How to `hear` the Holy Spirit

Wilbur N. Pickering, ThM PhD

Clearly, to begin, you must have the Holy Spirit, before you can hear Him. So how does one get the Holy Spirit?

Allow me to give my understanding of the sequence of events involved in receiving new life in Christ:

1) I believe into Jesus. The Text always has 'believe into' (εις) Jesus or His name, never 'believe in' (εν). A change of location is involved, from being outside of Christ to being in Him. That change involves commitment, and a change of worldview.

2) He baptizes me with Holy Spirit. Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8 and Luke 3:16 all have the Baptizer saying that Jesus will baptize people with Holy Spirit. In John 1:33 God Himself says that. So when and how does Jesus do it? I take it that after Pentecost He does so from His position at the Father's right hand (1 Peter 3:21-22), and He does it as soon as a person believes into Him. Cornelius offers a concrete example.[1] (Please see my article, "Baptisms in the Bible", available from my site: www.prunch.org.)

3) Holy Spirit regenerates me, giving me a new nature.

4) Probably at the same time, He baptizes me into Christ's body. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 explains that it is the Holy Spirit who baptizes us into Christ: ". . . so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." The primary reference here is probably to the Church as being Christ's body.[2]

5) Then Holy Spirit takes up residence within me, and my body becomes His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). It is the Holy Spirit within me who helps and enables me to appropriate the benefits that Christ's victory on the cross projects towards me.

Why would, or should, anyone want to 'hear' the Holy Spirit? Presumably to receive instruction and orientation, with a view to following or obeying it. In John 4:23-24 Sovereign Jesus said that the Father is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. To worship 'in truth' excludes mere curiosity. We must be committed to obey before we know what the order is. James 1:5-8 states plainly

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[1] "To **Him** all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes into Him will receive forgiveness of sins." While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all who were hearing the message (Acts 10:43-44). This was the crucial bit of information they were waiting for, what they had to do to be saved. The minute Peter said, "believe into Jesus", they did! And the Holy Spirit came upon them!

[2] A secondary reference could be to Jesus' physical body. If we become part of Jesus' body, then whatever happened to that body happened to us. If that body died, we did. If it was buried, so were we. If it was raised from the dead, we will be too. Correction—we already have new life in Christ, and are to live on that basis.

that God generally does not answer a double-minded person. We cannot play games with the Sovereign of the Universe!

How can we know when the Holy Spirit is dealing with us? It depends on intimacy and relationship. In John 15:14-15 (in the upper room) Jesus said: “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his owner is doing; rather I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I heard from my Father.” Amazing, the Sovereign offers us the privilege of being His friends, but first we must be His slaves, doing whatever He commands us. An owner will share his dream, his ‘big idea’ with a friend, but not necessarily with a slave. Now consider Psalm 32:8-9: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule.” Bits and whips cause physical pain, and altogether too often that is the way that God has to deal with us. To be guided by someone’s eye requires intimacy, and to develop intimacy requires time. To develop intimacy with the Holy Spirit we must spend time reading His Word and asking Him to instruct us as we do so. To be guided by someone’s eye, you must pay attention to that eye.

“Whatever I command you”—before God will give us individual commands, we must be living according to the standards that are laid down in the Scriptures. God’s written Revelation is the starting point and is expressly called the Holy Spirit’s ‘sword’ (Ephesians 6:17), and He uses it in a variety of ways (1 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12). James 1:22-25 compares the Word to a mirror, only this mirror tells us the truth about ourselves, and is therefore uncomfortable. Individual commands are reserved for slaves and friends. Since a slave exists to do what his owner commands, it is in the owner’s own interest to be sure that the slave knows what he is supposed to do. A slave has to know what he is supposed to do, but he will not necessarily be told why the owner wants him to do it. To know what we are supposed to do, we must ask specifically to be guided.

In passing, let me say that I am not always full of the Spirit, but I am never without Him. This is important. If you ask Him to warn you when you are in danger or about to do something you shouldn’t, He usually will. I believe it was Oswald Chambers who wrote about the ‘checks’ of the Spirit; He ‘checks’ or warns you when you need it. One day a former colleague of mine was walking on a path in the Amazon jungle, when he felt the Spirit tell him to stop, so he did. He looked around and down and saw a very poisonous snake in the path ahead of him. If he had not stopped, he would have been bitten. Apart from the Holy Spirit`s `checks`, we all need discernment, and the Holy Spirit gives discernment. We need to develop the habit of always asking Him for discernment and guidance whenever we encounter a situation where we need it. Depending on our level of intimacy, we sometimes receive them without asking.

