

What we believe about

EXPERIENCING THE SPIRIT

in Common Ground Church.

The Spirit enables us to experience God. But making sense of this experience, and finding the right biblical language can be difficult. Hopefully this simple document will help with this difficulty. There are three main concepts that need to be understood: 1) *The indwelling of the Spirit.* 2) *Baptism with the Spirit.* 3) *Walking in the Spirit.*

1) THE INDWELLING OF THE SPIRIT

- We believe that every believer, at the moment of faith in Christ, is born of the Spirit (John 3:3,5). This is called 'regeneration'. To use different language to describe the same thing, the Spirit 'indwells' the believer (1 Corinthians 6:19). Regeneration and indwelling are facts to be affirmed by faith.
- For some people the moment of regeneration is something one can feel happening inside of them, but for many this is not the case. For example, think of the two ways we wake up out of a sleep. Some people slowly drift into an awake state, but cannot pinpoint the moment they transitioned from sleep to wake, whereas others – with the help of an alarm clock – can point to the exact second they woke up! Same with regeneration. The important question is not *when* exactly one woke up to Christ, but whether one is now awake to him. But waking up is just the start of the day. There is so much more...

2) BAPTISM WITH THE SPIRIT

- Though all believers have the indwelling of the Spirit, not all believers have experienced baptism or infilling with the Spirit.
- We believe that over and above regeneration and indwelling, God wants to fill every believer with his Spirit. By this we mean that *God wants to experientially immerse every believer with the presence and power of his Spirit.* Another way of saying this is that God bestows upon them in the moment *a heightened awareness of Christ's nearness and power.* This is called many things in the book of Acts, including 'baptism in the Spirit' (Acts 1:5), the Spirit coming upon you (Acts 1:8), 'being filled with the Spirit' (Acts 2:4), 'the outpouring of the Spirit' (Acts 2:17), 'the gift of the Spirit' (Acts 2:38) and 'receiving the Spirit' (Acts 19:2).
- Some charismatic churches refer to this initial experience as 'the baptism in the Spirit' and any additional experiences as 'infillings by the Spirit.' We think this is unnecessarily confusing and by giving the first time a special name, it puts too much pressure on the first experience of the Spirit. Therefore we refer to every-time people experience Christ's nearness and power as a baptism in /with the Spirit.
- For some the baptism can be very dramatic, for others very gentle. But always one is conscious that it is happening, and one can remember it

happening (Galatians 3:2). This is usually a wonderful experience, which Ephesians 1:18-19 describes as a foretaste of the glories of heaven. This is an experience that can be repeated again and again (See Acts 4:31, which speaks of the same believers who experienced Acts 2:1-4). Sometimes, along with this experience, God gives the gift of tongues (Acts 19:6), but many – like Jesus for example (Matthew 3:16-17) - experience Spirit baptism without any gift of tongues.

- Some believers experience regeneration by the Spirit and baptism in the Spirit on the very same day, sometimes even at the same time (Acts 10:44-46) though a time lag between the two moments is far more common (Acts 8:14-15).
- There are two main reasons God pours out his Spirit upon believers: 1) To embolden and empower us for the mission he has for us (see Acts 1:8). 2) To let us sense the deeply assuring, in-flooding of His love in our hearts (Romans 5:5) – which enables us to intimately encounter Him as ‘Abba Father’ (Galatians 4:6).
- Two key Scriptures provide some keys to help us experience this blessing: 1) John 7:37-39 reveals that one must come to Jesus, with thirst, and with faith that indeed he wants to pour out his Spirit upon you. One must then ‘drink’ which means prayerfully engage God, all the time being ready to *receive* what Christ is ready to give. 2) Luke 11:9-13 shows that we must *ask* the Father for this experience, with the conviction that he wants what is best for us. Additionally, though this is often not needed, having Spirit-filled believers pray for us, with the laying on of hands, is a common way to experience the baptism in the Spirit (Acts 8:14-17 and 19:6).
- The question that every believer needs to answer is this: ‘Have you yet experienced immersion into the Spirit’s presence and power?’ If not, we should be encouraged to seek God for this. He is more than ready to give it. Some of us come into this experience quickly and easy, whereas for others, for whatever reason, it can take longer. But we must refuse to divide ourselves into ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ since God loves us equally, and the baptism in the Spirit is in no way an indicator of how spiritual we are – after all, it is a free undeserved gift much the same way salvation is a free undeserved gift. Besides, the Spirit is at work in the life of every believer from the moment he indwells us – so it is not like some believers don’t *have* the Spirit. They do. We are united by the fact that we all have ‘one Spirit’ (Eph 4:4), with none of us in anyway being inferior or superior to other believers.

3) WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

- Not every believer who has experienced the baptism of the Spirit has learnt to live every day in dependence on the Spirit. It is not enough to just be baptized in the Spirit. One must think about Spirit baptism as a kind of *launch or booster* into a daily dependence on the Spirit, which requires some effort on our part. This daily dependence on, and submission to, the Spirit is called ‘walking in the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:16).
- Ephesians 5:18 commands all believers to ‘be filled with the Spirit’. The tense used is present continuous. And it is something we’re commanded

to do. What does this verse mean? Though the phrase ‘filled by the Spirit’ as it is used in the book of Acts usually refers to a momentary baptism in the Spirit, in this verse it seems to refer to a life that is *constantly* lived in ‘fellowship with the Spirit (2 Cor 13:14) and ‘in step with the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:21).

- When we learn to live in the Spirit hour after hour and day after day, we tend to evidence more and more ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:22-23) and more and more ‘the gifts of the Spirit’ operating through us (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). The ‘fruit of the Spirit’ is the manifestation of Christ’s character in our lives. The ‘gifts of the Spirit’ are the manifestation of Christ’s ministry through our lives.
- An analogy helps to distinguish the Spirit baptism from walking in the Spirit. Imagine a father walking with a boy hand in hand. The boy knows the father loves him. The boy is dependent on the father, whose strength and power are available to him. That is a picture of walking in the Spirit. It is living hand in hand with the Spirit. Now imagine the father suddenly scoops up the boy off the ground, tightly embraces him and affirms his tender love for him. As wonderful as walking hand in hand with the father was, this is wonderful in a whole new way – it is the intensification of the bond between them, and of the boy’s certainty that his father loves him, and is with him in strength. This is a picture of the baptism of the Spirit. Though these experiences of being scooped up by God are tantalizing, they are not sustainable – one has a life to live, and a mission to fulfill – which is best done with one’s feet on the ground.

SUMMARY

The indwelling of the Spirit is something we believe. If we have trusted in Jesus then the Spirit now indwells or inhabits us, a fact to be affirmed by faith.

Baptism or infilling with the Spirit is something we ask God for. This is when God bestows upon a Christian a heightened awareness of Christ’s nearness and power. This is something God does. We can self-generate this, we can merely receive it.

Walking in the Spirit is something we do. Day after day, hour after hour, we are to depend on the Spirit, submitting to his leadings toward godliness, bearing the fruit of Christ’s character, and doing the deeds he leads us to do, in the power he gives.