the imparting of life." Examining this verse in its appropriate context reveals that the *life* that is spoken of here is "resurrection life." This verse in a round about way could be used to speak of regeneration, but it does not directly refer to regeneration.

- **2 Corinthians 5:17**, "*Therefore if any man is **in Christ**, {he is} a **new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*" This verse more closely links regeneration to the Second Person of the Trinity. Those who are "in Christ" are new creatures. In other words, believers in Christ have been regenerated.

- **1 John 5:12**, "***He who has the Son has the life**; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life*" This verse seems to be making a similar statement as 2 Corinthians 5:17. Those who are believers in Christ have life. They have been regenerated and possess eternal life.

There are verses that ascribe the work of regeneration to the Holy Spirit.

- **John 3:3-7**, "3) *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one **is born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" 4) *Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"* 5) *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and the Spirit**, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* 6) *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born of the Spirit is spirit**.* 7) *"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be **born again**.'"*

In this passage, Jesus speaks of being "*born again*," being "*born of water and the Spirit*," and being "*born of the Spirit*." In this passage, He is speaking of the new birth, regeneration. And He ascribes

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the work of regeneration to the Spirit. One who is born again is regenerated and it is of the Spirit. This really is a clear statement of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the work of regeneration.

- **Titus 3:5**, "*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.***" In this passage, the apostle Paul is communicating to Titus that salvation brings with it divine cleansing from sin and the gift of a new, Spirit-generated, Spirit-empowered, and Spirit-protected life. This is the new birth and the Holy Spirit is the agent in this work of regeneration. [Cf. The MacArthur Study Bible, note on p. 1888]

- **Galatians 3:3**, "*Are you so foolish? **Having begun by the Spirit**, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*" "Begun" is speaking of the Spirit's role in regeneration. Our new life in Christ began by the Holy Spirit.

The results of the Spirit's work in Regeneration:

1) A New Nature-One result of the Spirit's work of regeneration is the impartation of a new nature.

- The believer has become a partaker of the divine nature: **2 Peter 1:4**, "*For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might **become partakers of {the} divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*" We are sharing in God's nature by the possession of His eternal life and will one day receive a glorified body like His.

- The believer is spoken of as receiving a new self, a capacity for righteous living: **Ephesians 4:24**, "*and put on **the new self, which in {the likeness of} God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.***"

It is interesting to take note that the action of laying aside the old self and putting on the new self here in Ephesians 4 is in the aorist tense in the Greek, which denotes a once and for all, definite, concluding action. The stripping off of the old and putting on of the new is done at once and for good.

It is the transformation that takes place at salvation. The old corrupted nature is stripped off and a new Christ-like nature is put on. These are not commands since they do not appear here in an imperative form, but Paul is describing what had already taken place in the Ephesian believers lives. At the time of their salvation, the old self had been laid aside or stripped off and the new nature had been put on.

- The believer has become a new creature: **2 Corinthians 5:17**, "*Therefore if any man is **in Christ, {he is} a new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*"

Those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit have a new spiritual perception. The old value systems, priorities, beliefs, and plans are replaced with an eternal perspective, striving to live in a manner worthy of and pleasing to God.

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2) A New Life-Another result of regeneration is the impartation of life; a new life; a spiritual life; eternal life.

- The believer has received a new mind that he may know God: **1 Corinthians 2:16**, "*For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.*" We have received the mind of Christ so that we may be better able to know and understand God.
- The believer has received a new heart that he may love God: **Romans 5:5**, "*and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*" The idea here is that our hearts are now capable of loving God because of the work of the Holy Spirit.
- The believer has received a new will that he may obey God: **Romans 6:3**, "*and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin {as} instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members {as} instruments of righteousness to God.*" The idea here is that since we have been made alive from the dead (regeneration), we now have the capability; the will to obey God and live in righteousness.

The Holy Spirit Baptizes believers.

Another work of the Holy Spirit in relation to our salvation is that of Spirit Baptism. Unfortunately there exists a great deal of confusion regarding the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit.

First, there are many who confuse this work of the Spirit with water baptism. This group confuses passages such as Romans 6:4 and Galatians 3:27 that speak of Spirit baptism and suggest that they speak of water baptism.

