

CHAPTER 17

STEP FOUR IN DETAIL - RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

¹⁴Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.
Acts 8:14-17 (NASB)

²¹Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, ²²who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.
2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (NASB)

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
1 Corinthians 14:1 (NASB)

Most people get their beliefs about the Holy Spirit from their own *experiences* or from what they have been *told* or have *seen others doing* rather than *from the Bible*. The effect of all that is that there is probably more error, conflict and confusion generated on this topic than on any other. It is ironic that the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, should be the object of such contention and intolerance, given the gentleness which is the hallmark of His character.

So, this is yet another controversial topic. Many people avoid teaching about the Holy Spirit for that very reason. However, the Bible repeatedly speaks about the importance of "*receiving*", or being "*filled with*", or being "*baptised in*" the Holy Spirit. This is presented as a crucial part of the process of becoming a Christian. Therefore how can I leave this subject out, even if it is controversial? I have no alternative but to present what the Bible says as honestly as possible, even at the risk of offending people, though I have no desire to do so.

In writing about receiving the Holy Spirit, whilst I will sometimes refer to my own personal experiences, I will not rely on those experiences to define or prove anything. I will try to base everything I say solely on what the Bible says. My own experiences are no authority for anything. Neither is anybody else's experience. Neither is the traditional teaching of anybody's denomination. The Bible must be our only authority for any conclusions we arrive at with any doctrine or practice. That is just as true when we are discussing the Holy Spirit as with any other issue or doctrine.

If we make the mistake of relying on our own or other people's experience, or on our traditions or denominational background, we will end up reading the Bible through a lens or filter, just as we might attach to a camera. That filter will distort whatever we read. We will then '*read into*' the Bible whatever we already think, or have been told, even when it's *not* there on the page. We will also edit out anything which contradicts our existing views, even when it clearly *is* on the page.

We usually don't even realise we are doing any of that unconscious editing. That is how powerful pre-existing ideas can be. They are so blinding they can cause us to miss a "barn door" from ten yards away, even when it is clearly there on the page. Without ever saying so out loud, we tend to assume that our own existing ideas, traditions and practices must obviously be right.

Therefore, anything which challenges our pre-conceived ideas must obviously be wrong and is screened out before it even registers. Let that not be true of you. Take a different approach, which very few people take. Try asking yourself: "*Where am I getting my ideas from? Are they from the Bible or from somewhere else?*"

Why not examine afresh the question of receiving the Holy Spirit? Look at what the Bible actually says and at what the first century disciples did, rather than at your own tradition. Ask yourself "*Is what I do and think in line with Scripture, or am I just copying what I've seen other people doing and assuming it must be right?*"

Make sure you check my views carefully in the Bible. As you do so, pray for God to protect you from any errors on my part and to show you what the Bible really means in this area. Then seek to form your own view, with God's help, of what the Bible actually teaches. Start from a blank sheet of paper. Make an effort to put to one side for a moment everything you have ever been taught or have grown used to doing. That is very difficult and won't happen unless you are consciously seeking to do it.

Also, let us all try to approach this important subject of the Holy Spirit with gentleness and humility. Let's not attack each other if we disagree. You may find you disagree with me. That is OK, so long as your own belief has come from a thorough study of the Bible, rather than being a mere knee-jerk reaction, just because it's not what you're used to or not what your denomination does.

Why do we need to receive the Holy Spirit?

Once we have repented, believed and been baptised in water, we are ready to receive the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, the moment when a new believer receives the Holy Spirit is shown as a very distinct and memorable event. It is presented as an unmistakable experience, rather than as something which you would not notice.

Receiving the Holy Spirit has a number of purposes:

- a) it is a seal and serves as an indication that God now recognises you as a genuine believer.
- b) The Holy Spirit makes available to you the many gifts of the Holy Spirit, sometimes called "*spiritual gifts*".
- c) The Holy Spirit helps us over a long period of time to grow into fruitful disciples of Jesus Christ through being "*sanctified*" or made holy. That involves growing within our characters the "*fruit of the Spirit*" i.e. the qualities of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (See chapter 22 for more details on sanctification).

What does it mean to receive the Holy Spirit?

Let's begin at the beginning and look at what Jesus said would happen to the disciples:

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. John 14:26 (NASB)

"When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, John 15:26 (NASB)

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. John 16:13 (NASB)

⁴Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; ⁵for John baptized with water,

but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." 6So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
Acts 1:4-8 (NASB)

Jesus made this last statement during the 40 days He spent with His disciples, after His resurrection, but before His ascension into Heaven. While Jesus was physically present on the Earth, His followers could receive Him into their homes. Jesus could literally be invited to dinner and He was, many times. However, following His ascension into Heaven Jesus is not physically available to be present with us.

Therefore, from then on, the task of working in the life of each believer, to develop them into a mature disciple of Jesus Christ, has been transferred over to the Holy Spirit. He is now the main member of the Trinity who is helping us to grow.

The day of Pentecost - when the disciples were baptised in the Holy Spirit

When Jesus was present on the Earth in His physical body He did that for His disciples Himself. So, during His earthly ministry, He did not ask the Holy Spirit to perform that role. That did not begin to happen until some days after Jesus' ascension when, on the day of Pentecost, (a Jewish feast) the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in a dramatic way. This was the first time it happened, but it has been happening to Christians ever since, right up to today. But let's look at how it began:

1When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly there came from Heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. 5Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under Heaven. 6And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.

7They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8" And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? 9" Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." 12And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."
Acts 2:1-13 (NASB)

The role the Holy Spirit plays in the process of sanctification and of becoming a disciple

To receive the Holy Spirit means that He comes to live within you. Then He is not merely *alongside* you, but *inside* you. His help is needed to enable you to live the Christian life because it is so difficult. However, the Holy Spirit's help is also needed in our "*sanctification*". That means being made holy. Sanctification is the second stage of the overall process that we call "*salvation*" or being "*saved*".

The Bible reveals that we are "*deemed righteous*" or "*justified*" in legal terms, at the moment when our sins are forgiven due to what Jesus did for us on the cross. However, from then on, we also need to keep growing in maturity, such that we actually become holy in our own thoughts, speech and actions.

This life-long process of sanctification, or growing in holiness, is not what makes us justified or forgiven. Only Jesus' death on the cross in our place can achieve that. What sanctification does do is to change us from the inside out, so that we gradually (and it is gradually) become more and more like Jesus Christ in the way we live.

You could say that the words "*saved*" or "*salvation*" have three tenses in the Bible:

- a) "*Justification*" - This is salvation in the past tense. Once it has happened it is complete and final. It cannot be increased or improved upon. It is something that Jesus has achieved for us and given to us. We have been forgiven, justified, and made righteous. So, when speaking of justification, we can accurately say we "*have been saved*", i.e. in the past tense.
- b) "*Sanctification*" is the ongoing process of salvation in the present tense. We are meant to be continually being sanctified, from the moment we are justified, until the moment we die. This life-long task of sanctification is what the Holy Spirit helps you with, so that you can actually change, become holy and grow in the fruit of the Spirit. So, sanctification is the present tense of salvation, i.e. we can say we "*are being saved*".
- c) "*Glorification*" - this is the final stage of the process of salvation. It only occurs when we die. At that point our very sin nature itself will be taken away from us. Then we will be fully saved. We will be set free from the very presence of sin within us. So, at our conversion we were set free from the penalty of sin (by justification). Later we are gradually set free from the power of sin, (by sanctification). It is when we refer to our future glorification that we can say we "*will be saved*."

It is only at this final stage, i.e. when we die and are glorified and our sin nature is removed, that we can say we have been completely saved in every sense, and every tense, of that word. We are then set free even from the presence of sin. It will be gone forever and sin will never again trouble us. So, we can say that glorification reflects the future tense of the process of salvation, i.e. we *will be* glorified.

So, in summary, we might say:

- a) we *have been* saved (justified - i.e. instantly deemed righteous in legal terms)
- b) we *are being* saved (sanctified - i.e. gradually being made holy in our day to day lives)
- c) we *will be* saved (glorified - i.e. instantly losing our sin nature after we die)

So, when we read in the Bible of "*salvation*", or being "*saved*" we always need to be clear as to which of these three meanings, or tenses, is being referred to. In the context of this chapter on the Holy Spirit, we are mainly looking at the second meaning, or present tense of salvation, i.e. sanctification. Indeed, one of the main reasons why we all need to receive the Holy Spirit is so that He can help us to become sanctified or holy. (For a fuller explanation of these three stages of salvation, please refer to chapter 22.)

