

# PART 18 – ACTS & THE HOLY SPIRIT

## DISCUSS AND APPLY

### **Discuss – *questions to help understanding***

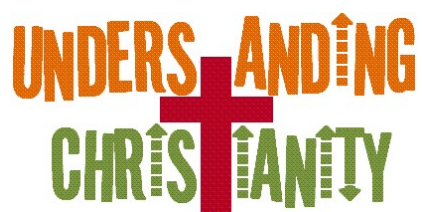
1. What do you already know, or what do you hear people saying about the Holy Spirit and His work?

*Read Romans 8:1-30*

2. Why is there no condemnation for people who are in Christ (verses 1-3)? What did Jesus do in order to remove the condemnation we deserve for our sins?
3. Paul contrasts the 'flesh' (our nature without the Spirit) and the Spirit, which lead us to different goals. What standard of actions does the Holy Spirit lead us towards (verses 3-4)?
4. What difference does the Holy Spirit make in our thinking, both in terms of our aims in life and the qualities he produces as we follow Him and not the 'flesh' (verses 5-8)?
5. Who has the Holy Spirit according to verses 9-10? Why does this matter?
6. Paul explains that the Spirit is the 'firstfruits' of the new creation – we have life from Him even though our bodies are still subject to disease and death. As we await future glory, when our bodies will be redeemed (verse 23), what does the Spirit do for us (see verses 15-17 and 26-27)?

### **Apply – *questions to help personal application***

- Do you think people are always capable of doing good things so long as they know what is good (education) and are free from constraints that might drive them to do wrong?
- The New Testament describes the Holy Spirit as indwelling people who believe in Jesus. Why do you think we need this presence of God living in our inner beings?
- Have you personally sensed that the Holy Spirit is guiding you or speaking to you (either using words and visions or through your feelings and thoughts)? How do you recognise it is Him and what is He saying?
- How do you think the Christian movement grew so dramatically from such insignificant origins and despite the message of a crucified founder? Was this God's work or something else?
- What do you think the Spirit of God might be leading you towards? What changes might He want you to make in your life and who might He want you to share the good news about Jesus with?



# PART 18 – ACTS & THE HOLY SPIRIT

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### ***What does speaking in tongues sound like?***

The word 'tongues' in the phrase 'speaking in tongues' simply means 'languages'. So, instead of saying 'speaking in tongues', the phrase could be translated 'ability to speak in other languages'. Speaking in tongues is described in Acts 2, 10 and 19 and in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In Acts 2, it is clear that the people in Jerusalem could hear the disciples speaking in their own languages and even dialects (verses 6-11). What is less clear is whether each disciple was speaking in one or more of these languages or the same speech could be heard by different people as if in their own language (in which case the gift was really of 'hearing', not 'speaking'). In any case, the effect was that people noticed something unusual and heard the message. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul includes ability to speak in other languages among the gifts God graciously gives to the Church. Some people who claim to be able to 'speak in tongues' use a sequence of repetitive sounds that do not appear to have structure or to correspond to known human languages. This is often called *glossolalia*. Based on a reference in 1 Corinthians 13:1, some describe glossolalia as ability to speak in the tongues of angels, although others suggest it may simply be a result of a heightened emotional state or a learned behaviour and that the reference to 'the tongues of angels' in Corinthians is rhetorical ('Even if I could ..'). Many Christians describe glossolalia as beneficial in their personal prayers and devotion to God. This is an area where sincere Christians have different views and the main practical challenge is that leaders in the churches need to decide what place the gift of tongues should have in public worship. I would say emphatically that it is wrong to suggest, as some people have, that every true Christian will speak in tongues if they have the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12 puts this ability among a list of gifts and clearly teaches that there is no gift that every Christian receives.

### ***Is the Holy Spirit God?***

The Holy Spirit, like the Father and Jesus (the Son), is described in the Bible as being God. When Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, he was lying to God (Acts 5:3-4). The Spirit is included in trinitarian formulations of praise such as 2 Corinthians 13:14 and He is described as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. In John 15-16, Jesus places the Spirit on a par with Himself and the Father. Importantly, the Spirit is not, therefore, an impersonal force (an 'it'), but a person who has feelings (He is capable of being grieved according to Ephesians 4:30 and He has a will according to 1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

### ***Does the Holy Spirit possess people?***

People sometimes have an unhelpful view of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. We speak about Him indwelling people and, influenced, no doubt, by Hollywood perceptions of possession by spirits, people sometimes think He takes control of a person. This is compounded by the language used in some translations of the New Testament that suggest that the Spirit 'controls' the lives of believers and by the practice of some Christians who describe bizarre actions and noises as the result of the Spirit's work in a person's life. This goes against what the New Testament teaches. The Holy Spirit produces qualities in our lives including 'self-control' (Galatians 5:23). He leads and guides us, but does not force His will upon us. The Christian must choose whether to follow the Spirit's leading towards doing God's will – if we do, He will give the power for us to do it and the results will be peace and life – or the leading of the flesh towards selfish actions, which result in death. The Spirit helps us, but does not take over our mind or will.

### ***What is the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in a person's life?***

People sometimes think that the Spirit's work is evidenced by special abilities or 'supernatural' phenomena, such as speaking in tongues. These things may come as a gift from the Spirit, but the New Testament suggests two things that are the true hallmarks of the Spirit's work in a person: the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3) and the fruit of a Christ-like character (Galatians 5:22-23). When these things are present consistently we cannot doubt that the Holy Spirit is at work.