A close up of oranges

Description automatically generated

**Lesson 1 | Introduction to the Study of the Holy Spirit**

The study of the Holy Spirit is one of the most helpful and yet one of the most neglected studies for believers. It’s helpful because, of course, the Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead who comes to live within us as believers. As one theologian put it “The Holy Spirit is the point at which the Trinity becomes personal to the believer.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Yet although it is incredibly practical, the doctrine is difficult for many believers to understand and study.

***Why do you think that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is hard for many to study?***

Part of the reason for this difficulty is the amount of terms that seem daunting and removed from everyday life.

***Can you think of terms that deal with the Holy Spirit that might be intimidating to some?***

What is the difference between filling, sealing, baptizing, indwelling, and leading? What does it mean to walk by the Spirit, or to live by the Spirit? What does it mean that the Spirit is an earnest? Or that He is a “Comforter” or a “Helper”? Another reason for this difficulty and hesitancy is the fact that many people have abused the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Some have tried to argue for an ongoing role for tongues, miraculous healings, and some have gone even crazier with “holy laughter” and even “holy barking.” In response, many believers just avoid the topic of spiritual gifts altogether. Finally, there tend to be less passages dedicated to the work of the Holy Spirit. Three major passages develop the doctrine of the Holy Spirit – Galatians 5, Romans 8, and John 14-16. Beyond this, much of the teaching of the Spirit is broken up and scattered across different passages. In this series, we will go through systematically and look at what the Bible as a whole has to say about to say about the Holy Spirit. In our first lesson we will briefly overview the three main passages that deal with the Holy Spirit.

# John 14-16 – The Coming Comforter

As Jesus prepares to leave His disciples, He shares with them important information they will need once He is gone. One of the things that He does is prepare them to realize He is leaving but the Spirit is coming to take His place. Although this long speech of Jesus involves more than just the Holy Spirit, at several points He gives important instructions on the work of the Spirit.

## The Holy Spirit Lives with Believers (John 14:15-17; 16:7)

The first thing Jesus wants to emphasize is that the Holy Spirit will come to be with believers once He has left.[[2]](#footnote-2) After telling His disciples that He would be leaving them He lets them know that the Spirit is coming as a “Comforter.” The Greek word here tends to be quite broad, and can include the idea of one who encourages, comforts, or a represents another. The word is hard to capture with a single English word because there are so many functions included, and yet the Spirit helps us in all these ways. Jesus calls the Spirit “another” Comforter, in other words the Holy Spirit helps us just as Jesus helped His disciples.

***Why would it be better for Jesus to leave and the Comforter to come?***

***What are some of the various ways that the Holy Spirit helps us?***

## The Holy Spirit Reveals God’s Truth (John 14:25-26; 16:12-15; cf 1 John 2:27)

Not only does the Spirit come to live with believers, but part of His responsibility will be to illuminate their minds so that they understand God’s truth. Some have limited Jesus’s words here specifically to the apostles and the Spirit’s work of inspiration. The Spirit would bring all things to the minds *of the apostles* as they recorded what Jesus said and did. While it is possible this is partly what Jesus had in mind, John seems to apply this teaching to all Christians in 1 John 2:27. This means that we can be confident as we study that we are not alone, but that God Himself is explaining to us the truth of His Word.

***What are some reasons why we might miss what the Spirit is teaching us?***

***If the Holy Spirit illuminates believers, why do Spirit-illuminated believers come to different interpretations?***

***How is it that the Holy Spirit works to guide us into all truth?***

# Galatians 5 – Walking in the Spirit

In the book of Galatians, Paul has been arguing that Christians are not saved by the law, but by grace. Yet this doesn’t mean that believers can just live however they want. But while we are no longer under the Mosaic law as a means of salvation, through the Spirit we fulfill the righteousness that the law points to (Romans 8:4). And so, after warning that we must not look to the law for our salvation, Paul then balances that teaching by arguing we should look to the Spirit for our ongoing sanctification.

