

9. The Holy Spirit and the Church (1Q 2017—Holy Spirit and Spirituality)

Biblical material: Eph. 1:22, 23; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 6:3-7; Acts 17:11; Eph. 4:3-6; Acts 2:4-11.

Quotes

- I remind you that there are churches so completely out of the hands of God that if the Holy Spirit withdrew from them, they wouldn't find it out for many months. *A.W. Tozer*
- Men ought to seek with their whole hearts to be filled with the Spirit of God. Without being filled with the Spirit, it is utterly impossible that an individual Christian or a church can ever live or work as God desires. *Andrew Murray*
- We are not going to move this world by criticism of it nor conformity to it, but by the combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God. *Vance Havner*
- One of the special marks of the Holy Ghost in the Apostolic Church was the spirit of boldness. *A.B. Simpson*
- All Church power arises from the indwelling of the Spirit; therefore those in whom the Spirit dwells are the seat of Church power. But the Spirit dwells in the whole Church, and therefore the whole Church is the seat of Church power. *Charles Hodge*

Questions

What is so special about the work of the Holy Spirit in the church? How do we evaluate claims made “under the direction of the Holy Spirit”? What of others who make similar claims to us, but who believe differently? Why is church unity so important, and how is it best achieved? How do we judge?

Bible summary

Eph. 1:22, 23 explains that Christ is the head of the church, and we are the body. Paul writing in a situation of church disunity explains that we are all baptized by one Spirit and we were all given one Spirit to drink (1 Cor. 12:13). In this way we are baptized into Christ's death and united with his resurrection (Rom. 6:3-7). The Jews in Berea searched the Scriptures to find out whether what Paul told them was true (Acts 17:11). The Holy Spirit leads to unity: “Make every effort to remain one in the Spirit through the peace that binds you together. For there's one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope. The Lord is one, our trust in him is one, and there's one baptism; there's one God and Father of everyone. He is over all and through all and in all.” Eph. 4:3-6 FBV. Through the Holy Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost everyone was able to hear the gospel message in their own language (Acts 2:4-11).

Comment

How does the Holy Spirit work in the church? This is an important question since we are warned by Jesus to be on our guard against false christs, spurious signs and wonders, and counterfeit spirituality. If we know this to be true, how do we prepare ourselves? Isn't the greatest mistake to rely on great signs and miraculous manifestations, since these are the very things we are told will be used as Satan masquerades as Christ?

So why do so many Christians today look for the amazing and astounding, as if such experiences were proof of their divine origin? More than anything else, we should be running far *away* from such extravaganzas, and focusing on the inner truths revealed by the Spirit through reason and evidence. Otherwise we will be “sitting ducks” when the Arch-deceiver arrives.

For example, notice this: “Should a conflict arise between the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and beliefs based on argument and evidence, then it is the former which must take precedence over the latter, not vice versa.” (William Lane Craig). I include this since I *disagree* with it so much! How would we even know whether it is the Holy Spirit that is speaking unless we test the ideas against Scripture using argument and evidence? It is not enough to believe mere claims—even by the most respected Christian leaders. The Holy Spirit values truth so much that he willingly *invites* the closest scrutiny.

Others also make claims of how the Holy Spirit will endorse their views. For example: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.” [*Moroni 10:4* (Book of Mormon)]. How do you answer such an assertion of the Spirit’s endorsement?

How do we evaluate end-time “dreams and visions” and decide whether they are to be followed or not? Or since it is the last days, does every dream and vision count? Besides what do we need? A whole host of miracles? Is it amazing wonders we need, or something else?

The truth is (as Jesus mentioned in his parable of Lazarus) that even if people came back from the dead, people still would not believe. In fact, the graciousness of God and his desire to give us freedom is demonstrated especially in the fact that God has given us “sufficient evidence to believe but has not removed the possibility of doubt.”

If it were simply a question of power, then God could have won the argument long ago. Even the Devil concedes that God is more powerful. That’s not the issue. The question is over God’s position and his use of power. The Devil charges God with mismanagement, deliberate abuse of power, and arbitrary exercise of authority. The reason Jesus came was to refute such charges, and in Jesus we see the true right-being and right-doing of God. So when it comes to the Holy Spirit and the church, we need to see him operating as he truly does, doing everything “decently and in order,” working for the building up of our trust in God and witnessing to the saving message of Jesus.

Ellen White Comments

There is altogether too little made of the work of the Holy Spirit’s influence upon the church... The Holy Spirit is the Comforter, in Christ’s name. He personifies Christ, yet is a distinct personality. {20MR 323-4}

We need to be exceedingly careful, and walk humbly before God, that we may have spiritual eyesalve that we may distinguish the working of the Holy Spirit of God from the working of that spirit that would bring in wild license and fanaticism... The Holy Spirit of God will inspire men with love and purity; and refinement will be manifest in their characters. {1SM 142}