However, there is another major reason why we need the Holy Spirit. That is so that He can provide us with the "*gifts of the Holy Spirit*". There is a wide range of supernatural gifts which enable us to

serve the Lord Jesus Christ more effectively. Using the various gifts of the Holy Spirit helps us to do things we could never do by ourselves, through our own natural ability.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit

Let's look at what apostle Paul has to say about the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.
1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (NASB)

We shall look in closer detail below at the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But before we do so, let us examine whether we are *all* meant to receive the Holy Spirit, or just *some* of us. Also, are we all supposed to operate in spiritual gifts or just some of us?

Are we all supposed to receive the Holy Spirit and should we all operate in spiritual gifts?

We have seen earlier what happened to the apostles on the day of Pentecost when they first spoke in tongues. They were the very first people to receive the Holy Spirit in the way the New Testament speaks of this. Let's now look at some other passages where many other people subsequently received the Holy Spirit and His gifts in the first 30 years of the Church. This was seen then as an essential part of becoming a new Christian. Consider firstly how apostle Peter dealt with a very large crowd of about 3000 people who were all converted on the same day. Note the emphasis that Peter gives to them being about to receive the Holy Spirit:

³⁷Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴²They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
Acts 2: 37-42 (NASB)

Then see how the need to receive the Holy Spirit is emphasised in this next passage from Acts chapter 8:

¹⁴ Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. ¹⁶ For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, ¹⁹ saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." ²⁰ But Peter said to him, "May your silver

perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Acts 8: 14-21 (NASB)

Look next at how apostle Paul dealt with a group of brand new converts in Ephesus, many years after the day of Pentecost. Paul realised they had not received the Holy Spirit:

¹It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. ²He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit." ³And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, " Into John's baptism." ⁴Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. ⁷There were in all about twelve men. Acts 19:1-7 (NASB)

We see in the passage above that Paul met a group of people in Ephesus who had believed in Jesus Christ and had repented. So, neither repentance nor faith were missing. However, Paul could sense that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. They had not yet been baptised in water either.

Most church leaders today would have accepted these men just as they were. They would not have intervened or advised them to do anything further. However, not Paul. He was concerned and was not satisfied with their situation. He had them baptised in water straight away. Then he laid his hands on them to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. As Paul did this, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues, just as had happened to the apostles in Acts chapter two, many years earlier.

So, this experience of receiving the Holy Spirit and of immediately speaking in tongues and prophesying was not restricted just to the 12 apostles or even to the 120 disciples on the day of Pentecost. I would suggest to you that it happened consistently to most people, though not to absolutely everybody, for the first 30 years of the church, which the book of Acts covers. If so, that means it would have happened to hundreds of thousands of believers, given how fast the church grew.

And it carried on long after that as well. It was a normal part of the process of becoming a Christian until the fourth century when the churches were taken over by the Emperor Constantine and began to degenerate into what we now know as the Roman Catholic church. However, outside of the Roman Catholic church, the experience of being baptised in the Holy Spirit continued, and has done so to this day.

The experience of Cornelius the Gentile

Let's look now at a more unusual situation where apostle Peter dealt with Cornelius, a Gentile, (non Jewish) believer. He believed in God and had repented, even though he was not a Jew. Peter then explains the gospel to Cornelius and others with him. Peter tells them who Jesus is and what He did. As he spoke, the men repented and believed his message. Then the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in tongues, even without Peter asking for any of that, or laying hands on them:

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. ⁴⁵All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. ⁴⁶For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, ⁴⁷"Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" ⁴⁸And he

ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.
Acts 10:44-48(NASB)

This episode in Acts chapter 10 is an unusual situation because Cornelius, and those with him, received the Holy Spirit *before being baptised in water*. That is not the usual biblical order. Baptism in water almost always came before receiving the Holy Spirit. It was different on this occasion. Peter had only just realised that the gospel was supposed to be preached to Gentiles as well as to Jews and that they no longer needed to become Jews, as they always had to up to that time.

If Peter and the others had realised all of that previously they would have had Cornelius baptised already. It had never occurred to Peter to baptise these Gentile believers because, up to this point, he didn't even consider Gentiles to be eligible to become Christians at all. That is an example of how a fixed mindset can cause a man to miss what God is saying. Remember that Peter had got this blind spot despite the fact that he had heard Jesus say, prior to His ascension, that He wanted the apostles to go and make disciples of *all nations*, not just among the Jews:

¹⁹"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB)

Peter had still not realised that Jesus really meant what He had said and that the gospel was also to be preached to the Gentiles. That shows how we can so easily miss things if we get our ideas from what we are used to, rather than from what the Bible actually says.

At any rate, each of these men with Cornelius in Acts 10 received the Holy Spirit. They then began to speak in tongues, just as the apostles had done, and just as Paul's converts did later. My main point is that I would suggest that this pattern of receiving the Holy Spirit, and then operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, was the norm. It was intended for almost everybody. In the passages above they all received the Holy Spirit and it would appear that they all spoke in tongues and/or prophesied as a result. That is the clear impression and nothing is stated to the contrary.

Receiving the Holy Spirit was not just for the apostles. Nor was it restricted to any other particular group or class of people or for any limited period of time. Therefore I suggest that we are all meant to receive the Holy Spirit and that we are all meant to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, I would freely concede that we are not all going to receive the *same* gifts. We will inevitably differ in what specific gifts we are given, just as we all differ in our natural gifts and talents.

The day of Pentecost was only about seven weeks after the resurrection. The incidents with Peter and Cornelius and then with Paul at Ephesus, were much later, many years after the resurrection. Yet it would appear that they all still received the Holy Spirit and that most of them spoke in tongues and/or prophesied. Nothing had changed and nothing had been abandoned during these years.

That said, the Bible does not say that we must all operate in any particular gift of the Holy Spirit. For example, we cannot say that we must *all* speak in tongues. Apostle Paul specifically says that we do not all do so:

²⁷Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? ³⁰All do not have

gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? ³¹But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.

1 Corinthians 12:27-31 (NASB)

Nevertheless, it seems to be clear from the above passage that Paul does still expect and assume that we will all operate in *some* gift of the Holy Spirit, even if not tongues or any other particular gift. Therefore the passage from 1 Corinthians 12 cannot be used as a basis for arguing that we don't need to, or aren't meant to, operate in *any* of the spiritual gifts. That does not follow at all.

Neither can what Paul says be taken to mean that we do not need to receive the Holy Spirit, or that receiving the Holy Spirit is automatic or inevitable, or that it happens without us being aware of it.

Note also this next passage from Acts chapter 15 concerning the Council meeting which took place in Jerusalem several years after the resurrection. At this meeting the status of Gentile believers was discussed and the question of whether they can become Christians without first becoming Jewish as an intermediate step. In that meeting the question of receiving the Holy Spirit was also addressed:

⁶The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. ⁷After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸"And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; ⁹and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:6-9 (NASB)

The key point from the above passage, for our purposes in this chapter, is that apostle Peter is telling the Council that not just the apostles, and not just the Jews, but also the Gentiles, were to receive the Holy Spirit. And they were to do so *in the same way* as the apostles and all other Jewish believers had done.

I suggest to you therefore that receiving the Holy Spirit or "*the baptism in the Holy Spirit*" is intended to be *for every believer, not just a select few*. It also seems clear that it is meant for us today, not just for people in the past. At any rate, there is no biblical reason to think otherwise.

Whilst we have seen above that not everybody spoke in tongues, the strong implication is that most, or at least many, of them did. If not, it surely would not have been emphasised as it was. At the very least, the clear impression given is that speaking in tongues, and the other gifts too, were a normal part of church life. They were by no means limited to a minority of people, or just in exceptional cases.

In any case, the real burden of proof must be on those who assume that the gifts as a whole do *not* apply any longer to explain why *any* of the people in these passages spoke in tongues or prophesied. We can see that some of them clearly did. The real question therefore is, did *any* of them do so. Instead of asking that, too many of us are focusing on whether or not *all* of them did so. Then people are saying "*If they didn't all operate in spiritual gifts, then that justifies me in not doing so*". But why would we want to look for reasons or excuses *not* to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

Why did they lay hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit?

