

General introduction to this set of topics

This is an extremely important set of lessons. They are about the way in which God worked, and works, in the world. It is sad that this is a subject about which Christadelphians do not always agree, so it is a key aim of these lessons that they should provide a unifying rather than a divisive influence.

It is extremely important in dealing with this subject to keep as closely as possible to the language of scripture, and to avoid phrases and expressions which confuse the subject. For example, the expression to 'have the holy spirit', in the sense of possession, is nowhere found in scripture; so to say that 'we do not have the holy spirit' is unhelpful: nobody ever did. The spirit is God's, and through it he works his will. Nobody else has ever owned or possessed it, though they may be possessed by it - a quite different idea.

The use of lower or upper case letters in 'spirit' or 'Spirit', 'holy' or 'Holy', also seems to be unhelpful. There is, after all 'one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling' (Ephesians 4:4). We have therefore in these lessons used lower case letters throughout. There are no capital letters in the Greek to make a distinction between the uses of the words, and any use of different cases must be to some extent a matter of personal judgment.

We have tried in preparing these lessons to avoid controversy and to let the words of scripture be a unifying influence that may, God willing, benefit our community. We trust that you will teach in the same spirit.

Is the 'spirit of God' the same as the 'holy spirit'?

You will probably not need to make this distinction to the young people, but may be worth pointing out that there is no distinction between the terms 'holy spirit', 'spirit of God' or 'spirit of Christ', and many occasions in which the word 'spirit' is used alone. Look, for instance, at Acts 16:6-10, Romans 8:9-11, 1 Corinthians 12:3-5, and how in each case these terms are used interchangeably, and how the 'spirit' is also equated with God himself. Similarly, you can compare the accounts of the baptism of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22 and John 1:32.

Aim of lesson

To enable the young people to have a balanced understanding of this subject. This lesson tries to lay a clear scriptural foundation that will enable the young people to avoid controversy in the future.

Bible background

Genesis 1; Job 33; Psalm 147; Jeremiah 10; Luke 1; Ephesians 6.

Preparation required

Familiarise yourself with the subject and make sure that you are clear about what the scriptures teach. There is a useful chapter on the holy spirit in *'Christadelphians: What they believe and teach'* by brother Harry Tennant, and *'The Spirit of God'* by brother Alfred Nicholls provides a fuller treatment.

There is a lot of material in these lessons and you will need to plan quite carefully how you want to use the time, and whether you want, if necessary, to spend more time on the subject.

Suggested outline of lesson

If any of the young people use the Authorised Version, talk briefly about the fact that it tends to use the term 'ghost' rather than 'spirit'. It does not, of course, have any of the implications of 'seeing a ghost'.

What is the holy spirit?

Get the young people to look up the passages listed in their notes and fill in the missing words, noting the parallels between and within the verses.

Genesis 1:2-3 (AV) 'the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said ...'

Job 33:4 (NIV) 'The spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.'

Psalm 33:6 'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.'

Psalm 147:15,18 'He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. ... He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow ...'

Jeremiah 10:12,13 (AV) 'He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his understanding. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens ...'

Luke 1:35 (AV) 'The holy spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest ...'

Ephesians 6:17 (AV) 'And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.'

From these passages the young people should glean the understanding that

1. The spirit of God, or the holy spirit, can be equated with his wisdom and understanding, will and purpose.
2. When the thoughts of God are turned into words - he speaks - those words are powerful and mighty, and his will is carried out. God has only to say 'Let there be light', and there is light. Sometimes the same effect is described as being the work of his wind or breath.
3. When the thoughts of God are recorded for mankind - his laws and decrees - then those words themselves become powerful to change the lives of people who read them.

Use a concordance to look up the words *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek. Point out that both words have multiple meanings but that they share the same themes of breath, wind and spirit. (The students' notes contain some extracts from the OnLine Bible).

Some connecting thoughts.

- When we speak we are expressing our understanding. We refer to the spirit of a law or agreement to mean the idea that was in the mind of the people who made it.
- Laws and decrees are an expression of the wisdom of the one who makes them.
- When a ruler speaks, his words have power - people obey them.
- The wind is like words in that both are invisible yet both affect what they 'hit'.

All these thoughts come together in the holy spirit.

An important principle

Get the young people to read 1 Corinthians 12:1-12. This relates specifically to a first century situation when the gifts of the spirit were being freely given, but it makes two important points:

- The spirit is in God's hands - see also v 18 and 28.
- God uses his power as he wills, as is demanded by the situation and the people concerned.

We should expect therefore that throughout scripture the spirit of God would work continuously but in different ways, appropriate to each situation, and varying according to the individuals concerned.

