

I Will Send the Spirit



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When I came to faith in Christ, serious changes began in my life. No, I was not freed from alcohol or drugs, drawn out of a life of dishonesty or crime, or delivered from a cult. In a very quiet personal moment I discovered that God loves me which stopped me dead in my tracks and changed my whole life orientation. Christian friends began to recruit me for their church, including those who insisted I now needed “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” that would equip me to do wonderful things and speak in “unknown” tongues. For two years I studied the New Testament, asked a lot of questions, and examined various denominations.

Today is the traditional day on the church calendar when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). The passage we study today opened my head as well as my heart to the incredible gift God gives to every individual who trusts life to Christ: the faithful, powerful, generous, unequalled gift of his Spirit. Jesus said it so clearly: “the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (v. 26).

John 13-17 has often been called Jesus’ “farewell discourse,” but in reality it is a glimpse of what is to come for all Jesus’ followers through the centuries. He never promised us freedom from life’s complications, success in the world’s terms, or a lucky charm for every problem. Those first disciples were about to witness the impossible and they would need to learn that, just as God the Father is our only true hope, and God the Son has broken through the doorway of death, now the Holy Spirit would continue to bless and work in every believer’s life.

The Apostle Paul, an expert in the laws and religious rituals of Israel, emphasized in his writings the critical place of the Holy Spirit in the life of every believer. In Paul’s most expansive theological treatise, Romans, he declares: “if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you ... for all who are being led by the

Spirit of God, these are sons (children) of God ... and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if we indeed suffer with Him in order that we may be glorified with Him” (Rom. 8:11-17).

There is an intimacy in the Apostle John’s account of the confusing and traumatic last days of Jesus’ ministry and the details of the Last Supper. John does not emphasize the bread and cup; instead he focuses on our role as servants as Jesus washes the disciples’ feet (Jn. 13:3-10). Note Jesus strongly connected the idea of keeping his commandments with those “who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me” ... “will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (v. 21). For those who love Christ beyond the temporary darkness of the cross there is the promise that “we (the Father and the Son) will come and make our home with them” (v. 23).

It may be easy to say “I love God,” but Jesus repeatedly demonstrated his connection to God by his actions and his compassion for the outsiders of that society. Christian faith demands a consistency in lifestyle and attitude. Three times in this passage Jesus says: “if you love me, you will keep my commandments” (v. 15); “they who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me” (v. 21); “those who love me will keep my word” (v. 23).

What is the result of our obedience built, not on fear, but on God’s love? When you live by the teachings of Jesus, he promises “we will come to you and make our home with you” (v. 23).

Be careful you do not turn this idea into an “earn as you go” kind of faith. Christians live by the example and words of Christ, not to earn or deserve God’s love, but because we have been changed within and our desire is to live for our loving Father. Jesus is very clear about our source of strength and guidance in living as God’s people: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (v. 26).

Too often we reduce our Christian faith to membership in an organization, adherence to a list of religious rules, or acceptance of philosophical statement

or creed. Christianity is a relationship with God, a commitment of life to the Jesus who lived, died, and lived again for us. This faith is not a philosophical abstraction, but an integral change that empowers us to see beyond the limited perspective of this flawed world. Only by the presence of God’s Spirit within us can we see life as the Creator intends it to be.

According to Jesus “the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth ... because it neither sees him or knows him,” but you as a believer “know him, because he abides with you, and will be in you” (v. 17). The Greek word translated “Advocate” can mean counselor, helper, or comforter. The Holy Spirit is all of these. He is not a shadowy being floating around in the air, waiting for our summons to solve a problem or work a miracle.

The Spirit is God with you. You are never alone. God is the Creator who walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, the Son who died on the cross and arose from the grave, the Spirit who stays with you every moment of your earthly life. Nobody can adequately explain this grace of God any more than they can explain God. But that diverse cluster of disciples who struggled to understand what Jesus told them that day were the same disciples who spread the gospel across the world of their day. We follow their example, encouraged by their faithfulness, learning from their mistakes, and depending on the abiding presence of God’s Spirit in our world.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful, and much easier, if we could have another outpouring of the Spirit like that recorded in Acts 2:1-43 every six months! But, like the crucifixion, Pentecost was the event that announced God’s grace to the world. What followed then, and now, is the ongoing reality of God’s grace in the individual lives of his people. The Holy Spirit is at work within you and through you, when you study God’s Word, when you pray, when you worship, when you share God’s love, when you reach out to someone in need, when you comfort those suffering, and when you stand against evil and injustice. God’s Spirit is not a personal body guard or servant. The Holy Spirit is God in you, teaching, guiding, strengthening, and blessing. Pay attention! Jesus promised ... “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever” (v. 15).

Retired after almost 50 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques. Formations is a curriculum series from Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc. through NextSunday Resources.