In most (but not all) cases in the New Testament, once a new believer had been baptised in water, someone would lay their hands on them immediately and pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. The person praying and laying their hands upon a new believer is not the one who causes them to receive the Holy Spirit. The only one who does that is Jesus Himself. Jesus is the one who baptises us in the Holy Spirit. We learn this from John the Baptist:

⁶John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist, and his diet was locusts and wild honey. ⁷And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. ⁸"I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."
Mark 1:6-8 (NASB)

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰"This is He on behalf of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.' ³¹"I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water."

³²John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of Heaven, and He remained upon Him. ³³"I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴"I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."
John 1:29-34 (NASB)

So then, if Jesus Christ Himself is the One who gives the Holy Spirit to us, or baptises us in the Holy Spirit, what is the role of the person who prays for us and lays hands upon us? They are, at most, a helper. They can guide and advise us. However they are not the source, or the giver, of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. That is Jesus alone. The person who prays for us and lays hands upon us merely helps us to receive the Holy Spirit. They show us what to do and what to ask for and they help us to ask.

We are not dependent upon that person. We can receive the Holy Spirit without such a person's help. Remember Cornelius in Acts chapter 10. He, and those around him, received the Holy Spirit while they were just listening to apostle Peter preaching. Nobody laid hands on any of them, or even prayed for them.

You do not necessarily have to have the help of any person to receive the Holy Spirit. You can be alone if necessary.

That should encourage you to be confident that you will receive the Holy Spirit if you ask, even if you have no fellow believer who is able and willing to pray for you and lay their hands on you. Human help and support is useful, but not essential. You can receive the Holy Spirit even when you are on your own, just as I did (see below).

Therefore, we benefit from a fellow believer praying with us and laying hands upon us to ask Jesus to baptise us in the Holy Spirit. That is the normal, biblical model which we should follow. However, it does not *have* to be done that way. Jesus can baptise you in the Holy Spirit even if you are alone, with nobody to pray for you or lay hands on you. It can happen even if nobody in your church understands any of this, and even if they actively oppose it.

No man can deny you the freedom to receive the Holy Spirit from Jesus. It may be that there is nobody willing or able to help you, or that nobody in your church believes in this. However, if they say it is not for today, you can simply ask God the Father and the Lord Jesus yourself, directly. Jesus will be glad to do this for you. It is His wish, and the Father's wish, that every one of His disciples should receive the Holy Spirit. Therefore, He will not deny you when you ask:

¹¹"Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? ¹²"Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will

he? ¹³" If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" Luke 11:11-13 (NASB)

It is interesting that in this verse we are told by Jesus to ask God the Father to give us the Holy Spirit. So, although Jesus is the one who actually baptises us in the Holy Spirit, we can, and should, ask the Father. He will then answer that prayer through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is an illustration of how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit work together in perfect cooperation.

So, to reiterate, if you are alone, with nobody suitable or willing to help you, or pray with you, do not feel thwarted or discouraged. Just ask God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ directly, for yourself. Then believe that your own prayer will be answered. I will cover this more fully below.

Note also from the above passage from Luke 11 that we can be confident that if we sincerely ask God to give us the Holy Spirit then He is the One whom we will receive, not a demonic counterfeit. If we pray sincerely then God will never give us something bad. Neither will He allow the Devil to give us something false instead of the Holy Spirit. In other words, if we genuinely ask God for the Holy Spirit, then He will not allow any demon to give us something false instead.

If a human father can be trusted not to give his child a scorpion when he asks for an egg, then how much more can God be trusted? Therefore if you are a genuine believer, and are sincerely seeking to receive the Holy Spirit, do not fear that you will receive anything false. Go ahead and ask to receive the Holy Spirit with confidence. However, I would stress again the need for you to be genuine and sincere.

However, it has to be said that there is a danger. If we allow another person to lay hands on us, we could receive a demonic spirit if that is what *they* have. In other words, if they themselves are not genuine and are operating in an unbiblical way, with false teaching, a carnal lifestyle and false spiritual manifestations, then they could pass on to you what they have.

Therefore examine the 'fruit' that comes from their lives. Also test the accuracy of their doctrine closely before you allow anybody to lay hands on you to receive the Holy Spirit. If there is any doubt about that person, you can simply pray by and for yourself.

What are tongues? Why does God give such a strange gift?

When people received the Holy Spirit in the New Testament it would appear that the fact that it had happened was obvious to everyone else. That is because they began to speak in tongues or they prophesied or operated in some other gift. I feel that they all operated in some gift. But if you disagree then we can surely say that most, or at the very least, many of them did. In other words, it was by no means limited or restricted. That was true then, and I suggest that it is still true today.

Let's now look specifically at what tongues are and why that particular gift was given and, in my view, still is given. We will then go on to look at the other spiritual gifts too:

Apostle Paul's explanation of how spiritual gifts operate

Let us look at 1 Corinthians chapter 14:

¹Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. ³But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and

consolation. ⁴One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.

⁶But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? ⁷Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? ⁸For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle?

⁹So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. ¹¹If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. ¹²So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.

¹³Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. ¹⁶Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

¹⁸I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; ¹⁹however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue. ²⁰Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. ²¹In the Law it is written, "by men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to me," says the Lord.

²²So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. ²³Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? ²⁴But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; ²⁵the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

²⁶What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; ²⁸but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³²and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

1 Corinthians 14:1-33 (NASB)

Take a close look at the passage above. Ideally read it and re-read it two or three times. Wouldn't you agree that what Paul is speaking about, and what he views as normal, is very different from what most of our churches are like today? Paul clearly saw the widespread and active use of spiritual gifts as being entirely right and proper. Yet, in most Western churches today, what Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 is almost entirely ignored. At any rate, it certainly isn't practised.

It is glossed over and not even thought about, let alone preached on. If it was it would raise too many uncomfortable questions, such as *"Why doesn't our church do these things?"*

However, anybody who teaches that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are *not* meant to be used by us will have great difficulties in explaining away what Paul says. Therefore, those people who hold that view generally ignore 1 Corinthians 14 entirely. That is why it is very rarely preached on.

Speaking in tongues, both in the New Testament and today, is not mere babbling or making gibberish sounds. The gift of tongues, when given by the Holy Spirit, should involve a real language, whether human or angelic. It will have complex and detailed structure, grammar and syntax, just like any other language. That is how the various foreigners present on the day of Pentecost all heard their own language being spoken.

The only foreign language I can speak, up to a point, is French. I once worked in France. However, if I hear a language like Russian or Chinese or German, even though I can't understand it, I can tell very clearly that the person is speaking in a proper language with clear rules and vocabulary. I know it isn't gibberish and that the speaker isn't just making up sounds by themselves. It is the same with the gift of tongues. It sounds like a real language. That's because it *is* a real language, whether human or angelic, just one that you don't know. But God knows it and He understands it.

However, I should add that that is not necessarily the experience of every person. I know people myself for whom tongues is very limited. That fact can make a person feel inferior or threatened, because what they have does not sound very fluent or extensive. I have no wish to suggest that anybody is inferior. That is the last thing I would wish to do. Yet, if what you have got so far is limited just to a few words or phrases, then please do not be content to stay at that level.

Ask God to give you more, so that you can begin to speak in tongues with the full fluency and range that is available to others. So, whilst I fully accept that nobody is inferior or second rate, that is still no reason for anybody to stay where they are. Instead, press on and seek for all that God has to offer.

When we speak in tongues, we are saying words which the Holy Spirit Himself puts into our mouths. We may be praying prayers that He wants us to pray, even though we do not know what we are praying about. We may also be praising God and worshiping Him in our spirit with a greater fluency and depth than we would be capable of in our own language using only our minds, if we were not aided by the Holy Spirit.

The purposes and benefits of the gift of tongues in particular

The gift of tongues has a number of purposes and benefits. Let us examine these:

- a) Speaking in tongues enables us to praise and worship God with a depth and content that we could not achieve by ourselves.
- b) The gift of tongues enables God to put into our mouths specific prayers and requests which we would never think of, or even know about, for ourselves. There could be a person for whom nobody is praying, or perhaps an urgent situation which needs prayer, but nobody is aware of it. Through praying in tongues God can then put prayers into the mouths of His people which would not otherwise be prayed. I believe many situations and people have been prayed about in that way and that God has then answered those prayers.

