

## **Bible Facts You Should Know about the Holy Spirit**

**By Bob Young**

*Note: In Wes McAdams article about the biblical view of miracles, he sets forth biblical principles that also apply to the Holy Spirit. This article borrows and adapts parts of his article.*

Most who seek to be Christians believe in the Holy Spirit. Many of that number associate the Holy Spirit with miracles. Many believe that the Holy Spirit is God's method for intervening in human events by doing something contrary to the laws of nature. Is that what the Bible says? What can we know with certainty?

### **God Has Always Been Actively Involved in this World**

Let's begin by talking about God. In the Old Testament, God repeatedly penetrated the human dilemma, revealing himself and acting in various ways. For the most part, God's actions in the Old Testament did not clearly point to the tripartite nature of God—Father, Son and Spirit. Clear statements of God's work through Christ and the Holy Spirit do not come until the New Testament.

Unfortunately, many Christians today have been influenced by secular thinking. Scientific advances have led many to think that the universe is a big machine that has been preprogrammed by the laws of nature and is now on autopilot. When one begins with the idea that everything is already preprogrammed, the influence of the Holy Spirit is seen as a miraculous intervention; God temporarily does something extraordinary, contrary to what is "normal," and then things go back to "normal." This idea is often heard in descriptions of God's actions in the Old Testament. When we come to the New Testament, this view understands the Holy Spirit as inconsistent with normal life and expects the Holy Spirit to do things that cannot be explained by natural law.

The result is that more and more Christians describe everything around them as a miracle. The word miracle gets "watered down" because it is applied to every unexplained action of God – including his daily presence and work in the world. This terminology does not reflect a biblical view of the universe, of God, of Christ, or of the Spirit. As McAdams points out, the writer of Hebrews says that the Son of God created the world and now "upholds the universe by the word of his power." In other words, Jesus is actively "sustaining" (NIV), "maintaining and propelling" (AMP), holding everything together in the universe. He is doing this through his powerful commanding word. Maybe this is why G.K. Chesterton imagined God, who never gets tired, constantly commanding the universe to do what it does: *"It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them."*

When someone says that the Holy Spirit is God's way of intervening in the world today, that reveals incorrect assumptions, beginning with the assumption that God is not always actively involved in the world. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are constantly at work in our world. Our challenge is to learn what they are continuously doing in the world, in the lives of others, and in our lives.

That Christ constantly sustains the universe has already been mentioned. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that God gives the flowers beauty and feeds the birds. The New Testament says that the Spirit helps our prayers, gives testimony about Jesus, and convicts the world. If these are described as miracles, what will we say when we encounter something truly extraordinary, supernatural, above and beyond nature?

### **Three things the Holy Spirit does in the book of Acts**

The Holy Spirit Confirms God's Word. In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit often clarified the connection between an Old Testament text and a current event. The Holy Spirit moved God's prophets. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit. At times the confirming and validating actions of the Holy Spirit seemed normal; other times unexpected and unusual.

The Holy Spirit Empowers God's People, frequently displaying God's power. Another work of the Holy Spirit was empowerment. In the earliest days of Christianity, that empowerment was at times extraordinary. God's people are enabled to do God's work by the Spirit. A connection frequently repeated in the New Testament is that when people were filled with the Holy Spirit, they spoke God's Word, at times speaking in a language they had not learned as the Holy Spirit propelled the gospel forward into all the world. In the church today, when is the empowerment of the Holy Spirit "normal" and when is it beyond normal?

Many examples can be cited from Acts, Luke's history of the early years of the existence of the church. Often the power was so evident and overwhelming that the onlookers were amazed. The Holy Spirit is also involved in our access to God and in our prayers. This is an example of daily empowerment.

The Holy Spirit is God's Promise for the Future. The Holy Spirit is a seal or promise of God's presence. The Holy Spirit is down payment and guarantee. God dwells in his people, individually and collectively, since we are a temple of the "Spirit" and thus a temple of God.

### **When the Actions of the Holy Spirit Are Expected; When They Are Unexpected or Extraordinary**

God is actively involved in ordinary natural events. When the earth rotates around the sun or the flowers bloom in the spring, Christians give credit to God and not to "Mother Nature." Although these events are ordinary and expected, they are still the work of God. The sustaining work of Christ in the world is ordinary. The continuing presence of the Holy Spirit in all believers is an ordinary, natural action, yet it is also extraordinary since unbelievers are excluded!

Sometimes, God does something that we describe as unexpected or extraordinary. God does something we have not seen before, or perhaps better said, something we have not been aware of previously. Many Christians describe these as miracles, or the Holy Spirit at work. But how does one distinguish daily Holy Spirit actions from extraordinary actions? Is the difference in two distinct kinds of Holy Spirit actions? Or is the difference in our lack of spiritual sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's daily work in and among us?

Often in the New Testament, we read of events where the descriptions include words like power, amazement, awe, and glory. Such events display God's power in unexpected or extraordinary ways, at least from a human perspective. In such cases, is God doing something special? Or, is God simply being God? In our daily lives, is the Holy Spirit doing special things? Or, is the Holy Spirit always available and acting, only we are too often spiritually insensitive and unaware of those actions? Perhaps the problem is that our daily spiritual lives are too "typical" and we too seldom expect "atypical" things from God, Christ, and the Spirit.

### **What is God Trying to Do?**

The actions of God (and of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit) are designed to grab attention. These actions point to a grander reality. These actions speak to God's rule and reign in the world – God's kingdom. The kingdom is here! God has been, is, and will be at work. Christ's work is past history, present, and continuing. The Holy Spirit has acted, continues to act, and is future promise of what God will do for his people.

### **Conclusion**

Today in your life, God, Christ, the Holy Spirit will be at work. Will you see them? Will you see the results of their work? Will you give praise and honor and glory? Some of those actions or works will be quite normal and expected, things that we see occur every day. Other works will appear to us to be unusual, unexpected, extraordinary because we have never seen it like this. These actions may not be all that rare, but we have not seen them before. The message of the Messiah is being confirmed. God's people are being empowered. The promise of God is more clearly seen than ever before.

In a study of the Holy Spirit, one must avoid partial truth. One must not let one's view of the Holy Spirit become "ho-hum," so common that nothing extraordinary ever happens (or can happen). That is, the idea that the age of miracles is past. Second, one must avoid thinking that God is inactive in the world so that everything unusual or unexpected is now the work of the Holy Spirit. God is at work in marvelous ways, beyond what we imagine, what we expect, what we pray for, what we hope for.

One of my undergraduate professors, Raymond Kelcy, was fond of saying that "God has not quit doing miracles—but he has taken the decision away from human beings."

God wants to do more in our lives than we allow him to do. God continues to work in mundane matters as the world continues. God continues to work in marvelous ways, answering our prayers in powerful, inexplicable ways. The continuing transformation of the lives of God's people involves the Holy Spirit. The instant, unbelievable transformation of a new believer also involves the Holy Spirit. May we stand in equal awe in both cases – amazing displays of God's power, God's saving work in Christ, and God's continuing work through the Holy Spirit.