A second group understands the baptism of the Spirit to be some kind of second blessing. They teach that the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit is a secondary work of the Spirit occurring sometime after salvation and empowers the believer for service. In addition, they believe that this baptism of the Spirit is accompanied by some sort of manifestation of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues. In so doing, they misunderstand the teaching of Acts 2 regarding the birth of the church and insist that this should be repeated throughout the church age.

But, what is the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit? The baptism of the Spirit may best be defined as the work whereby the Holy Spirit places the believer into union with Christ and into union with other believers in the body of Christ.

Paul says in **1 Corinthians 12:13**, "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*" This verse clearly defines the ministry of Spirit baptism. There are several distinctives of this work of the Holy Spirit that need to be mentioned.

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1) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is Unique to the Church Age.

The Baptizing work of the Spirit is not mentioned in the Old Testament in regards to the salvation of Old Testament saints. However, it is mentioned quite frequently in the New Testament in regards to salvation in Christ. The primary verse reference is that of 1 Corinthians 12:13, mentioned above. Very clearly, this baptizing work of the Spirit begins in Acts chapter 2 at Pentecost.

Acts 1:5 makes it quite clear that this work of the Spirit is still future. Jesus says, "*for John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.*"

Acts 11:15-16 indicates that this work of the Spirit had already begun, "*And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as {He did} upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'*"

This baptizing work of the Holy Spirit includes all believers of the church age. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 it indicates, "*we were all baptized*" while in Romans 6, all who were baptized in verse 3 are those who have been united to Christ in verse 5. Once again indicating that all believers in Christ are baptized by the Spirit.

2) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit includes a Union with Christ.

The apostle Paul makes this clear in **Romans 6:3-5**. He says, "*Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with {Him} in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also (in the likeness) of His resurrection.*" The idea here is that those who were baptized into Christ (Baptism of the Spirit) according to verse 3 are also "united with Him according to verse 5.

Paul also says in **Galatians 3:27-28**, "*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

3) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit includes a Union with other Christians.

This is made clear in **1 Corinthians 12:13**. Paul states, "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*"

Paul also says in **Galatians 3:27-28**, "*For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

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4) The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is Unaccompanied by Charismatic signs.

Unfortunately in the last century, many from the Charismatic churches have misapplied Acts 2 and have taught that the gift of speaking in tongues or some other experiential sign must accompany the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They have deemed that the absence of such signs suggest that one has not truly been baptized by the Spirit. As this has played out the Charismatic position sees this as a secondary work of the Spirit in relation to salvation. In other words, they see it as subsequent to salvation and it can happen any time after salvation and in some cases may not happen at all. It is viewed by this group as an empowering ministry rather than having anything to do with salvation.

However, if one accurately views Acts 2 as a foundational ministry of the Holy Spirit in starting the church and the church age then the conclusion above is unwarranted. The giving of speaking and serving gifts were for the edification of the body of Christ, but the sign gifts were given to authenticate the early messengers of Scripture as being from God (Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:2-3).

The Holy Spirit Indwells believers.

Another work of the Holy Spirit at our salvation is that of Spirit Indwelling. Once again this is a controversial ministry of the Holy Spirit. As mentioned earlier there exists much confusion over the ministry of indwelling in regards to the Spirit's role in the Old Testament versus the New Testament. Hopefully this has been cleared up when we understand that the only mention of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is for the purpose of empowering for a God-appointed task. The Spirit is said to be with Old Testament believers, but to dwell in New Testament believers.

The Definition of the Indwelling Ministry of the Spirit:

The Indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit is the act by which the Holy Spirit permanently takes up residence in every believer. This presence or abiding of the Holy Spirit within each individual believer is considered to be permanent.

The Substantiation of the Indwelling Ministry of the Spirit:

This ministry of the Holy Spirit dwelling within believers is frequently mentioned in the New Testament Scripture. The following is a list of verses, which supply Scriptural evidence for this ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus predicted the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers:

John 7:39, *“But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet {given,} because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

John 14:16-17, *“And I will ask the Father, and He will **give you another Helper**, that He may be with you forever; {that is} **the Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, {but} you know Him because **He abides with you, and will be in you.**”*

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- Paul taught regarding the Holy Spirit's indwelling of believers:

Romans 5:5, “and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through **the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**”

Romans 8:9-11, “However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the **Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you.** He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through **His Spirit who indwells you.**”

1 Corinthians 6:19, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of **the Holy Spirit who is in you**, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”

Ephesians 1:13-14, “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation -having also believed, you were sealed in Him **with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given** as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of {God's own} possession, to the praise of His glory.”