²⁶In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;
Romans 8:26 (NASB)

- c) The gift of tongues, when used in private as part of our own devotional time, has the effect of strengthening us personally in our 'inner man' or spirit. We each have a spirit and the gift of tongues enables our own spirit to speak to God with a freedom we would not otherwise have, if we were confined solely to what our minds can think of. Remember, our spirit is not the same thing as our mind.

When we pray with our minds in our own native language, it is not the same as when we allow the Holy Spirit to enable our own spirit to pray. Praying in tongues bypasses our mind. This strengthens and benefits us as well as helping those other people or situations that we may, unknowingly, be praying for.

- d) Tongues when spoken out loud at a meeting, are a supernatural sign. It can benefit another person if he hears someone speaking in tongues and recognises his own language being spoken. The same is true if the tongue is interpreted through the gift of interpretation. That is another of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Either way, the other person, who may even be an unbeliever, can then understand what has been said. That may get through to him and bring him to repentance and to faith in ways that ordinary speech may not achieve.

The late Derek Prince, a well known Bible teacher, told many stories of how non-Christians have visited a church and been amazed to hear people praying out loud in the visitor's native language, even though the person speaking does not know that language. The person is actually speaking in tongues, but the visitor understands it.

On one occasion a Welshman, who was not a Christian, was travelling abroad, in South America I believe, and went to a South American church together with some English speaking friends. A local man then began to pray out loud in tongues publicly. He didn't know it but he was speaking perfect Welsh. The Welsh speaking visitor was amazed and said to the English speaking person who had brought him that the man had been speaking in detail, in Welsh, about some sins which he (the Welsh visitor) had committed.

He was the only person in the room who knew what was being said, because he was the only Welsh speaker. It convicted him very deeply and he repented and believed. There are many other instances where things like that have occurred. It would occur even more often if more people believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today and allowed them to be used in churches.

- e) Perhaps most important of all, tongues are also a supernatural sign or seal of approval. It is meant to demonstrate to you, and to others, that your conversion is real and has been accepted by God, that you really are a Christian and, therefore, have received the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts and in the letters of the New Testament it seems that they assumed that new believers would either speak in tongues or prophesy immediately when they received the Holy Spirit.

Therefore tongues was the main evidence they looked for, at least in the immediate sense. (Later on they would be looking for fruit to emerge in that person's life.) Conversely, the absence of tongues or prophecy or any other gift at the outset, was generally seen as an indication that the person had not yet completed the process of becoming a Christian. Can you imagine how much offence would be taken if apostle Paul visited many of our churches today and began to challenge people as he did in Acts chapter 19? Paul would be thrown out of most churches today.

My own experience of receiving the Holy Spirit

I repented and believed at 2:30pm on 8 June 1981. That is the point at which I began the biblical process of becoming a Christian. At that moment, though I had not yet been baptised in water, I believe I was justified (made righteous in God's sight) and my sins were forgiven.

Thankfully, I had heard about the gospel from people who believed that the need to receive the Holy Spirit, and to operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, still applied. So, I was prayed for. They laid their hands on me in the biblical manner, asking God to baptise me in the Holy Spirit. I wanted that to happen and I was praying for it myself.

However, so far as I could tell at the time, nothing supernatural appeared to happen to me. Indeed, nothing seemed to happen at all. I did not speak in tongues, or feel anything strange in any way. I felt disappointed, and confused. Therefore I just continued to pray to receive the Holy Spirit and to receive spiritual gifts, in particular the gift of tongues. Weeks and months passed and I persisted in praying and asking others to pray for me too. Still nothing happened, so far as I could tell.

What I did do, however, was to eagerly read the Bible, study it, memorise it and tell others about the gospel. God used me in some surprising ways and I was effective in evangelism, telling many people about Jesus and seeing some come to faith as a result. All this occurred without me ever having spoken in tongues. Yet, rather strangely, one of the new converts whom I had led to faith was baptised in the Holy Spirit at the very outset. He had a very powerful and life changing experience and began to speak in tongues long before I did.

I believe that throughout this time of waiting, which lasted nearly two years, I was already a real Christian. I believe I had started out on "*the Way*". (See chapter 21) I had been forgiven and justified in God's sight because of my repentance and my faith in Jesus Christ. But, I had not yet been baptised in water. And, in my view, I had not yet been baptised in the Holy Spirit.

Then, quite out of the blue, there came a day of dramatic breakthrough. It was early on the morning of my 21st birthday in 1983, nearly two years after I had first repented and believed. I was sitting on my bed in my student room and I suddenly felt a release whereby I felt free to speak in tongues. It was not forced upon me. Yet, somehow, I felt able to do it and I began to speak. However, I had perfect liberty to stop if I had wanted to.

The point was that I suddenly felt prompted to begin to speak out loud, but not in English. As I opened my mouth, and began to speak, words flowed easily and quickly. Moreover, I felt a powerful *emotional release* too. I had felt so buttoned up and reserved beforehand. I had felt shy of showing any emotion.

In particular, I had been very sensitive about anybody hearing me attempt to speak in tongues. That had been a real stumbling block for me and was probably the main thing that kept me bound up during those two years. However, I didn't realise that then.

At any rate, I found myself suddenly able (but not compelled) to speak in tongues. It came out in a torrent and I didn't want it to stop. I just kept on and on for about 2 hours! What made it stranger, and more memorable, was that it was accompanied by weeping. As soon as I began to speak in tongues I also began to cry, which was something I had never done before then.

I had always been, and still am, particularly reserved, even for a person from England, which is a country that specialises in being reserved. I wasn't sad. It was a joyful experience and was a release of a lot of pent up emotion. I think God was also doing some deep work inside me, putting some things right that needed to be dealt with.

So two breakthroughs were made simultaneously. God enabled me to speak in tongues, and He also enabled me to cry. That too was an ability, or a freedom, that I needed but had lacked. I believe that God touched me powerfully in my spirit that day. Some things were also being dealt with at an emotional level. That is one of the many other purposes of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. When He comes into a person's life it seems to me that He begins to "*re-wire*" us and to "*rewrite our software*". He changes us from the inside. (That is not how the Bible puts it. That is just my own personal view and has no scriptural authority).

I remember that as this weeping and praying in tongues continued, I did not want it to stop. I was concerned that if I stopped I might not be able to start again. I had spent two years feeling paralysed in this area of speaking in tongues and didn't want to risk going back to that. However, eventually, I stopped. Then after a moment, I resumed, feeling unsure as to whether it would be possible to start again.

Happily, there was no difficulty at all in starting again. From that day onwards, I have been able to speak in tongues whenever I choose to. The gift is entirely in my hands. It has been left to me to decide whether and when to use it.

So, why did it take me two years to be baptised in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues while others experienced it immediately? What held me back? I have reflected on this and I believe the following factors all combined to prevent me from receiving the Holy Spirit, or at least from operating in the spiritual gifts:

- a) I was tense and keyed up. I felt shy and awkward about speaking in tongues out loud in front of others, or even by myself. I was afraid that I would begin to attempt it, but fail, and be embarrassed.
- b) I had wrongly thought that it would be something God would *do to me*, or impose on me. I assumed it would come down on me from above without me needing to be active or do anything. So, I kept waiting for God to do something, but I think He was waiting for me to just speak and get started.
- c) I had never been baptised in water. Oddly, for a group of believers whose Bible knowledge was otherwise so good, the people who had led me to faith never told me that I needed to be baptised in water. Perhaps they felt shy about saying it, given that so many people take offence at being told that. I don't know. They either never told me, or I never heard them. At any rate, I didn't get baptised in water. I assumed that the baptism in water I had had as a baby, in the Catholic church, was sufficient. I did not know then that it wasn't and that I was being disobedient to what the Bible clearly teaches about baptism in water.

I feel that these three factors, combined together, held me back. In the end God, in His mercy, intervened and rescued me. If not, I could have gone on like that for decades, as many people do. So, God made an exception with me, as He did with Cornelius, in Acts chapter 10. He allowed me to receive the Holy Spirit before I was baptised in water, whereas the New Testament clearly shows that baptism in water should happen first.