Also in passing, how does one avoid becoming an 'old wineskin'? Many 'churches' began with 'new wine', but did not continue to grow. They settled into a customary procedure and became 'old wineskins' in their turn. I would say that the only way to avoid it, whether as an individual or as a group, is to be constantly listening to the Holy Spirit as we read His Word. We must be open to change and in fact actually change, as He calls things to our attention. **However**, that will make us unpredictable.

Recall what Sovereign Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:8: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you (sg) hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who has been begotten by the Spirit." Notice that the Lord is saying here that it is **we** who are to be unpredictable, like the wind, or the Spirit ("comes" and "goes" are in the present tense). If you are really under the control of the Spirit you will do unexpected things, just like He does. And that will make you a *persona non grata*.

How so? Well, no religious denomination or school can tolerate someone who listens to and obeys the Holy Spirit. All such institutions are committed to a particular doctrinal 'package',[3] and the Holy Spirit does not like packages; He cannot be put in a box. No such school can tolerate a student, or a faculty member, who listens to and obeys the Holy Spirit. One of the conditions for being on the faculty is that you must respect your colleagues: respect for colleagues trumps respect for the Holy Spirit. The point I am making is that listening to the Holy Spirit carries a price. Do not expect human approval. John 12:43 refers to some people who "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God", and he was not being complementary.

Furthermore, there is the matter of dying to self. In 1 Corinthians 15:31 Paul wrote, "I die every day". Paul could not have been referring to actual physical death, obviously, since Hebrews 9:27 affirms that it is appointed to men to die only once (no re-incarnation). He may well have faced possible death often enough, but I suppose he is referring to dying to himself, to his own ambitions, ideas and wishes, so as to embrace God's will. Remember what the Lord Jesus Himself said in Luke 9:23. "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me." Some 13% of the Greek manuscripts add 'daily', as in most versions, but if you take it up, you have it. It sounds like being without a cross is not an option for those who follow Jesus. In those days a cross represented death; as with Paul, Jesus was not talking about physical death.

Then there is Romans 12:1-2.

> Now then, brothers, I exhort you, in view of God's compassions, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, satisfying to God—your intelligent duty.

[3] The institutions financial survival may depend on 'toeing the line'.

> Yes, stop conforming to the pattern of this world; rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind so as to be able to experience the good and satisfying and perfect will of God.[4]

Any animal in the Old Testament had to die in order to become a sacrifice, so what does Paul mean by a 'living' one? You live 'dying'. To present the body is presumably a metonym for presenting one's whole self.

Now consider Romans 8:14, "as many as are led by God's Spirit, these are God's sons". Hey, wait a minute; this is not what I was taught in Seminary! The Text says that in order to be God's son you must be led by God's Spirit! Verse 12 is addressed to 'brothers', and verse 13 says that to live according to the flesh results in death. But someone living according to the flesh is obviously <u>not</u> being led by the Spirit. You cannot die unless you are alive; notice also the "if indeed" in verse 17. In order to be led by the Holy Spirit, you have to listen to Him!

Consider also Galatians 5:16-18.

> I say then: walk in the Spirit, and you will <u>not</u> fulfill any lust of the flesh. Because the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh; they oppose each other; it follows that you may not do the things that you wish. However, if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

What the flesh wants is bad for you; what the Spirit wants is good for you. To be led by the Spirit is not to be under a set of rules; it is a relationship.

To walk is to take a sequence of individual steps. In physical walking we do not think about the individual steps, they are 'automatic', unless unusual circumstances oblige us to do so. I would say that walking in the Spirit is similar. We all have responsibilities and commitments that take up most of our time, but a commitment to Christ and His Kingdom should be our controlling factor. Each morning I commit myself and my day's activities to the Holy Spirit and ask for His protection and direction. I then do the logical and reasonable thing to do within my context, except that I expressly ask the Holy Spirit to 'check' me when necessary.

Consider also 1 Thessalonians 5:19, "Do not quench the Spirit!" When you quench a lighted candle, you put out its light. To quench the Spirit is presumably to 'put out' or refuse His light, to suppress or ignore His voice when He speaks to us—this would include any rejection of the revealed will of God.

To recapitulate:

1) We must **have** the Holy Spirit, before we can listen to Him.

[4] 'The pattern of this world' belongs to Satan, so it must be rejected in order to do God's will.

2) We must be willing and ready to obey.
3) We must maintain an active relationship with Him.
4) We must be open to change and in fact actually change, as He calls things to our attention.
5) We must die to self.