

THE CHURCH MUST LEARN WHAT IT MEANS TO ACCESS AND USE THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

By Bob Young

In many places, the church has stagnated and is seeking a new, fresh, life-giving Spirit to revive its message and reverse its lessening influence in the world. In some places, the church seems unaware that it is losing the battle. The current state of affairs is even more incredible because the church has access to the power of the Spirit. Why is the church often powerless?

Even when the church and its members recognize that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for us today, many churches and members do not know what the Holy Spirit does, how He does it, and how to activate His great power. Many people are looking for Holy Spirit power in the wrong places with false expectations. Amazingly, in some churches people are constantly talking about and mentioning the Holy Spirit but still the power is absent. Talking about the Holy Spirit will not cure the ills of this world. Jesus is the answer. Only Jesus can grant new life and power dynamic growth.

The church has access to God's Holy Spirit power, but the power is not automatic. It is possible to quench the Spirit, to hold the Spirit back. It is possible to misunderstand the Spirit's work and role. It is possible to expect of the Spirit that which God never intended. If your church is choking out the Spirit, or if your church misunderstands the Spirit, or if your church has unbiblical expectations of the Spirit, God's work will be hindered. It is time to get back to basics. It is time to restore God's plan for His Spirit in this world.

What does the Holy Spirit do?

When Jesus promised the coming the Holy Spirit (John 14-16), he said the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, of righteousness or justice, and of judgment. The Holy Spirit convicts the world by pointing to Jesus. The Holy Spirit exalts righteousness by pointing to Jesus. The Holy Spirit declares judgment by pointing to Jesus. The Holy Spirit speaks only what he receives (John 15). The Holy Spirit bears testimony of Jesus and points to Jesus.

Jesus' words show that the Spirit has a specific ministry (John 16). That ministry includes speaking with God's authority to confirm God's word (1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17), renewal (John 3:1-8; Titus 3), liberation (2 Cor. 3:16-18), empowerment (Acts 6:1-15), equipping (1 Cor. 12), influencing (Acts 16:1-5; Eph. 5:15ff), guiding away from worldliness (Rom. 8:12-14), and uniting (Eph. 4:1-3). Consistent with Romans 8, Christians are called to walk in the Spirit to avoid the evil desires of the world (Gal. 5:16-26).

Notice how many of the specific ministries of the Spirit involve our thinking. So that Christians can have access to the ministry of the Spirit, God has given us the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Paul connects taking up the sword of the Spirit with a vibrant prayer life (Eph. 6:17-20). A quick survey of the Bible texts above reveals that God gives us the gift of the Spirit at our baptism, the indwelling presence of the Spirit as we walk with Him and are constantly renewed and transformed; that God fills Christians with the Spirit enabling them to speak with boldness; and that the Holy Spirit empowers evangelism. We see opportunities to love, care, and share faith as we are empowered and equipped to use our spiritual gifts. We are led by the Spirit to avoid worldliness as we walk in the Spirit. Unity is empowered by the Spirit, which Paul connects with the unifying message of the Spirit (Eph. 4).

In another more extended study, I have shown that in the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit functioned in three primary ways—confirmation of truth, equipping and empowering, and giving certainty to God's promises.

Too many churches, members, church leaders, and preachers think that talking about the Holy Spirit, mentioning Him often, and attributing various things to him will somehow bring God's Holy Spirit power to reality. Such thinking fails to honor God's Word and God's description of the Holy Spirit. Until the church restores the work of the Holy Spirit, done by the power of the Holy Spirit, the wineskin will remain empty.

Let me summarize with three biblical concepts.

When the Holy Spirit is present, Christians take up the sword of the Spirit and pray frequently. The prayer life of the church and of the Christian is one indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit is present, the sword of the Spirit is wielded often and well. Spiritual ideas are communicated in spiritual words. God's people speak where God speaks, where the Holy Spirit speaks, testifying about Christ. The Holy Spirit is evident in a commitment to biblical truth.

When the Holy Spirit is present, God's people boldly share the gospel message. In the Bible, Spirit-filling always led to speaking.

The church must not place the Holy Spirit ahead of Jesus. The message of the church is Jesus. God makes possible the work of his people. The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is visible in prayer, Bible teachings, and evangelism. When someone claims to have or know the Holy Spirit, but is not a person of prayer, a person of the Word of God speaking Bible truths with Bible words, and an evangelistic person who is continually sharing the gospel, something is amiss!