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FRUITFULNESS: BEGINNING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

How do we receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our experience? To obtain the proper perspective to be able to answer this question, we must discern between objective realities and our subjective experience. **Of first importance, is the realization that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the church in the *once-for-all* action described by Peter in Acts 2:33.** His coming and His ministry had been promised by Jesus (Lk. 24:46-49; Jn. 14-16), and had finally been experienced at Pentecost in the upper room. According to Peter's explanation of their experience, Jesus, "having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, ...has poured forth this which you both see and hear" (Acts 2:33). This was a one-time gift which was the completion of Old Testament promise, and the introduction of a new order (Joel 2:21-32; Ezk. 11:19,20). **The Holy Spirit, having been given, does not need to be given again and again to the Church.** He has entered upon a new ministry. He has come to stay (Jn. 14:16,17). That is the historical fact upon which all our genuine experience is based.

There is another objective fact which is important to mention. We Christians received the Holy Spirit at our new birth into Jesus. This was our Spirit-baptism into Jesus' Body (I Cor. 12:13). Some teach that the baptism of the Spirit is a second work of the Holy Spirit which follows conversion. They feel it is given to empower the Christian, either for ministry or for holy living. Usually, advocates of this theology also indicate that people seeking this experience can expect a particular supernatural manifestation to indicate the receipt of His coming. Although proponents of this view may pepper their arguments with Scripture references, their theology does not truly reflect the Biblical teaching. Their reasoning exemplifies a very common phenomenon in the history of the Church. People tend not to determine their doctrinal beliefs solely from the Scriptures. They may *claim* to be interpreting their experiences in light of what the Bible teaches. In reality, however, people often tend to begin their reasoning process from what their personal experience has been. They begin with that as the norm and touchstone of what is real, and proceed to study the Bible to glean whatever verses they may find that support their understanding of their experience. This is a very misguided, crooked method of study, one which can lead to significant confusion. In order to be "rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Tim 2:23), we must hold fast to what the Scriptures *clearly* teach as the fundamental and primary source of truth, allowing these teachings to explain to us the theological basis for our experiences. Our perception is oftentimes incomplete, or affected by numerous personal or circumstantial factors which we may not fully understand, or be able to account for. As such, though experience may be an important source of information, the Scriptures must be viewed as the primary source, that which guides us accurately through the sea of informational clues that we traverse in our search for truth. **What the Bible plainly teaches is that because we became His children, He came to dwell within us** (Gal. 4:5,6). At that point of real faith, we were washed, reborn, sealed, and indwelt by the mighty Spirit of God (Jn. 1:12,13; Eph. 1:13,14). **Furthermore, because He is the omnipotent, personal God, not just an impersonal force or influence, we have all of Him that we can get.** We either have Him, or we do not.

An interesting observation to consider about this whole controversy is that if there was a two-stage receipt of the Holy Spirit, the first stage being the new birth and indwelling of the Spirit and the second stage being a special empowering for ministry or holiness of life, it would seem to be of great importance to emphasize this and encourage believers to pursue this experience. There is, however, never a hint of any such idea. The only picture painted in the epistles assumes that they already have the Holy Spirit (e.g., Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13,14; Gal. 3:2; 4:6). **There is not even *one* example of the apostles encouraging or commanding those "problem Christians", to whom their letters were often addressed, to seek the baptism of the Spirit, or the anointing of the Spirit, or any such thing. Rather, the emphasis is upon discovering**

and responding to what they *already* have (e.g., Col. 2:6,9,10; Gal. 3:1-14,26-29; 4:6,7; II Pet. 1:3,4). Such language as “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18); “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16,25); being “led by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18); and “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22,23) implies a previous presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life. **The focus seems to be the idea of responding to His influence in one’s life. The emphasis is *not* on getting more of the Spirit, or even a new activity of the Spirit, but on *acting in accordance with His inworking.*** This conspicuous absence of any command to be baptized in the Spirit cannot make sense, unless the theology constructed by the two-stage theologians is in error. If the baptism is identical with the gift of the Spirit at new birth, however, then such an admonition would be pointless, since all Christians already have been Spirit-baptized. The objective fact is that having believed, we received the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13; Acts 10:47; 11:15-17). The infinite, omnipotent God has come to dwell within us (Jn. 14:23; Acts 5:3,4).

In our subjective experience, however, there can be many different levels, types, or gradations of our awareness of His ministry within us, or of our response to His leadings. From this perspective, we might say we need more of the Holy Spirit. Actually, **properly speaking, we do not need more of Him. We do need to see, or experience, a greater measure of His influence,** however. When we see more of His activity, we tend to say that we have more of Him. In reality, He has been allowed to have His way with us. We have become open channels for His indwelling power.

Father, thank you that because we have believed the gospel about Jesus that You have given us the Holy Spirit. We were sealed with Him. His presence in our lives is the mark of Your ownership of us, and the promise that You intend to finish what you started with us, even the pledge of our full redemption at Jesus’ return. Lord, we want to experience a more clear guidedness, a more powerful inworking, and a greater usefulness to You. We know that Your Spirit has been given to us for those very things. We don’t need more of Him. He needs more of us to be yielded to Him. God, open us up to being led by Your Spirit, so we could experience and express more of Jesus, as we walk with Him.

FOR MEDITATION: Ephesians 1:13.

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation -- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise...”

The Beauty of the Bride: Love Drawing Near To People In Need

“The church as a bride is not to be a mannequin on display in a stained-glass window ‘bridal shop’. Her beauty is operational, dynamic, and penetrating. The beautiful bride is not content to withdraw, obsessed with having peace and tranquility. She refuses to sit back and clip coupons on the spiritual investments of her forefathers in the faith. Love becomes her trademark, her signature and her endorsement as she deals in basic needs. It is Christ’s actual love which is at work through the preaching, fellowship, worshiping, and serving of His bride.

“Love in Scripture has an interesting bedfellow. It’s spelled n-e-i-g-h-b-o-r. Loving your neighbor is part of the greatest commandment! Oh? But who is my neighbor? A neighbor is someone in need that we can help. He may be beaten up and lying beside the road, but it is more likely that his wounds are carefully hidden behind a mask of adequacy. Our goal is not to determine who our neighbor is, but to be one.

“So what is a neighbor? The word ‘neighbor’ comes from a root which means to ‘be near, or close by’. Therefore, to be a neighbor is to develop the capacity to draw near. ‘To draw near’ presupposes distance. It suggests that there are obstacles to nearness. The clash between the Christian and non-Christian subcultures is one of the biggest obstacles. Cultural ‘shock’ is very real. Bear in mind that many distinctives of a particular Christian subculture are often just that -- cultural, not biblical.”

Abridged from Lifestyle Evangelism by Joseph C. Aldrich (Multnomah Press: Portland. 1981), pages 66,67.