

TOO HOT TO HANDLE

23 What's An Unction?

How Do You Describe It?

The change the baptism of Holy Spirit makes — or potentially could make — in a believer's life is immense. So immense it can be difficult to describe. The writers of the Bible have used a number of different ideas and images. They speak, for example, of the sealing of the Spirit, the unction (or anointing) of the Spirit, the earnest of the Spirit, the witness of the Spirit and the leading of the Spirit. Each describes a different aspect of the way the Holy Spirit exerts His influence in a believer's soul. They are all part of the same thing but each has its own special significance. Tonight we are going to think about the use of some of them.

The Sealing Of The Spirit

The use of a seal goes back at least to the time of Judah, the son of Jacob. It is a common practice in many parts of the world right to the present day. When a person in authority puts his seal on a document it is confirmation that its content is genuine and that it has his approval. When he places his seal on an object it is a mark of ownership and protection. In addition, the seal itself is a means of security: a seal placed on a package prevents any tampering with its contents.

Every believer is baptised with the Holy Spirit and in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes the presence of the Holy Spirit as God's seal placed upon His children. The presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives is the sign of His approval as well as His confirmation that what they have is genuine and that they truly belong to Him. It is also a guarantee of His protection and is in itself one of the means by which He makes sure that their condition remains secure.

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Ephesians 4:30

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession”

Ephesians 1:13 – 14

“[He] has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

2 Corinthians 1:22

Question: Scripture does not tell us exactly how the sealing with the Holy Spirit is evident in a believer's life. How do you think it shows in experience? Curtis Vaughn¹ makes some suggestions that you might find helpful.

- The Holy Spirit produces in us all the evidences of conversion.
- He gives stability and strength to persevere and stay strong in faith.
- He maintains in us our sense of spiritual need.
- He maintains the desire for salvation.
- He gives and maintains the spirit of prayer.
- He maintains in us our love for the word of God.
- He grants us confidence in the promises of God.
- He places the hope of heaven in our hearts.
- He maintains spiritual energy and zeal.

The Unction Of The Spirit

“But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things.”

1 John 2:20

The phrase “unction of the Spirit” brings to mind the practice of pouring oil on the head of someone who has been chosen to hold office or set apart for a special task. As an act, to be anointed carried meaning for those who looked on but it also made a powerful impression on the one who was himself anointed: it gave him confidence to take up his new role.

¹ , The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit, Banner of Truth,

In the anointing, or unction, of the Spirit then the Holy Spirit Himself is poured out upon the believer (so once again we identify it with the baptism of the Spirit), he is set apart or consecrated for service and also made fit for that service.

Anointing can be thought of in another sense as it is in the letter to the church at Laodicea.

“...anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”

Revelation 3:18

This idea seems to fit better with John’s thinking in the verse we have quoted which mentions one specific effect of the unction of the Spirit: the ability to know all things. “Knowing all things” does not mean omniscience but looked at in the context of 1 John it does imply a greatly improved ability to discern truth from error. The presence of the Holy Spirit then enables the believer to see clearly and to be discerning.

Thirdly, anointing the skin with oil has a soothing and softening influence just as the presence of the Holy Spirit softens the believers heart, soothes him in times of distress bringing comfort and joy through the knowledge of Christ, gives him inner beauty, restores strength and vigour and adds energy and fervency to his service and prayers.

Question: How will the unction of the Spirit be evident in experience?

The Witness Of The Spirit

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

Romans 8:16

A witness gives evidence of what he knows to be true. The Holy Spirit, present in the life of every believer, bears witness to the fact that he or she has indeed been adopted as a child of God. His testimony is given within the believer’s own spirit, not communicated to him from outside, and it is given in cooperation with the believer’s own spirit — the two chime in harmony.

Question: How will the witness of the Spirit be evident in experience? Here are some ideas to help you.

- The Holy Spirit brings to mind and opens up passages of Scripture which bring assurance.
- He shines upon the graces produced in us by affliction.
- He shines upon the outward evidences of genuine conversion in our lives.
- He gives the ability to perceive those evidences and to view them in the light of God’s word.

The Leading Of The Spirit

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

Romans 8:14

Leading can be accomplished in different ways: by going ahead and showing the way, by taking hold of the hand and guiding, with the glance of an eye or by issuing commands. A shepherd will pick up the little lambs and carry them, He will lead the weak and feeble sheep with gentleness, He will walk before the adult flock with unhesitating decision but whatever way the leader accomplishes his task there has to be a corresponding act of following on the part of the one being led.

The leading of the Spirit is the influence He exerts in guiding the believer in the way God would have him go. His methods vary according to the individual and the circumstances of the time. As with the witness of the Spirit, His leading requires a corresponding action on our part. The believers response in harmony with His leading produces the result: God’s purpose accomplished.

We can see a good example of the leading of the Spirit at work in the production of Scripture. The Holy Spirit led in the writing and yet the distinct personalities of individual writers were stamped upon their work.

“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

2 Peter 1:20 – 21

Question: How will the leading of the Spirit be evident in experience? Once again, here are some ideas to help you.

- The Holy Spirit leads the understanding into knowledge of the truth as God has revealed it.

"When, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth;² ...He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you."

1 John 16:13 – 14

- He directs the affections and the intellect to desire and to choose the right way.
- He stirs up hunger for what is good.
- He gives us the written law to show us what is pleasing to God and to restrain us from what is displeasing.
- He orders events and circumstances to guide us in the right path.

Think What It Could Mean

I hope this consideration of some of the terms used to describe the Holy Spirit's influence in our lives has helped you to appreciate just how extensive that influence is and to have a better understanding of the degree to which we depend upon Him. It seems to me that the more we are filled with the Spirit the more evident these influences would be. Imagine what your Christian life could be like!

Next Week

Next week we will consider the influence of the Holy Spirit in prayer and worship.

² Again this is not a promise of omniscience. It is a promise that The holy Spirit will furnish us with all the understanding that is needed for us to be saved and for us to accomplish His purpose for us.