

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF A BELIEVER:

Sanctification, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts

The Statement of Faith of our church says, “We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.” This is the foundational understanding of the work of the third person of the Trinity in the regeneration and life of a believer. And yet there are some common questions that often arise that can cause confusion. This paper will briefly address some of the more common questions.

As a believer, should I be seeking to be “baptized in the Spirit?”

We believe that 1 Corinthians 12:13 makes clear that “. . . we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . .” The baptism in or with the Holy Spirit is the act of the Spirit that takes an unregenerate individual and, through the new birth, adopts them into the family of God. If you are a believer, then you have already been baptized in and by the Spirit. All the works of the Holy Spirit in a Christ-follower’s life are because of this initial baptism, not separate from it.

Is there a “deeper work” of the Spirit that I should be seeking?

We believe the sanctification of a believer is never complete short of glorification (that is, we will never be perfectly holy in the practical sense until we are glorified, after our death or at the return of Jesus). This process of making us more and more holy is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. All Christians are called to “be filled with the Spirit . . .” (Ephesians 5:18). This is a continuing command to all believers, who having already been baptized into Christ’s body by the Holy Spirit, are now to seek to be controlled and empowered by the same Spirit on a daily basis. Regardless of the terminology used, we recognize that the continuing work of the Spirit is valid and necessary in the ongoing life of a believer.

Should I look for a certain spiritual gift to signify a deeper work of the Holy Spirit?

Some would require that Christians manifest a particular spiritual gift, such as speaking in tongues, as evidence of a deeper work of the Spirit. Others would have us understand that such a gift is no longer available or acceptable. We believe that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in His distribution of the gifts. The teaching of 1 Corinthians 12 does not allow us to either require a certain gift or to restrict the Spirit in how He will work. Therefore, speaking in tongues is one of the gifts but it does not signify a deeper work, any more than does the expression of one of the other spiritual gifts.

Since the Holy Spirit is the source of Christian unity, we must ever guard against any use of the gifts that would lead to division within the Church. We affirm the priority of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5) over the gifts of the Spirit in the life of a Christian. All mature believers should be seeking to walk in step with the Spirit, manifesting the same fruit, even while exercising different gifts.

Is any gift available to all and therefore to be sought out by everyone?

The teaching passage in 1 Corinthians 12 states, through rhetorical questions, such as, “Do all speak in tongues?” that no one gift is given to all Christians. To suggest that any one could have all the gifts or that everyone could have a certain gift would point us in the direction of independence from one another. Rather, the Bible points us towards interdependence, like a healthy body with many diverse members. Instead of suggesting that all should have a specific gift, it is better for us to be motivated by love (1 Corinthians 13) with the intention of desiring the gifts that God would use for the greater benefit of the church body.

How should we seek to use the gifts of the Spirit?

We believe that the gifts of the Spirit are biblically valid for today. They should be exercised under the guidance of God’s Word and under the authority of the local church leadership. We believe all Christians should open their lives to God’s Spirit and allow Him to fill, empower, and to “gift” as He sees fit. We should earnestly desire the greater gifts, with the emphasis being on gifts that are of greater value for the good of the whole church body, not just the individual.

Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower His followers individually and the Church corporately. This began on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit's power was said to have a particular purpose: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you shall be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:18). We believe the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit are given to enable us to fulfill the Great Commission through missions and world evangelization and building up the Body of Christ on earth.

What are guidelines for the use of the gifts of the Spirit that use words?

The gifts that use words, or verbal-gifts, are revelatory in nature. That is, God is revealing something to the Body through the words being communicated. The confusion comes when we do not make a difference between these types of "revelation" and the authoritative, inerrant, inspired Revelation of God's Word, the Bible. This mistake results in treating the verbal gifts as more authoritative than the Scriptures. This is especially true of New Testament prophecy. Since the word "prophecy" is used in both testaments, it is easy to assume they refer to the same thing. But in the Old Testament, prophets who spoke any error were to be stoned. In the New Testament, prophecies are to be "weighed" or judged. This clearly implies that they do not have inspired authority.

With the gifts that are expressed in words (such as interpreted tongues, prophecy, a word of wisdom, etc.), we believe that how these words are communicated and how they are received must both reflect a submission of these words to the Word of God. The words must always "be under" the Word. The Bible is authoritative and inerrant in the original writings. The word-gifts are not. Therefore it is wise to not couch their presentation with phrases like, "The Lord says," since this communicates an Old Testament prophecy kind of authority.

Receiving these verbal-gifts must also be handled in a way that does not exalt them over the Word of God. The Bible is to be obeyed. These other words are to be judged and weighed. The Scriptures are to be carefully studied, since their inspiration is verbal and plenary (applying to every word in the original manuscripts). Therefore, it is wise not to "publish" contemporary prophecies, since they are for the local church's use at that time. When they are duplicated and distributed, they may be taken out of their God-given context and misapplied. We must avoid paying such attention to the contemporary "words" that we neglect the timeless truth of the Bible. Thus, we should not spend inordinate time and effort to record, study, and interpret them. But we should remain open to God using these words for our up-building and encouragement and consolation.

What are guidelines for the use of the gift of tongues?

The descriptions of the gift of tongues in the book of Acts, especially chapter two, would lead us to believe that this gift is the ability to speak a foreign language that one has not studied. God used this gift to communicate that all different groups were indeed welcomed into the one true Church (Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles). But the main teaching passage on this gift is found in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In this passage, it is not clear that the gift is of human languages that have not been studied. When Paul says that praying in tongues is not praying with his mind, there is a hint that the "language" is not earthly or "rational."

Paul's contrast between tongues and prophecy in chapter 14 leads us to believe that the gift of tongues can be used privately, even if it is limited publicly. The apostle talks of his private use being very strong, but makes it clear that when he is in public he would rather give intelligible words. There is no clue that Paul would separate "private" and "public tongues" into two categories. Rather, they are the same gift used either alone or with others. Thus, his limitation on the gift must be applied — all public uses of the spiritual gift of tongues must be limited to two or three and they must be interpreted. This would apply to praying or singing in tongues (so called "private tongues" being used in public) as well as to "giving a tongue."

What if I do not agree with your conclusions?

Sincere believers may disagree with our stated beliefs. But for the sake of the unity and healthy functioning of the local Body of believers called Trinity Fellowship, we would ask that those who choose to fellowship with us not engage in teaching or promoting beliefs in contradiction to our stated position.