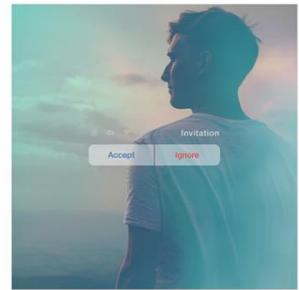


Receive the Spirit

Throughout the gospels, there are many places where Jesus calls or invites us to something, but He leaves it up to us to decide whether we'll accept His invitation or ignore it. Let's look at five invitations Jesus extends and ask ourselves how we'll respond



INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit's role in our lives, though often underestimated and misunderstood, is vital to our well-being and our growth as Christ followers. Jesus specifically left the Holy Spirit here to guide, transform, and fill our lives. "Holy" and "Spirit" describe Him, but *Comforter* could be His name. This is a very fitting name, as *com* means "alongside of" and *fortis* means "strong." He is the strong One who stays alongside us forever. Receive the Holy Spirit, be comforted, then be filled with peace, and share the good news of forgiveness and redemption!

STARTER QUESTION

Are you feeling like the disciples were after their beloved Messiah and Savior was seemingly taken away? Confused? Afraid? Isolated? God never abandons us, and Jesus showed His disciples how to have peace in this world and live without fear by breathing a new kind of comfort into them - the Holy Spirit! How can we find that same kind of hope today by better understanding the power of God through the Holy Spirit *with* and *in* us?

INTO THE WORD

1. About two thousand years ago after a major event that shook the world (Jesus' crucifixion and death), the disciples were confused, afraid, and found themselves seeking isolation. That is -- until Jesus appeared in His glorified body and comforted them -- with His peace! It was a very unique moment in the history of the world when Jesus then left the Holy Spirit with His followers as He ascended back into Heaven. As believers, how can we better leverage the power of the Holy Spirit to help us in our lives? Consider a few of the scripture references that Pastor Dave gave us in the sermon notes to start (Acts 9:31; Act 13:2,4; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; and Romans 14:17; 15:13)
2. Reread John 20:21-23. Remember, what is it that forgives sins? So, how can you and I forgive sins?
3. Spend some time looking at the progression of God's involvement with people. In the Old Testament the people wanted God to relate to them in what way? In the Gospels? In the Epistles continuing through today? What do you observe and what response do you have to your observations?

APPLICATION

4. Pastor Dave said, "Receiving is when you have all of the Spirit. Filling is when the Spirit has all of you." It is easy to keep pieces of our lives back from the Holy Spirit and be in denial about it. What are some areas where we may not be "filled" with the Holy Spirit, which commonly go overlooked?
5. Thomas did not believe the other disciples had seen Jesus, even though he heard the testimony of many men that he knew well and presumably trusted. Why do you think we still doubt God, even though we see the evidence of what God has done? How do we overcome our doubt?
6. We are all works in progress. What is one area of our lives which we can yield to the Holy Spirit for Him to fill, complete, or comfort?

PRAYER

Lord, please grant us the opportunity to comfort those who have not experienced true peace as we share the gospel boldly. Allow the Holy Spirit inside us to guide and direct unbelievers to accept the invitation of a relationship with Jesus. And let those of us who have already received the Holy Spirit to be filled with peace and joy, so that the Spirit may have all of us - including areas of our lives which we have not yet yielded over to Him. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

SUGGESTED ANSWER GUIDE / MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS:

Question 1:

Consider the following ways the Holy Spirit assists us. What verses below especially minister to your heart, or what are ways you have experienced some of the following?

- Comforts (Acts 9:31)
- Guides and directs (Acts 13:2,4)
- Transforms us (2 Corinthians 3:17-18)
- Empowers everyday life (Romans 14:17; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Jude 20)
- Confirms God's word (Hebrews 2:4)
- Sanctifies our actions (Romans 15:16)
- Infuses joy (Acts 13:52; Romans 14:17-19)
- Keeps us to the end (Ephesians 1:13-14)
- Fills us with praise (Acts 2:4)
- Communicates the Father's love (Romans 5:5; Ephesians 3:14-19)
- Confirms our gifts (Acts 1:8; 4:8, 31; 6:5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52)

Question 2:

Consider: In *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee* (Matthew through Romans; page 498-499), Dr. McGee writes:

"This is an important verse which is greatly misunderstood. John Calvin writes: 'When Christ enjoins the apostles to forgive sins, He does not convey to them what is peculiar to Himself. It belongs to Him to forgive sins. He only enjoins them in His name to proclaim the forgiveness of sins.'

Nowhere in the book of Acts or in the epistles do we find any instance of an apostle remitting the sins of anyone. They do go everywhere, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins. Let me ask the question: What is it that forgives sins? Even God cannot just arbitrarily forgive sins. Forgiveness of sins is only and alone through the blood of Jesus Christ. Back in the Old Testament, the forgiveness of sins was based on the fact that Christ would come and die. God saved 'on credit' in the Old Testament until Christ would come and pay the penalty. Today God forgives our sins when we believe that Christ died for them.

How can you and I remit sins? By telling the gospel! This is the greater work which we shall do. When somebody turned and believed on Jesus while he was here on earth, that was wonderful. But what is staggering is when you or I simply give out the Word of God, and someone is born-again and becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus. 'Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them' happens when you and I proclaim the gospel of the grace of God. That is the most glorious privilege that there is today, my friend.

We have a responsibility. If we do not preach the gospel to the world, their sins will not be remitted.

...We have the only thing that will bring forgiveness to the world. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ..."

Question 4:

Philippians 2:3-7 – It is easy to get so wrapped up in our own life and our own problems that we ignore the needs of those around us. These verses not only remind us to look out for those around us, but to do "**nothing** from selfish ambition" (emphasis mine). How often do we do nothing out of selfishness?

James 1:19-27 – Our attitudes and responses are often one area that we keep from the Spirit. We make excuses, saying that our anger is justified. But according to these verses, if we can't keep our responses/words in check (bridled), then our religion is "worthless" (v. 26).

Psalms 37:1-9 – It is easy to look at those in the world who have something we want, and rather than waiting on the Lord's timing, we imitate the world's ways in order to obtain it.

Question 5:

Michael Patton from Credo House Ministries says, "...think of doubt as the gap between our current faith and perfect faith. If this is the case, we all doubt." A few things to keep in mind when dealing with doubt.

- It is in our nature to rely on what we can understand (Proverbs 3:5). But since God is so far beyond our understanding, overcoming our doubts takes our commitment and work, and God's work in our hearts. (Jeremiah 29:11-13; Mark 9:24).
- Remember that we are supposed to "Test all things" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). That includes what we already believe. Author Pat Higgins says "Experience proves that not all that we believe is truth, even if held fast for forty years. We have to test our beliefs continually and rigorously against the only standard that counts—the Bible"
- While God has provided answers to many things, there are some things that are only for Him (Deuteronomy 29:29). While we may never understand the Trinity or why He allows certain things to happen, what we *do* understand is enough for us to rest in God when these mysteries arise.
- If you are doubting your faith, you should also be doubting your doubts. Is your doubt so compelling that it can't be questioned? "When we go through times of doubt, we need to make sure we are critical of our doubts as well. Doubt usually doesn't offer a better solution; it just nags at the one we already have." – Michael Patton

Remember that doubt is not unbelief. Hold fast to the faith that you do have and stand strong in the answers God has provided. Often, the doubts we have are secondary (when the world was created, when Christ will return, etc). When you experience these doubts, remember that God tells us in His Word what is important. Read Romans 10:10-14, John 3:16-21, and Micah 6:8 for just a few reminders of what is important to God.