I don't recommend what I did. I should have got baptised in water straight away when I first repented and believed. Had I done so, I feel that being baptised in water would probably have produced the breakthrough I needed. I would then have received the Holy Spirit either immediately or very soon after being baptised in water. Still, despite all my errors, ignorance and hang-ups, God moved in and helped me to break through.

God also helped me to overcome the silly, but to me very real, barrier of my own shyness and self-consciousness. God is a very kind and tender parent. He knows each of His children individually and is aware of all their different ways and hang-ups. Therefore, He wisely and sensitively dealt with my specific problems so that I could be free to break through.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit in more detail

We have already seen the gifts of the Holy Spirit discussed by Paul in the earlier passage, 1 Corinthians 14:1-33. There is not space to examine all of these gifts fully in this book, but I will, at least, list them and briefly explain them. These are gifts which are *still available to us today* and we should ask God for them. He wants us to have them. Don't be shy about it, as I was. Don't hold back. Ask God for these gifts with eagerness, so that you can be more useful to God in the work He is calling you to. Let's look again at the full list of spiritual gifts which apostle Paul sets out for us:

⁷But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.
1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (NASB)

Now let's list the nine gifts in turn, in the same order that Paul uses:

1) the word of wisdom

This means that the Holy Spirit provides you with a specific piece of wisdom, directly from Him, which is needed for the particular situation you are facing. Or, it could be to benefit someone else's situation. A solution or an insight or understanding comes to you from God which meets the need of the moment. It's not from your own mind. It is planted into your mind.

With a word of wisdom, we can help others in ways that we could never do if we just used our own personal wisdom. This is a gift we all need to seek for. Ask God to give you His wisdom in whatever situation you face, so that you can take the right path, or solve a vexed problem. That gift is available to us when we have received the Holy Spirit.

A personal example of an occasion when I have received a word of wisdom is when my son badly injured his finger when he was 13. He got his finger tip caught in a door hinge at school and cut off the end of his finger. He was taken to A&E and then was seen by an orthopaedic surgeon. The finger end was badly damaged and the whole nail was pulled off, plus the finger tip was gone.

I was devastated because my son was a gifted cello player and had won a scholarship to a private school to play the cello. The finger he'd injured was on his left hand and was needed for pressing hard on strings, not just for bowing. Therefore, he needed a full finger with a tip and nail.

I spoke to the orthopaedic surgeon but he said that it was going to be necessary to amputate more of the finger, i.e. right back to the knuckle! I asked him if he was sure about this and pointed out to him that my son needed the whole finger for cello (and piano). The surgeon was adamant and said that it was *"the only way"*. He then called over another orthopaedic surgeon who agreed with what he said.

However, I believe that at that moment the Holy Spirit gave me a word of wisdom. I just knew in my spirit that what I was being told by these two surgeons was wrong. I knew that the finger should not be amputated and that I was being given bad advice. I had no way of knowing that in myself. It was a word of wisdom (and probably also a word of knowledge) from the Holy Spirit. It was not from within myself, or from my own knowledge, because I did not have any knowledge.

So I refused to allow the amputation to go ahead, even though the operation was all lined up and ready to happen within the next hour. I insisted, instead, on being transferred to another surgeon for an official second opinion. That didn't go down well.

I then prayed, and rang others to get them to pray, for the next surgeon to give correct advice and to find a way to save and restore the finger. The next morning, to my great relief, we were put under the care of one of the top hand specialists in the area. Plus, it turned out that he had a daughter who played the cello, so he understood the instrument fully. He knew what was needed and why it mattered so much.

He looked at my son's finger. Unlike the first surgeon, who had said amputation was "the only way", the first words he said were "*Well, there are at least six different ways of doing this*". He described each way, and none of them involved amputation. His view was totally different from the first two surgeons! He said he would operate and seek to restore the finger, not to amputate it. He then operated and took pieces of skin from elsewhere and put them on the badly injured finger tip, which was down to bare bone.

Amazingly, over the next year the finger got progressively better. In the end the extent of the healing was astonishing. The nail grew back and so did the flesh at the side and the tip of the finger. And it was deep enough to enable him to press on the strings of a guitar or cello. We had been warned that there could be nerve damage and that pressing could be very painful, but it wasn't. The operation was a total success. God also caused the finger to regenerate itself to such an extent that it now looks hardly any different to the other fingers.

Now, the point is that I was in a crisis. I was being given wrong medical advice which I was not qualified to disagree with. Yet, I knew in my spirit that it was wrong. The Holy Spirit had revealed that to me. If I had listened to the first surgeon (and his colleague) instead of the Holy Spirit, my son would now have a missing finger end. Instead, his finger is virtually perfect and he has no loss of function and no pain either.

Another example of a word of wisdom involved a young man I know. He was a sixth former (aged 17) who was at school, studying for A levels. He had not been wise in his lower sixth form year and had done badly in his chemistry exams. Therefore the teacher told him very firmly that he could not continue to do chemistry in the upper sixth form. He said he would have to give it up and only do physics and biology.

I was being told about this by the young man. He was resigned to this and saw no way round the problem. He had been thrown out of chemistry and that was all there was to it. However, I felt a deep concern rising up inside me. God then gave me a word of wisdom. God revealed to me how *He* saw the situation, i.e. that the young man *must* continue with chemistry. I knew suddenly what to tell him.

It was that although he had been thrown out of chemistry A level, he should nevertheless, turn up for the first lesson of the new school year and just sit down in the class. I said he should tell the teacher that he did not want to stop doing chemistry and to promise to change his ways. He took my advice and turned up, sat down, and spoke to the teacher. It didn't go down well initially, but he persisted. In the end he was allowed back into the class.

He went on to do well in chemistry in the upper sixth form. Ironically, he then took chemistry for his degree, narrowly missing out on first class honours. He then went on to do a Masters degree in chemistry. Doing that Masters degree then won him a fully paid position to do a PhD in chemistry which he has recently completed! All of that happened to a lad who had been thrown out of his A level class half way through.

The point is that God knew that that young man's future was to be wrapped up in chemistry and that he must not give it up, despite the mess he was in, and despite what his school was telling him. So, God shared His thoughts with me. He revealed His sense of concern and urgency and gave me a word of wisdom which met the need of the moment. What I told that young man wasn't a good idea, it was a "*God-idea*".

If I had simply thought up that plan for myself it wouldn't have worked. Also, who would ever have imagined that chemistry was going to be such a vital part of the future of a young man who had just been kicked out of A level? At a human level it made no sense, but it was God's wisdom in operation and reflected God's deeper understanding of the situation and of the future.

That is the difference that a word of wisdom can make. They ought to be much more common, and they would be, if more people were willing to believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for us to use today. I should add that in my son's case I think the gift of faith was also involved. (see below).

2) the word of knowledge

This is similar to the word of wisdom, except that it involves a specific *fact* or *piece of knowledge* rather than wisdom or understanding. The Holy Spirit reveals a fact to us to help us, or which we can say to another person, which unlocks the situation. It can provide a breakthrough. For example it could be that there is an illness or disease that needs healing. Or it could be about some problem which they would, otherwise, be unaware of.

I can remember on one occasion being exasperated by some problems in my business. I was asking God to tell me what on earth was causing the problems, because I was baffled. To my great surprise I heard, in my head, an almost audible voice saying a person's name. I was amazed because it was the last person I would ever have expected. I had no idea they were causing harm.

Yet, when I investigated it (very thoroughly and carefully), I found it to be entirely true. They had been causing great harm in the firm and had been deceiving me for a long time. That was a total revelation to me. I could not have figured it out for myself. Or, if I ever had, it would have taken much longer.

God regularly gave me words of knowledge (and words of wisdom) in my job as a lawyer and a manager. I found myself repeatedly in situations where I just instantly put my finger on some point. It then turned out to be the key fact in a case, on which it all turned. Or, God would alert me to a hazard or problem which I could not have realised for myself.

I have deliberately chosen to give examples of the word of knowledge and word of wisdom which show their relevance to everyday life at work or school or in our personal life, not just at church meetings. They can certainly be given in a church meeting, but *not only* in that context. That is worth emphasising, because few people seem to realise that God wants spiritual gifts to be used *in every part of our life, not just in the setting of a church meeting*.