- James mentions the Holy Spirit's indwelling of believers:

James 4:5, “Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: **'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?'**”

- John speaks of the Holy Spirit's indwelling of believers:

1 John 2:27, “And as for you, **the anointing** which you received from Him **abides in you**, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as **His anointing** teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

Observations regarding the Indwelling Ministry of the Spirit:

The previous verses lead one to make the following observations in regards to the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit is given by Christ as a gift to indwell believers. (John 7:39; 14:16-17; Ephesians 1:14)
- The Holy Spirit is given at the point of salvation. (Ephesians 1:13-14; cf. Galatians 3:2)
- The Holy Spirit only indwells believers, certainly not unbelievers. (Romans 8:9; cf. Jude 1:19)
- The Holy Spirit is said to still be indwelling believers even if they are in sin. (context of 1 Corinthians 6:19; cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-2)
- The Holy Spirit indwells believers permanently. (John 14:16-17; Ephesians 1:13-14)

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- The indwelling of the Holy Spirit should move us toward righteous living, because we are not our own. (Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 6:19; cf. Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16)

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is truly an amazing spiritual blessing. When we place our faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit permanently indwells us. He functions as our helper, seeking to teach us and guide us in our spiritual growth toward righteousness. What a comfort and encouragement this is for the believer in Christ.

The Holy Spirit Seals believers.

There is one last aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in relation to our salvation and that is the sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit. The sealing ministry of the Holy Spirit is mentioned in three different passages, all written by the Apostle Paul:

- **2 Corinthians 1:21-22**, *“Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave {us} the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”*
- **Ephesians 1:13**, *“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation -having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of | promise.”*
- **Ephesians 4:30**, *“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*

In Paul's day an official document would be sealed with wax. An impression would be made in the hot wax with the signet ring of the king or another high ranking official. The seal would signify that the document was official. The Spirit of God is our seal. Let's look at four things that the sealing of the Spirit signifies.

1) **Security:** In ancient times the seal of a king, prince, or noble represented security and inviolability (cf. Daniel 6:6-7). When we became a Christian, God put His Holy Spirit in us. He stamped us with His signet ring, thus declaring us secure.

2) **Authenticity:** In ancient times the seal signified authenticity. The seal served as the Kings We authentic signature (i.e. 1 Kings 21:6-16). When God gave us His Holy Spirit, He declared us to be authentic children of the King.

3) **Ownership:** In ancient times the seal also served as a completion of a transaction noting final ownership. When the Holy Spirit seals believers. He marks them as God's divine possession and declares the transaction of salvation as official and final.

4) **Authority:** In ancient times the seal emphasized the absolute authority of the decrees represented by the seal. Those who possessed the sealed decree had the Kings delegated authority (cf. Esther 8:8-12). When Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit, we are delegated to proclaim, teach, and defend God's Word and His Gospel with His authority! When God gave you the Holy Spirit, He gave you the only guarantee you'll ever need.

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The role of the Holy Spirit in sealing believers provides the believer with eternal-security and assurance of salvation. God will certainly fulfill His promises to His children, whom He has sealed with the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

“As Christians we came into spiritual life through the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicted us of our sin and brought us to repentance. He produced in us the faith we needed to respond to the preaching of the gospel. He similarly brought us into submission to the lordship of Christ, and we were regenerated by Him-recreated into new life. The Spirit of God indwelt us, baptized us into the body of Christ, gave us spiritual gifts, sealed us for eternal life, and separated us from sin. That monumental work of the Spirit lifted us out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Colossians 1:13). Ours is a spiritual life-we are not of this world, though we are in this world.” [John MacArthur, Whatever Happened to the Holy Spirit, p. 67]

APPLICATION

As a believer in Christ, the Holy Spirit has regenerated you; baptized you into the body of Christ; is presently indwelling you and has sealed you for the day of redemption.

- ***Do you recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?***
- ***Are your thoughts, speech and actions appropriate for one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit?***