

The Spirit and our Worship and Prayer

Message 1 in 4 part series

Introduction:

Personal testimony: I have felt the need and prompting of the Lord in recent months to discover more of the reality of the Person and work of His Spirit in my life. I have realised that though I have studied a lot about the Spirit and taught on different occasions about the Spirit, still I long to know more of the reality of the Spirit in my daily life and ministry.

It is one thing to have right beliefs and theology; a totally different thing to have a living faith or theology.

What has stimulated me to seek further understanding from the Scriptures about the Spirit? A personal awareness that it is so easy or natural to fall into a spiritual rut in serving the Lord. To become so focused upon the mechanics of daily living and ministering that I become spiritually “dry” and barren which affects every part of my life, all my relationships, and also my ministry. I don’t like that, and I believe the Lord wills for me/us to live and serve on a totally different plane.

So what we are sharing with you this week comes straight out of fresh and ongoing experience and wrestling with the Scriptures.

The fundamental conviction is that God has given to us His most precious gift, His Spirit, and that He calls us to know experientially what it means to live our lives out each day and to minister through Him.

The primary purpose is that God might reveal to us more of the work and wonder of His Spirit in our lives – and that He the Spirit of life might breathe life into our lives, and revive us and re-energise all of us for all that He has ahead for us.

The Spirit is God's most precious GIFT and is given exclusively to God's people. See John 14:16-18; Acts 2:38; 10:45.

How it must grieve God the Father and our Lord Jesus when we receive this most precious gift – but then largely ignore Him, or treat this gift as if “it” has a big “DANGER!” sign on the outside – “Beware! Don't touch!”

Just as with all of God's gifts, the Spirit is given to us freely and graciously, not because we prove ourselves to be good enough to receive such a precious Gift. We receive all of God's gifts by faith – not by works. Including the gift of God's Spirit. See Gal.3:1-5,14; Eph.2:8-9.

There is a passive and an active receiving:

- Passive receiving indicates that God takes the initiative and gives His Spirit to us – to those who put their faith in Jesus. See Acts – God's people received the Spirit who “fell upon” or “filled” them. Cf. Jesus' promise – John 14:8-18 – the focus is upon God giving, not upon man's receiving.
- Active receiving is that God's people as the recipients need to do something. And here the focus is upon “believing” (which is sometimes in Scripture made synonymous with “receiving” – see John 1:12). Illustration: receiving a birthday gift. See Eph.1:13,14. In other words, an active and a conscious receiving of the Spirit = a welcoming of the Spirit, rather than just being a passive, inactive recipient.

This passive attitude is so common among God's people today. There is a sort-of belief that we Christians have received the Holy Spirit as a part of our believing in Jesus. But in reality, He is more often almost totally ignored by Christians. Or shunned. Or treated as some “mystery Guest”. Put off in some “back room” of our house. And for some believers, this is motivated by fear – fear of extremes, fear that if too much thought or attention is given to the Spirit, something bad will happen to them. Cf. Background in today's church.

Yet if we look at the NT, we are blind if we miss how often the Spirit of God is mentioned, and how openly and plainly the work and the writings of the early apostles

refer to the Spirit. To ignore Him, to put Him into the “too hard” or even “danger” box is to leave us wide open to living and serving “in the flesh”, not in the Spirit.

How easy or natural it is for us to trust in ourselves = in our human resources, our own intellects, our spiritual gifts, our experiences in ministry and life, our learning and knowledge, our human abilities. And things can get done in this way. And God is also very patient.

However, what is God’s way? He has in mind for our lives and our ministries to be lived out in the same way that Jesus Himself lived and ministered. And how was that? Through the anointing and empowering of the Spirit. It is God’s design and plan that we His people carry on the work of Jesus, and live to the glory of God, with the very same divine Presence. Cf. John 20:21 – “... so send I you!”

God’s Spirit is OUR HELPER – in every aspect of our lives and ministry for God. Another way of saying the same truth is that He is the divine AGENT – “through” or “by” Him, God gives all gifts to us.

See separate sheet of references. Highlight Eph.3:16,17a. Note that Paul doesn’t just assume such knowledge – but he underscores it in his prayer for the Ephesian believers = asking that God by His Spirit would give them POWER.

This means that in every aspect of our Christian experience and ministry, we are to actively aware of and to believe in (rely upon) the Spirit of God – just as the early believers were exhorted to do.

In these days we want to look at four aspects of the Spirit and our lives & ministry:

1. The Spirit and worship & prayer
2. The Spirit and our spiritual growth
3. The Spirit and our relationships
4. The Spirit and our ministry/mission

THE SPIRIT AND PRAYER

Eph.6:18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Jude 20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

He helps us as we pray. Therefore, we are to look to Him for His help, to actively trust in His leading. See Rom.8:26,27.

Are we actively seeking His help or relying upon His help as we pray? For example, coming to God thanking Him for His Spirit and asking for His help? This is our privilege, and also our need. We need to ask God for His Spirit to help us. See Eph.1:15ff; Luke 11:13.

The question: If we already have the Spirit, how is it possible that we need to ask God to give us His Spirit? Does this verse just refer to this group of Jesus' disciples before Pentecost?

See notes on Luke 11:13.

Closing challenge: Worship and pray “through/by the Spirit” – let Him lead you, energise your prayer & worship, actively rely upon, submit to, let go of your own trust and let Him be the Master who leads and guides you. And don't be afraid!

1999 OM Romania team retreat