***Read Galatians 5:16-25***

## The Holy Spirit Leads Us

We are not saved by our own efforts, and we are also not sanctified by our own efforts. Paul here describes us as “walking in [by] the Spirit” (5:16, 25) and as being “led of [by] the Spirit” (5:18). Both images depict us as following the Holy Spirit as He directs us in our everyday lives. Two different Greek words are used for the word “walk” in verses 16 and 25. The second word (5:25) is an interesting word that was used of soldiers standing in rank. Just as a soldier marched step for step behind the person in front of them, so believers should be following the Holy Spirit step by step as He leads them throughout lives.

***What does it look like to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in your everyday life?***

## The Holy Spirit Produces Righteousness in Us

We often think of righteousness in terms of what we are not supposed to do. A righteous person is someone who doesn’t do bad things. Yet while Paul does in fact give us a list of things we aren’t supposed to do, he also includes a list of things that should be the case if the Holy Spirit is in control of our lives. These end up being a fairly good litmus test if we ask the question, “Am I being led by the Spirit?”

***What kind of things are true in the life of a person being led by the Spirit?***

***What kind of things are true in the life of a person walking in the flesh?***

***How does this compare with what we normally think of as “holiness”?***

# Romans 8 – Living by the Spirit

Romans 8 comes after another lengthy discussion by Paul about the law in Romans 6-7. There Paul sets up the problem in extremely relatable terms – we want to do what is right and we try but we just keep failing. What is the solution to such a depressing situation? The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the power we need to live for God. This chapter describes the help of the Spirit as we face our own sin nature (8:1-13) as well as showing the help that the Spirit gives when we face the suffering around us (8:14-30).

***Read Romans 8:1-30***

## The Spirit Sets Us Free from the Power of Sin (Romans 8:1-13)

Paul makes an astonishing claim in Romans 8:2 – Jesus has set us free from the sin and death through the work of the Spirit. Whereas before we were powerless in our own strength to overcome our sinful tendencies, now with the help of the Holy Spirit we can live victoriously. All throughout this passage Paul contrasts life and death, showing that as believers we who were once dead in our sins have the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit within us to bring about new spiritual life. But this is not automatic, we are told that we must choose to “live according to the Spirit” if we want to have life, and that if we “live according to the flesh” that will bring death.

***Why would anyone choose to live in the flesh if that brings death?***

***How is it that we choose to “live according to the Spirit”?***

## The Spirit Helps Us in our Suffering (Romans 8:14-30)

Paul transitions quickly at the end of this section to talk about the difference the Holy Spirit will make in our sufferings. When we go through persecution, tragedy, and great pain we are tempted to lose hope. We can begin to wonder if God is really for us, if He really cares about what we are going through. Here in Scripture God affirms that He does care, and practically He shows that by sending the Spirit who affirms to us that we are God’s children and who intercedes for us before the Father.

***How can the Holy Spirit provide comfort during times of great suffering?***

***How should we respond if we go through trials and it doesn’t seem to us that the promises of the Spirit’s help aren’t true?***

There is much to study about the Holy Spirit. While such a study might be intimidating, the payout in terms of help for practical Christian living is enormous. The key to righteous living and to enduring suffering is through the help of the Spirit. As we will see in our study, Jesus lived by the power of the Spirit, and as our perfect example He set the example for what successfully serving the Father looks like. As we learn more about this ever-present member of the Trinity, we will find much practical help in our walk with God.

1. *Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson, 2nd edition, page 862. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There is some debate about whether OT believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. While OT believers would need to have been regenerated by the Spirit (John 3:3) and would have needed the Spirit’s help if they were going to live righteous lives. However, it is an open question whether such help demanded indwelling or whether the Holy Spirit was able to provide this help in a different, less immediate way. The statement of Christ in John 14:17 seems to state a difference in the way the Spirit helps the people of God, with Him being “with” the OT saints but “in” the NT saints. This lines up with the different ways that God’s relationship is described. In the OT, we repeatedly read that God is “with” His people, but in the NT we find that God/Christ/the Spirit is “in” us. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)