Perhaps the most common context where I find God gives me words of knowledge or words of wisdom is where I am sharing the gospel one to one with a person. God will often give me a point to

make, or an analogy, or a question to ask which is extremely relevant or timely in the life of that person. It just comes out of me, without me even needing to think. That has occurred more times than I could ever remember. It illustrates the point that spiritual gifts are meant to be used regularly and freely, in every day life, not rarely, or as a last resort.

3) the gift of faith

This is when God gives you the specific faith to believe Him for something so that you can then pray with greatly enhanced confidence that the prayer will be answered. You might face a difficult situation and you don't have enough faith to ask for help and to believe that that prayer will be answered. The gift of faith can suddenly lift up the level of your faith so that you can then ask with full confidence, expecting your prayer to be answered. Or, where you face a problem or there is danger, you can step out in faith, believing God will provide for you.

With this gift you will attempt things, or ask for things, where you would not otherwise do so. It transforms your prayers and your actions from mere presumption into stepping out in faith. That's because the gift of faith has been imparted to you from outside of yourself. It is not merely worked up by yourself, in your own strength, or by your own effort.

In 1999 I believe God gave me the gift of faith to enable me to set up a new business when all the facts and circumstances seemed to suggest that it would inevitably fail and that there was no point even trying. However, because I had the gift of faith I pressed on and refused ever to give up, even though there were many difficulties to overcome. I couldn't have done it without the gift of faith and probably wouldn't even have been willing to attempt it.

4) the gift of healing

This gift means that a person is given the faith needed to pray for healing for themselves or another person. They are then supernaturally healed by God's power. This gift is rarely seen in Western churches because our minds are so saturated with unbelief and scepticism. However, it is much more common in the Developing World. In such places, where medical help isn't very available, the people seek much more earnestly for this gift. More people are therefore physically healed by God's miraculous intervention than in the West.

5) the gift of effecting of miracles (or working of miracles)

This is similar to the gift of healing but more general. Thus it would relate to any supernatural, miraculous intervention. Again it is rare in the West, but it shouldn't be.

6) the gift of prophecy

Prophecy is *not* divination or fortune telling. That is evil and is of the occult. The gift of prophecy means the ability, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to speak God's truth into a situation. We deliver a message which God wishes to give, but *He does it through us*, in our own native language. It often relates to the future and reveals something which is going to happen. If so, it needs to turn out to be entirely accurate or it should be rejected as false.

Prophecy is always a message *from God to the people*. That is the direction of travel. Thus it differs from the interpretation of tongues (see below) which involves us saying something *to or about God*, such as praise, worship, prayer etc.

The main purpose of the gift of prophecy is to edify, exhort and console other people:

¹Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. ³But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. ⁴One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.
1 Corinthians 14:1-5 (NASB)

Whenever a prophecy or "*prophetic word*" is given it should always be weighed and tested very carefully by those hearing it. It should only be accepted if it is genuinely from the Holy Spirit. That therefore requires people with discernment to be able to know what it is and the courage to say whether it is valid. (see below)

An example from the Bible of a person giving a personal word of prophecy to another person is the account in Acts chapter 21 of Agabus. He told Paul what trouble awaited him if he was to go to Jerusalem, which Paul was determined to do:

¹⁰As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹²When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!" ¹⁵After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem.
Acts 21:10-15 (NASB)

So, Agabus was able to tell Paul what lay ahead. Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned and ended up being sent to Rome to be tried. Agabus' prophecy allowed Paul and those around him *to be prepared* for what lay ahead and to be able to pray for Paul. Thus, neither Paul nor his friends were caught out or surprised when he was later taken into protective custody in Jerusalem, due to so many people seeking to kill him:

¹⁰And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks. ¹¹But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."
Acts 23:10-11 (NASB)

From my own experience, an example of a prophecy relating to the future was one which was given to me in 2004. It came very indirectly from a friend of a friend of a friend of mine. A man called Chris had heard of me from a friend of his called John, who was a friend of my friend, Bob. They all lived over 100 miles from me and I didn't know Chris or John at all. Neither did my friend Bob know Chris. Yet God gave Chris a very clear, very helpful, word of prophecy concerning my business and it was passed on to me.

It was detailed, but it basically related to the fact that I was going to go through a period during which a series of people were going to plunder my business and steal from me. However, he said that I should not be alarmed when it occurred. He said that God had it all under control and would not allow them to go beyond a certain point and would ensure that the business remained fruitful. He also said that God would repay me seven times over for everything that was stolen from me. That prophecy came out of the blue, from someone I had never met.

It all proved to be entirely accurate. I therefore knew about this period of difficulty in advance, and was encouraged to keep going and not to be alarmed by it. That really helped me to keep it all in perspective. It also alerted me to pray about it and to be prepared for it all, which reduced the scale of the losses. So, that prophecy greatly encouraged me. It built up my faith, endurance and hope at a difficult time.

That shows how valuable prophecy can be, when it is valid and is genuinely from the Holy Spirit. It is like a word in season which has a huge impact for good. I have always been grateful for that particular word of prophecy and for Chris, the man who gave it. I've still never met him.

However, the gift of prophecy does not always relate to the future. It is often used to reveal what God feels and wishes us to know about what *has been happening*, or what *is happening now*, or to tell us something about us or about the state of the church. It could be a word of encouragement, correction, guidance or even rebuke.

Whatever it is, it should always be carefully weighed and tested by those who hear it. Nothing should ever be accepted uncritically or passively. In particular, whatever is said must never contradict the Bible. If it does, it is not a genuine prophecy. This gives us yet another reason to study and be familiar with the *whole Bible*, so that our discernment is more thoroughly informed.

7) the gift of distinguishing of spirits

This means the supernatural ability to tell whether something said or done is coming from God, or from a demon, or merely from a person themselves. So, if someone gives a prophecy you might be unsure whether it is a real prophecy from God, or a false demonic counterfeit, or of purely human origin from the person themselves.

If so, this gift is of great value. God reveals to us the *origin or source* of what was said or done by that other person. We need to seek for this gift. It is not highly regarded or sought after, but it ought to be. It is a great help to the church when a large number of members have this gift. Let me give an example of one of the times when I have operated in this gift myself:

Many years ago I was Chairman of the Trustees in quite a large charismatic church. The church contained a mixture of some good and bad things. I was struggling to know what to think about some of the carnal, worldly behaviour and false spiritual manifestations that were coming in to the church. It was a highly confusing situation. I knew some things were wrong, but I couldn't quite put my finger on exactly what was going on.

I was even more confused because in some ways the leader of the church was, himself, a major concern to me. I was troubled by his actions and by the way he spoke. Sometimes he seemed to be genuine, but at other times he would surprise me by acting in carnal, manipulative, dishonest and controlling ways. He didn't add up and it was very confusing to me.

But he was the leader of the church and I naively assumed that he must, therefore, be genuine. Plus I'd seen him do many good things, especially in past years. Yet, now, he was different and something

was wrong, even sinister. If it happened today I would weigh him up far quicker. But, in those days I knew so much less. I needed God to step in and give me understanding of what was really going on.

Then one Sunday morning, God gave me a revelation of what the problem really was. I suddenly became able to see what was happening and what lay behind all the confusion. I was sitting listening to the leader speaking at the front of the church when I saw something very strange in his eyes that I had never seen in anybody before.

His eyes and his whole face suddenly changed. His eyes lit up and became someone else's eyes. They were very different. They glowed and looked entirely evil. I was, in fact, looking into the eyes of the demon which was within, or operating through, the leader. I also saw the demon's face in his face, which became contorted. His facial appearance altered dramatically. It was horrible. It went on for about 10 or 15 seconds and then it stopped.

