

The Spirit of Holiness

Even though it is Luke who most often calls the Spirit the ‘Holy Spirit’, Luke actually writes very little in either his gospel or Acts about **how** the Spirit engenders holiness in Christians (Acts 5:3 is one of the rare examples linking the Spirit to upright living, but even this does not indicate quite what the link is). It is to Paul’s letters that we must turn for consideration of this matter.

Opening Discussion Questions:

1. Does the Holy Spirit make Christians holy?—or is this achieved through their own efforts? Or is there some other answer?
2. Is the Spirit’s influence didactic—teaching recipients a new ‘law’, for instance—or is it empowering—giving them the ability to obey a law they already know? Or both? Or some other explanation?
3. What is the nature of the S/spirit versus flesh antithesis that we read about in Paul’s letters? (e.g., Rom 8:12–14)

Paul’s ‘Divine Indicative’ and ‘Human Imperative’

In Paul’s letters we find a tension between the ‘divine indicative’ and the ‘human imperative’—between ‘God has’ and ‘you must’. We see this summed up neatly in Philippians 2:12–13. Paul told his hearers to ‘work out’ their salvation (that this was meant in ethical terms can be seen from the reference to obedience earlier in the verse), for God ‘worked in’ them. We also see it set out in lengthier discourse in Romans 6. We find the divine indicative in 6:2, “we died to sin,” which is then expanded in the following verses (see especially 6:6–7). In 6:11–12 the human imperative begins, “reckon yourselves dead to sin . . . don’t let sin reign.” (Note the order: the imperative rests on the indicative, as in Philippians with its ‘for’; cf. Col 3:3, 5, 10, 12.)

This dual message is also related to the Spirit. In Galatians, for instance, the famous ‘fruit’ of the Spirit (5:22–23) is a metaphor that brings to mind fruit growing automatically on a tree, according to its kind: “good trees bear good fruit,” to slightly misquote Luke 6:43. Not only do apple trees not bear oranges, but the production of apples by an apple tree *simply happens* (according to the botanical knowledge of the NT, we can guess) according to the tree’s own nature. By way of confirmation, we find the divine indicative clearly set out in Galatians 5:24. But the human imperative surrounds these texts—in Galatians 5:16 and 5:25, for instance. Believers *should* walk, should conduct themselves, *in* the Spirit.

Given this tension between indicative and imperative, it should come as no surprise to discover that scholars’ emphases fall to one side or the other. Among well-known Pauline scholars, Fee leans towards the indicative. It is only a leaning: he does not present Paul as a triumphalist for whom upright ethical Christian living is a *fait accompli*. Nevertheless his emphasis shines out in his writing. James Dunn, on the other hand, tends towards an emphasis on the imperative, highlighting more than Fee the internal struggle that believers face, in his reading of Paul.

It emerges that how optimistic or pessimistic we think Paul was—how much he emphasised the divine indicative or the human imperative—has much to do with how we understand Romans 7:14–25. This passage is famously divisive. The question is

this: was Paul describing his own life as a Christian, or was he not? Was he, instead, describing a life, be it of an individual or of corporate Israel, before or outside Christ? As Fee observes, (Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 511, n. 113) the former view—that Paul described his present ethical struggle as a Christian—is the majority view in church circles but the minority view in academic circles.

Further Discussion Questions:

- Read Romans 7:14–25.
1. How have you previously understood Romans 7:14–25—as referring to Paul's Christian struggle or to an ethical struggle outside Christ? Why have you held this view?
 2. Has your own personal experience as a Christian coloured your reading of this passage?
 3. Do you see that there might be a different way of reading it?
 4. What do you sense might be the strengths and weaknesses of each of these two readings?
 5. What is the relevance of Romans 7:14–25 to the balance Paul offered between the divine indicative and the human imperative?

We will close the morning by drawing together discussions, and with overall concluding remarks about what it means for Christians to have God's Spirit working in them to engender holiness. We will reflect on the significance of 2 Corinthians 3:18 for this.