

THE PURSUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT PART VIII

Today we are into our eighth message on the pursuit of the Holy Spirit.

Last week we emphasized the importance of being Spirit filled and examined several examples from scriptures where believers were filled with the Spirit and examined the events surrounding those happenings.

I hope that you recall that when we talked about evidence that believers had been filled, we said that perhaps the most important evidence was the change that it brought in believer's lives, and we could expand that to say that the ministry of the Holy Spirit became much more evident and predominate in the way that the early church organized and evangelized.

Today, we will first look at some of the examples of how the coming of the Holy Spirit in New fullness affected the early Church.

The first need for administrative and organizational skills is identified in Acts chapter six when the management of food distribution for widows comes under scrutiny.

Managing the disputes was a burden on the apostles and detracting from their ministry.

So, it was decided that some believers other than the apostles would be selected to manage this issue. We pick up the story in Acts chapter six verse three: (NLT)

And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."

Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

So, we see here the selection of Spirit filled workers from among the pool of believers.

But it would seem that Stephen is not content with the administrative assignment and he also becomes involved in evangelism. Remember from our previous study that one of the changes that occurred to those who were filled with the Spirit was that of bold witnessing.

We read these words from Acts 6:8-10 (NLT)

Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him.

They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

So, we have seen here, and will note further in our study, how the church now selects and uses believers who were filled with the Spirit for both administrative and evangelistic roles.

Remember also that one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to provide the right words at the right time. And so, we see here that the Spirit filled Stephen is given words of wisdom and power, so powerful and so convicting that so one can debate him or withstand their impact.

Unfortunately, in this case the anointing and boldness that Stephen receives, coupled with the powerful conviction of the Holy Spirit, leads to Stephen's martyrdom.

But the presence of the Spirit remains with Stephen right up to his death.

In Acts 7:55 (NLT) we read:

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

And as we travel through the chapters of Acts, we see in several cases that the Holy Spirit is directly leading the members of that early church.

Last week we touched briefly on the story of Cornelius.

In Acts 11:12(NLT) we see Peter explaining that the Holy Spirit led him in spite of his personal apprehension about Gentiles to welcome Cornelius and his entourage.

In that verse Peter says:

"The Holy Spirit told me to go with them and not to worry that they were Gentiles. These six brothers here accompanied

me, and we soon entered the home of the man who had sent for us.”

Now the believer named Barnabas, who became a partner of Paul for a time, is another example of the church selecting a Spirit filled believer and the Holy Spirit’s involvement in sending people out to evangelize.

This is what we read about the character of Barnabas in Acts 11:24 (NLT):

Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and strong in faith. And many people were brought to the Lord.

So, Barnabas is full of the Holy Spirit and many people come to the Lord. The anointing of the Spirit, power and boldness on the words of Barnabas results in many saved.

And then moving down to Acts Chapter thirteen beginning at verse one:

Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called “the black man”), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul.

One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.” So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way. So, Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit.

So, once again, the Holy Spirit is directing the plans of the early church specifying who will be sent where they will go.

Now in Acts 16 beginning at verse six we see something quite the opposite from the Spirit leading to the Spirit preventing. We read these words in Acts 16:6:

Next Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia, because the Holy Spirit had prevented them from preaching the word in the province of Asia at that time. Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they headed north for the province of Bithynia, but again the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to go there. So instead, they went on through Mysia to the seaport of Troas

So, I hope that you can see from these examples how huge a difference the Holy Spirit made to the early church, both in individual believer's lives and in the way the church operated and evangelized.

The early church becomes very much motivated and led by the Holy Spirit. What a contrast between what we see in the church of Acts and the church in general around us today.

Now when we think about this, I would submit to you that most of us would agree that our conversations, and our thoughts about our faith tend to be much more about God the Father and God the Son than on God the Spirit.

For example, as we head into the Easter season, we will probably be talking much about God the Father sending his Son and the sacrifice the Son made on our behalf. And it is good that we would be very much aware of these important thoughts.,

But thoughts about the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's role in our churches seems rather diminished by comparison.

One would almost think at times that twenty-first century Christianity centers entirely around Jesus and the work the Father sent him here to accomplish.

And in many cases, there seems to be little tangible evidence to confirm that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is actively directing believers and churches.

So, let's give some thoughts to these three verses:

First, from John 14:26 (NLT)

But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

The second from John 16, verses seven and eight:

But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

And the third if from John 16: Verse sixteen –

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

So, there are some important points to be noted here. First the sending of the Spirit into the church world was commissioned and endorsed by both the Father and the Son.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit was promised unconditionally to be with us forever. There was no end date intended. There was no best before date defined. The Spirit was sent with the intention to bring his wide variety of ministries and gifts to the church until the end of the age.