I would, perhaps, have assumed that I must have imagined it. However, there are at least two reasons why I feel sure it was genuine and that God really had revealed to me that a demon was operating in and through the leader of the church, which I would never have guessed or figured out for myself:

- i) immediately after the service another man, who was older than me, and who was a fellow trustee in the church, came over to me. We looked at each other and I could see he was very concerned. I said "*Did you see what I just saw?*" He looked grimly at me and said "*I did*". We then discussed it. Both of us had seen the same things. I don't know if anybody else did. I expect not. I expect they saw nothing at all. The congregation certainly gave no impression of having seen anything. It was something which probably only the two of us had seen, because only we had operated at that moment in the gift of distinguishing of spirits. I think that because the situation was so serious and involved the very leader of the church himself, God revealed it to two of us simultaneously, so that each of us could be sure that we were not mistaken.
- ii) subsequent events seemed to prove the truth of what I had seen. Things went from bad to worse. More and more lies were told. More carnal and manipulative things were done. Eventually, that leader gave up his ministry completely and left his wife for another woman. I tried to reach out to him, to help him and get him to repent. So did the other man who had seen the demon in his eyes.

Yet, in one sense, we both failed. The leader was not willing to listen or to repent. He just hardened his heart. I couldn't do anything to stop the collapse of the church that followed. But, at least God had warned me and enabled me to try to help the leader and others. By the way, I didn't tell others what I'd seen that morning, not even the leader. Its purpose was to help me and the other trustee to understand what was going on, so that we could help the leader and the church. It wasn't meant to be broadcast, at least not on that occasion.

8) the gift of tongues (private and public)

We need to distinguish between two different ways in which the gift of tongues operates. There are *private* tongues which are purely for your own personal use when you are alone. With that gift you can pray on your own in tongues, i.e. to pray "*in the Spirit*". That will strengthen and edify you. It is also a means by which God can put prayers into our mouths which He wants us to pray. Or He can put praise and worship into our mouths even though we can't understand it. I use tongues very regularly in private and I always feel better for it. That is to be expected. Indeed, apostle Paul said he spoke in tongues more than all (any) of the people in Corinth:

***I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all;
1 Corinthians 14:18 (NASB)***

What Paul meant by that was that he spoke in (private) tongues more than any other person at Corinth, not more than all of them put together. I clarify that because I've heard people say that he meant that he spoke in tongues more than all of them combined. They then suggest that it meant that the people at Corinth *didn't* generally speak in tongues. They then put that forward as a justification for them *not* speaking in tongues, i.e. that the people in Corinth didn't speak in tongues very much. It doesn't mean that at all. On the contrary, it just means that Paul used the gift of tongues a lot, to edify himself and to build himself up. The clear implication is that we should follow Paul's example and use the gift of tongues regularly, not that we should avoid it or ban it.

Indeed, Paul tells the Corinthians directly that he wishes they would all speak in tongues and that they would all prophesy. Clearly that has to mean that *they did not all do so*, or he wouldn't have said it. However that fact cannot be used as an argument *against* speaking in tongues and/or prophesying, because Paul clearly says he wishes they *would* all do so:

Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.
1 Corinthians 14:5 (NASB)

Another form of the gift of tongues is when the gift is for *public* use. It is good in a church meeting for up to two or three people (one at a time) to speak out loud in tongues. They should each then pause and allow what has been said to be interpreted by someone else in the meeting who has the gift of interpretation of tongues. Or it can be interpreted by the person themselves, i.e. the one who gave the original message in tongues.

What is said in tongues will always be directed *from the person towards God*. Tongues enables us to address God more fluently. It will never be a message from God to us, though other things could be referred to within it, as happened in the instance that Derek Prince spoke of, where a Welshman's sins were described within the message in tongues (given by a non-Welsh speaker). That is, the person speaking in tongues was praying to God (in Welsh) *for* the Welshman, not saying something on God's behalf *to* the Welshman.

9) the gift of interpretation of tongues

This is a gift that enables a person to understand what has been said by themselves, or by someone else, speaking publicly in tongues. God gives understanding and then the person interprets it in ordinary speech, in their own language, so that all can understand it. This gift should always be used whenever tongues are spoken publicly. Tongues are basically directed from the people towards God.

Therefore, when the interpretation is given it will, if it is valid, always be in that direction. It will be saying something that is addressed *to God*, not to the people. So it differs from prophecy, which is about God speaking to the people. A message in that direction would be given directly as a prophecy, not by way of tongues with interpretation.

Therefore, it is vitally important that when that interpretation is given, there must be mature people listening to it who are willing to speak up and challenge it if it is not correct. That is needed to prevent false interpretations being given. Someone else in the meeting also needs to be operating in the gifts of interpretation and/or distinguishing of spirits. That will enable what is being said to be tested and verified.

How do we receive the Holy Spirit?

When we receive the Holy Spirit it is meant to be an event which you can't miss. It is supposed to be very noticeable. Indeed, one of the very purposes of being filled with, or baptised in, the Holy Spirit is to confirm conclusively to ourselves, and to others, that we really have become a Christian. That is one reason why apostle Paul was so easily able to see, and hear, whether a person had, or had not, received the Holy Spirit.

In the Bible this event of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not presented as something quiet, such that you can't tell whether it has happened. You can tell. God doesn't want you to be left in any doubt about it.

So, if we have received the Holy Spirit there should, normally, be a clear sign. Usually it is that we will be able immediately to begin to speak in tongues. And/or we could begin to operate in one or more of the other gifts, though probably not all of them. These other gifts will not necessarily come immediately. Some of them could come immediately, for example prophecy or interpretation of tongues. Others may come later, as and when we need them. I have never heard of anybody having all of the gifts, except for apostle Paul.

The sign that most of us should expect to see straight away, is the ability to speak in tongues. It is not just making babbling sounds. It is clear, structured, complex language. It usually flows in full sentences without any effort. and without needing to think or construct it at all.

It has been suggested to me that I am being too dogmatic in suggesting that *most* people can and should speak in tongues. The argument is put to me that there are some people who cannot and do not speak in tongues but, nevertheless, that they are genuine Christians and have received the Holy Spirit. I wouldn't argue against that. Indeed I know many people who are excellent Christians and mature disciples who have never operated in any spiritual gifts (so far as they know). Many of these people that I know, and who are my friends, do not even believe in the gifts being for today.

Are such people real Christians? I'm sure they are. Have they received the Holy Spirit, despite not having, or not using, the gifts? It may well be so. I don't know. I'm not wise enough or clever enough to know such things. I think they have. If so, could it be that without realising it, they have been baptised in the Holy Spirit and could operate in spiritual gifts if they chose to do so?

It is quite possible that they have received the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, therefore, they could operate in the gifts if they chose to. I don't know. What is clear is that they never choose to. That is probably because of their theology, which rules it out. They don't believe that they are *supposed* to, and they don't see *others* doing so. Therefore, they don't do it either.

The Holy Spirit never forces you to receive or operate in any of His gifts

Let's address a common area of confusion, which I got wrong myself as a young Christian. You mustn't imagine that the gift of tongues will be *forced upon you*, such that you don't have to do anything at all, or even to speak out. Though the gift of tongues is supernatural, it still operates through your physical tongue. Your tongue is, and always will be, entirely under *your* control.

So, for the gift to begin to operate you do have to *choose to speak*. You have to launch forth and say something. You can't just sit there saying nothing at all and expect the Holy Spirit to take over or do it all for you. He won't. The same applies to prophecy, interpretation, and so on. You have to choose to speak.

The Holy Spirit is the most perfectly well-mannered, gentle, sensitive person you could ever imagine. He does not take over or dominate you or use you like a puppet. He gives gifts, but He gives them to you for you to use, or not to use, *as you freely choose*. The Holy Spirit always respects your free will. He never forces you to do anything.

Many people make the serious mistake (as I did) of never starting to speak in tongues because they wrongly imagine that if it is the real thing it will happen *to* them, without them needing to do anything or speak at all. They expect to be "*taken over*" like a ventriloquist's dummy or to go into some kind of trance where they speak without any involvement from themselves. That is all totally mistaken. That is the Devil's way, not the Holy Spirit's. Indeed, if it happens like that, you can be sure that it is *not* the Holy Spirit who is involved. That is not His way, or His style.

By contrast, the hallmark of the Devil and of all his demons is that they always seek to dominate, control and manipulate us. The Holy Spirit never does. So, a medium or spiritualist, when they speak, is under the power and influence of a demon. That demon will, to some degree, take over and speak through the medium, even overriding their free will. In some cases such mediums may be pure fraudsters, faking it and making it all up for themselves. But, in many other cases, they really are under the dominating power and influence of a demon.

