

“God’s Holy Spirit”

by Pastor Steve Hammond on 5/31/2020
Text: Acts 2:1-13 at FBC of Newport, NH

//When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.//

—Acts 2:1-4 (NIV)

Who is this Holy Spirit? And why is he such a precious and important gift to God’s people?

The Holy Spirit is God, every bit as much as the Father and the Son. But let’s face it, when you come right down to it, God is really quite different from us. Yes, we are made in the image of God, but that doesn’t mean God himself is made in *our* image or that he should fit neatly into our expectations and explanations. So in God’s revelation you have things like the trinity and the incarnation and the cross. Not things one might expect. And instead of having the Father, the Son and the Holy Mother (as Muhammed erroneously thought was Christian doctrine), God reveals himself as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It’s not what our ears might expect, but it’s what is most accurate, as revealed by the One who’s in the position to know—Jesus, the Word of God.

So what is it about the Holy Spirit? What makes Jesus warn his disciples to do nothing about the Great Commission, refrain from preaching the Gospel and hold off on expanding the Kingdom of God until the promised Holy Spirit comes upon them? How can the Spirit be *that* important? Just who is this third Person of the trinity?

I don’t think we need an in depth explanation of the Holy Spirit here, though there’s a lot that could be said. Peter did give the crowd a scriptural explanation of the manifestations of the wind and the miracle of the languages being heard. He said what they were seeing and hearing was the beginning of the last days, where God’s Spirit is being poured out on all kinds of people. But he didn’t try to explain the Holy Spirit himself. Instead he moved on to explain and proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Then he urged the people to repent and believe this Good News.

Let me say this:

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon God’s people at Pentecost does not really need to be explained as much as it, or he, needs to be experienced. It’s not that explanations can’t be had; it’s just that explanations have now reached the point where they can go no further until the fullness of the Spirit of what’s being explained is received for what it truly is. And there’s certainly no point in the Apostles going out into the world to preach the Gospel if they themselves have not really been caught up in the truth of what it is. And what is it? It is nothing less than the knowing of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, in the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God.

Let me illustrate what I’m getting at.

ILLUS: Do you remember Helen Keller? I need only say her name and you know her story. Due to an illness at age two, Helen became blind, deaf and was unable to speak. When Helen was six years old, a miracle working teacher, Anne Sullivan, sought to teach her language, sign language and finger spelling. She could get a few simple words and ideas, but something big was missing. The whole concept of language was missing. Helen was communicating more like a parrot than a person.

But then came that crucial day when she had that experience at the water pump. As the water flowed over their hands, her teacher manipulated Helen's fingers to spell out "water". She knew the fingering, but she knew nothing until she got the spirit of that word into her heart. And she did! In an instant the light of recognition came over Helen Keller. She not only knew the word "water," she knew it was connected to the concept of language itself. After this you could hardly contain her as she pulled her teacher around everywhere, asking her to spell more and more words. You know the story. You know Helen Keller went on to college and to great works of communication. But if she had tried to do any of those works without first being filled with the spirit of that word "water" she would have had no chance, no matter how much time and teaching Anne Sullivan gave to her student.

The disciples of Jesus already had everything they needed to speak the language of the Gospel of Jesus. But the meaning of the single Word of God in "Jesus" is nothing less than God himself! So, God himself had to come upon those who believed in that Word. Now that Jesus was fully glorified and at the right hand of God, he could do just that. And so he did at Pentecost. God poured out his Holy Spirit over all his disciples. To show this he empowered their tongues to reverse the tower of Babel by praising God in all the languages of the land.

And this promised Holy Spirit is given now to everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord. No one calls Jesus "Lord" today apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit. (see 1 Corinthians 12:3) This is why the scriptures say we are living in "the last days." We are living in the days that are significantly different from the Old Testament, even different from when Jesus was still establishing the Gospel. We are living in the days when that Gospel Word has now been spoken. God has spoken himself into our world in Jesus and that message of grace and love, forgiveness and salvation is upon us. The water of its truth is being poured over us. All that is left for us to do is believe it, receive it. And let that Holy Spirit fill our lives with its meaning and power!

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is nothing less than God. He's the fullness of God released from that single Word of Jesus and the Gospel. And he is promised to everyone who repents and believes in Christ.

This is why he is so important. Without him we are powerless, but with him we are living in the last days with the very power of God within us.

Praise God for his presence with us as he teaches us his Word in Christ. And praise God for his presence with us as he gives us his whole language as we receive that Word.