There is also another distinction. There is a sense in which the spirit of God is active in the lives of all living creatures, man especially. It works in the lives of God's people in a general sense. Specifically, through the gifts of the spirit, and

on special occasions, it is vividly seen in the words and work of the prophets and particularly through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The spirit of God works in the lives of all men

Without God there would be no life on this earth. God is everywhere through his spirit, sustaining life - and ending it. Get the young people to read Genesis 2:7, Job 33:4, Psalm 104:27-30. We see the hand of God not simply in the fact of life but in the means to sustain it. While you are in Psalm 104, look at the chapter as a whole and see how it describes the creation of the world (v 1-5), the flood (v 6-9), and then goes on to describe the hand of God in nature and particularly in providing food. Try to get the young people to wonder at the loving hand of the God who keeps all his creation alive.

Now turn to the New Testament and look at Acts 17:24-28, which confirms that this is not just an Old Testament view of the world, then at Matthew 5:45. This activity of God occurs irrespective of the faith, or lack of it, of the people concerned - 'he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' (Matthew 5:45, ESV).

Among God's people

Get the young people to read Isaiah 63:7-14, and see that God's hand worked in a special way in the lives of the people of Israel. God's special relationship with Israel caused him:

- To suffer with his people in Egypt and to bring them out (v9)
- To bring them through the Red Sea (v11-12)
- To guide and sustain them through the wilderness (v13-14)

Note, however, that although these events demonstrate God's grace in choosing and delivering Israel, they did not guarantee the salvation of individuals nor make them morally good; on the contrary the whole point of these verses is to stress that despite God's wonders the people did not obey him.

The holy spirit at work in special ways at particular times

A distinction is sometimes drawn between 'spirit' and 'Spirit'; between the spirit of God and the holy spirit. There is a tendency in scripture to use the term 'holy spirit' to refer to occasions when God's spirit works through selected individuals and in specific situations. You may like to discuss this, but be careful to avoid creating the impression that the spirit of God and the holy spirit are different things. It is clear from the passages referred to at the start that the distinction cannot be rigidly applied. 'There is one spirit'.

As an example of the way in which God's spirit has been used in specific ways you may like to look at Exodus 31:1-6, where Bezalel and Aholiab were given skills to build the tabernacle.

Prophecy

Numbers 12:6; 2 Samuel 23:1-3 and 2 Peter 1:21. Prophets were 'moved' or 'carried along' by the holy spirit. The young people may (or may not!) remember from Part 1, Lesson 1, that in Acts 27:17 the same word is used of Paul's ship in the storm. This is a vivid idea and it would be well worth reminding them of it.

God spoke to the prophets, who passed on both the words and the spirit of the words. Their words also had power because they came from God.

Miracles

Get the young people to reflect on the way in which prophets like Moses, Elijah and Elisha were enabled to work miracles as a demonstration of God's power.

The culmination of this came of course in the Lord Jesus. Look at John 3:34 and see how God gave the spirit 'without limit' (NIV) to the Lord Jesus.

Look at John 14:9-11 and see how Jesus attributes both his words and his works to his Father. Even he did not 'own' the spirit, in the sense of having power that was independent of his Father.

Speaking in tongues

Acts 2:1-11 and 5:12-15 speak of the coming of the holy spirit at the day of Pentecost, and of the power that the apostles were given to speak in tongues and to work miracles.

If a question is asked about exactly what 'speaking in tongues' meant, it may be helpful to be prepared. There are two Greek words used, both indicating that what the apostles were enabled to do was to speak in other languages, so that those who did not speak Hebrew or Aramaic could understand them. Dialektos means a language used by a nation or group of people - see Acts 2:6,8. It is also used in 21:40; 22:2; 26:14 of the normal use of Hebrew by Paul. Glossa means tongue - the thing we have in our mouths. Mark 7:33,35; James 3:5-8. It is used in Acts 2:3,4,11. The last indicates that here too it was an intelligible language that is being referred to. We will be thinking next week of this subject in more detail.

The time chart

For now, summarise by getting the young people to fill in the table at the end of their notes. The important points to make are that:

- For most of the time in Biblical times, no miraculous acts are recorded.

- Although there are exceptions - Abraham is described as a prophet, as were some of the Judges, for example - there are three main periods of activity: around the time of the Exodus, in the times of the Kings, and during the first century.
- In each case it can be seen that there was a clear purpose in God's mind. Either a great deliverance was being achieved or there was a threat to the spiritual and physical health of the nation.

Relevance to our lives

This is a subject that has occasionally provoked some extreme reactions. We all need to seek to understand the truth and to work for its unifying influence. 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling' (Ephesians 4:4).

The fact that there were long periods of biblical history in which there was no apparent miraculous activity means that we need not be concerned that there is none now. The flurries of activity clearly happened at set times and for particular purposes.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, who in the beginning brought light into a dark world, we pray for enlightenment that we may understand your truth and be led to understand the fullness of its beauty. Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

Read chapters 38-41 of Job, and marvel at how wide-ranging is God's work in the world.