What if nothing happens when we pray to receive the Holy Spirit?

A common explanation when nothing happens when we pray to receive the Holy Spirit is simply that the person has been too afraid to speak out loud or too shy to do so in front of others. I was like that myself. It can be that you, yourself, are the blockage. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is just waiting patiently for you to be willing to step out in faith and begin to speak.

So, if you have prayed to receive the Holy Spirit and nothing happens, i.e. there are no tongues, then consider what I have said above. Ask yourself whether you have actually tried to speak. You may not have. The answer could be as simple as that. You may have just sat there silently and passively, waiting for something to happen. It won't. The Holy Spirit won't ever force you to speak. He will only *enable you to do so*. He always respects your free will (unlike how demons operate)

Therefore, go ahead and start to speak. Don't speak English. Just make a sound and continue. If you have received the gift of tongues, it will flow and you will be able to do it without effort or thinking of what to say. It is best if you do this together with another person who believes that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today and who has already received the Holy Spirit themselves and operates in the gifts. They can then encourage and assist you. But if there is no such person to help you, then you can still go ahead on your own. Also do not make the mistake of thinking that there must be strong feelings of emotional intensity. That does often happen when a person first speaks in tongues, but by no means always. So do not be put off or discouraged if you feel no different. That is quite normal.

If you have prayed to receive the Holy Spirit and have attempted to speak in tongues, but still nothing has happened, then there may be one or more other problems. Let's examine what those might be:

Other reasons why sometimes nothing may happen when we pray to receive the Holy Spirit

You need to remember that receiving the Holy Spirit is generally meant to be the fourth and final step in becoming a Christian. There have been some notable exceptions, such as Cornelius the Gentile. He received the Holy Spirit before he was baptised in water. However, I would argue that when that occurred in the New Testament, it was always for some exceptional reason. It's not meant to happen that way normally.

Therefore, if you have prayed to receive the Holy Spirit but nothing has happened, the next most obvious explanation could be that you may not have taken one or more of the three previous steps, which are meant to happen first. It would be wise therefore to examine yourself and ask yourself whether you have genuinely and properly:

- a) **repented** of your sins and turned from them
- b) **believed** in Jesus Christ and put your whole faith and trust in Him, and in Him alone, to save you from your sins
- c) **been baptised in water**, as the Bible clearly commands us to do. Remember that this is meant to be done when you are old enough to have repented and believed for yourself. Do not make the mistake which many make, and which I made myself, which is to assume that if you have been baptised as a baby that will count. I don't believe it will. (See chapter 16)

If that offends you, I can only apologise, but I can't say anything different, because the Bible is so clear on this. So, if that is your position, then don't delay. Go now and be properly baptised in water. Take that third step and obey Jesus' command. Don't neglect or overlook it any further.

Likewise if, on reflection, you think that you have perhaps *not genuinely repented*, or are continuing in some known sin which you know is wrong, then repent properly now. Turn away from any sin or sinful situation which you are aware of. If you are unclear or confused, just ask God to reveal to you anything you need to repent of which may be a blockage. He will gladly answer that prayer. Also, reread chapter 14 on repentance. Ask God to make clear to you whether there is something specific in your behaviour or lifestyle that concerns Him.

Alternatively, it could be that you have not properly or genuinely believed in, or put your faith and trust in, the Lord Jesus. That's possible. It could be that you have some issues which you are confused or mistaken about. For example it could be to do with who and what Jesus Christ is. Or it could be about what His death on the cross was all about or why it was needed. Confusion, error and false teaching are extremely widespread, so this could easily be the problem. Pray and ask God to reveal to you any specific error, deception or significant *doctrinal mistake* you may be affected by.

Look also at chapter 15 on believing. Carefully go through the various points I have set out, which are the basic things a person needs to know, understand and believe. If any of these don't make sense to you, or you don't believe them, or you have been taught something different in the past which you still believe, then ask God to expose any error or deception which may be holding you back. Do this sincerely, with a genuine willingness to be corrected.

One common problem is with people who come out of cults such as the Jehovah's witnesses. They teach that Jesus Christ is not God, but just a man. Sometimes that error is so deeply ingrained that a person still holds onto it, even after leaving the cult. Or, even if you weren't in a cult, you may just have heard something like that, or been taught it, and it may have taken deep root in your mind. If so, it needs to be corrected.

You can't meaningfully believe in Jesus Christ, if you don't believe that He is the Son of God. If the 'Jesus' that you believe in is just a man, not the God of the Bible, then you would be believing in a false god, instead of the real Jesus. He has to be seen as divine or you are not truly believing in Him in the way the Bible requires you to. You would only be believing in a false god, who is wrongly going by the name Jesus.

For example, I am reminded of a story Derek Prince told about a man with whom he shared the gospel in Sudan. This man was a Muslim. He wanted to become a Christian and Derek Prince led him in a prayer, but nothing happened. Later it occurred to Derek Prince to question the man closely as to exactly *who* it was that he was praying *to*. It emerged that the man was still praying to Allah, as was his lifelong habit. That was the problem, because Allah is not the real God of the Bible. Once this error was cleared up and the man spoke to the real God of the Bible and prayed in the name of Jesus, then he was heard by God and was unmistakably saved.

This problem also arises with people who have come out of a New Age background. The New Age movement presents many false and distorted versions of Jesus. So it's very possible you could be deceived or misinformed. If so, the Jesus you are following would be a false, distorted, unbiblical, counterfeit, rather than the real Lord Jesus Christ. However, if it is all you have ever been taught, it may seem true to you even though it isn't.

That type of error would cause a total blockage. How can the real Jesus baptise you in the Holy Spirit if you are, in fact, believing in some other false and inaccurate version of Jesus? Therefore carefully read and reread chapter 15 on believing. Pray about it and ask God to expose any error in your thinking or your knowledge, however small, which might be creating a blockage.

Once you have corrected any errors and taken or retaken any step that was missing or inadequate, then you may now be ready to pray again to receive the Holy Spirit. Hopefully the error or problem will have been removed and you can now receive the Holy Spirit. If not, and still nothing happens, then just continue to pray earnestly and sincerely. Ask God to reveal the problem, or blockage or whatever is missing. Keep asking and He will do so. God wants you to receive the Holy Spirit. He is on your side.

Persist therefore until you have found out what the blockage is. Keep on and on asking to receive the Holy Spirit. Do not give up. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Therefore be diligent and carry on for as long as it takes. Many people give up even at the first or second obstacle and do not press on. That would be a tragic mistake. Never stop seeking and asking. Keep on until your prayer is answered:

⁷"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸"For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.
Matthew 7:7-8 (NASB)

In these verses, Jesus Himself is speaking. He tells us to ask, to seek and to knock. However, the clear implication of His words is that we are to *persist* in doing so. He doesn't mean that we should knock once or twice. He means keep on knocking, persistently, until the door is opened.

Why don't we see more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit being used, if they are really from God?

We have to remember that God will not impose Himself or His gifts on us. Therefore, if we reject the gifts, or if we are wary and suspicious of them, we will not experience them. So much depends on what the leaders of a particular church say. If they teach that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have ceased, or are not from God at all, then there will be no gifts. You then end up with yet another church where the shutters have been firmly slammed down, keeping out anything of the Holy Spirit. This is very widespread.

At any rate, in Great Britain, we now have a situation where the gifts of the Holy Spirit can freely operate in one church, but in another church nearby there are no gifts, due to confusion and wrong teaching. Sadly, in such a church, where the gifts of the Holy Spirit are effectively "banned", (though

they would never put it that way), even believers who have received the Holy Spirit and the gifts will be silenced.

The reality is that in such a church, even those individuals who have been baptised in the Holy Spirit will be pressured, or even intimidated, into not operating in the gifts. Thus, there will be no tongues, interpretation, prophecy, words of wisdom or words of knowledge within the church meetings, even if such things are occurring at an individual level outside of meetings.

This indicates the profound importance of the responsibility that church leaders have to interpret the Bible correctly. They must not reject or forbid genuine gifts which the Holy Spirit wants us to use. We must all be so careful, not only in what we *accept and allow*, but also in what we *reject or forbid*:

³⁹Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. ⁴⁰But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner. 1 Corinthians 14:39-40 (NASB)