And this new dispensation of the Spirit was going to be substantially different in that previously he had been with them but now as going to be in them.

Thirdly, there was no indication that the various ministries of the Holy Spirit were going to change. He was still going to be the advocate. He was still going to be the comforter.

The Holy Spirit would still be the one who would give seeking believers spiritual gifts.

And just as importantly he was still going to be the one who would convict.

Now one of the most important questions we can ask ourselves as believers and churches today is: “why is there so little tangible evidence of Holy Spirit anointing, empowerment, directing and conviction in the church today?”

For the moment let’s focus on the question: “why is there so little in the way of conviction in the church and in the world today?” A good part of the answer to that question is because there is so little evidence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in believers today.

But let’s just think for a moment about one aspect of the Spirit’s ministry, that of conviction.

It would seem in many cases that the conviction ministry of the Holy Spirit has slipped into the background if not disappeared entirely.

So why is that? Here are some possibilities.

First, Conviction is extremely unpopular, and quite frequently very unwelcome. Probably hated is a better descriptor.

Teaching or preaching about sin and judgment are totally unpopular. If we look at the history of the church, and studied periods where there was great revival, we would see that those periods were characterized by conviction. Sermons and teaching contained much about sin and coming judgement.

There were lots of special meetings, lots of travelling evangelists, lots of camp meetings and so on. Conviction was powerful in those movements. Many came to Christ for the first time and many others renewed their commitment from their lackadaisical spiritual state.

That's why they were called revivals, the convicting power of the Holy Spirit challenging all who would listen about their fallen spiritual state.

For example, history records situations where Charles Finney visited factories and workers were so powerfully convicted that they fell to their knees right beside their machines and cried to God for mercy.

But if we move to more recent history, we could find copious examples where denominations or churches eased pastors out who were insisting on preaching the whole gospel, insisting on speaking about things like sin and coming judgement.

Two thousand years previously Paul had predicted to Timothy that this was inevitably going to happen.

In II Timothy 4:3 (NLT) he writes:

For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.

Likewise, evangelistic campaigns and camp meetings where the preaching and teaching gave the Holy Spirit a chance to work in calloused hearts are now a thing of the past.

The Holy Spirit's role is to anoint and amplify truth and then convict the hearer based on that truth. Without the faithful presentation of God's word the Holy Spirit's role is diminished.

So, the first reason we are not experiencing much tangible evidence that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is active in our lives and in our churches is that we have made the uncomfortable aspects of his ministry unwelcome and to a large degree organized church programs to avoid the uncomfortable rather ensure that the program is Spirit led as was the case we see in the early church.

Secondly, there is in many cases a reluctance to welcome and embrace the role of the Holy Spirit because of bad experiences.

And there are lots of bad experiences one can point to where things happened that were not genuine manifestations of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We should remember that the Holy Spirit and his ministry is the God ordained gift to empower that church and grow the Kingdom. And as such you can be sure that our enemy Satan will be doing everything possible to sow confusion and destroy the work of the Spirit.

We need only to look to Paul's struggles with the church in Corinth to illustrate that point. The enemy was much at work in individual believers and much at work in the church as well.

So, in summary to our main point today. The infilling of the Spirit radically changed believers and radically changed the early church.

We see that in the New Testament church the believers, not just the Apostle, but believers who came into the church were filled with the Spirit, and began to boldly proclaim their new faith.

The church and church leaders were guided and directed by the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8:14 Paul makes the point that *"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."*

So, if that is true then it would also be logical to conclude that children of God, or churches of God are led or should be led by the Spirit of God.

For our last thought for today we want to transition from thinking about the role and activity of the Spirit in churches to one of his roles in believers.

And the point we wish to make is this:

Being filled with the Spirit is critical in dealing with our sinful nature and growing in Holiness.

Remember we said that one of the evidences of being filled with the Spirit is a changed life.

Let's look at: Romans 8 beginning at verse five and reading through to verse nine.

⁵ Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. ⁶ So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace. ⁷ For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will.

That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God.

But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you.

Our over all point for today is that one of the major evidences of the spirit is a changed life.

Paul here makes the point that we will either choose to live our life dominated by our sinful nature or we will embrace the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And the contrast between those two lifestyles is dramatic. One lead to death, the other leads to life.

One results in a life that can never please God, the other leads to a life that enjoys a renewed relationship with God

because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, and because we welcome the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us and yes, convict us when we are straying back to the influences of our sinful nature.

So in closing today can we be so bold as to welcome the Holy Spirit to help us with some self examination.

The first question would be: “Am I living my life led by the Spirit, welcoming his presence and his convicting power?”

Or if truth be told: “Am I living my life, making my decisions, establishing my values and choices based on my sinful nature?”

Is my life an example of radical change as a result of the Holy Spirit coming in fullness in my life?