

Did You Receive the Holy Spirit?

Acts 2:1-4, 19:1-7

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Bethany Church

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One of my mentors read an article I wrote about healing. He sent me a terse note that said: “Watch out, the Holy Spirit is no tame pigeon!” I liked his line, but wasn’t sure what he meant? Was I domesticating the Holy Spirit? We try to confine the Holy Spirit to an inner work that is quiet, subtle, reasonable, and under our control. That way we can be comfortable. Domestication brings comfort. Was I doing that?

I have a dog named Buddy. To combat arthritis, he takes steroids; and that makes him one excited dog. He is pretty domesticated except for his piercing bark. However, when he was a pup, he was incorrigible. He rarely responded to commands and paid little attention to boundaries. One day ignoring our commands, he spotted a neighbor and ran through the mud to jump on him and play. The man looked like a Dalmatian. I was thoroughly embarrassed. The neighbor pushed the dog aside and said with disgust, “You’ve got to do something.” Minutes later I was looking for an obedience school. I found that obedience school was as much for me as it

was for the dog. The work and practice of obedience school didn't change Buddy's personality. It did, however, bring familiarity and trust to both the dog and me.

Do we try to domesticate the Holy Spirit because we lack familiarity and trust? Are we afraid of the person Jesus gives us as a teacher, counselor and guide (John 14:25-26, 15:26-27, 16:12-15).

The opening hymn of the first service was *Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart*. Written by George Croly in the 19th Century, the words call us to passionate, trusting devotion. The first verse reads:

Spirit of God, descend upon my heart; wean it from earth; through all its pulses move; stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art, and make me love thee as I ought to love.

Isn't that wonderful? Don't you want your heart pulsing with the love of God? I want God's Spirit to supply everything I lack as his child. The second verse, however, limits the work of the Spirit to that of a tame pigeon, a domesticated Holy Spirit.

I ask no dream, no prophet ecstasies, no sudden rending of the veil of clay, no angel visitant, no opening skies; but take the dimness of my soul away.

Is it virtuous to ask for no dreams, no prophetic visions, no great signs or no great work? Is it virtuous to seek only the removal of some dimness? We are in a fight between life and death, between heaven and hell. We are in a fight for the freedom and salvation of humanity. This fight is so intense that Jesus wants his disciples to wait and not engage until they've been clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49), and we only ask for a little dimness to be removed?

No tame pigeon visited the praying believers that gathered on the day of Pentecost.

On the day of Pentecost... there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and

settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.
(Acts 2:1-3, NLT)

I don't know who all heard the roar. I don't know who all saw the fire. But the demeanor of those filled with the Spirit was so different that people came running to see what happened. Some thought they were drunk. Others heard the praises of God in their own language. The result was that three thousand more people believed that day.

I don't think God was interested in just removing a little dimness. He was clothing his children with power for the fight. He was doing even more. He was fulfilling a promise. God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34) that he would make a new covenant with Israel. The old brought condemnation because they were convicted of disobedience to God's laws. In the new, God would put those laws in their minds and write in on their hearts so they would naturally do what was important. They would also have no problem knowing God.

“They will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their family, saying, ‘You should know the LORD.’ For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will already know me,” says the LORD. (Jeremiah 31:34, NLT)

This wonderful work of God would bring intimate communion with God. It would bring the inner communion of spirits where the two, God and the individual, know each other's hearts. Indeed, the Spirit would change hearts. God spoke through the prophet Ezekiel:

I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their hearts of stone and give them tender hearts instead, so they will obey my laws and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20, NLT)

The Holy Spirit causes people to share the vision and heart of God. They become tender and passionate about God's purposes and plan, and then they speak about those purposes. God said through the prophet Joel:

I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. In

those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, men and women alike.
(Joel 2:28-29, NLT)

God promised that all people would experience the drenching presence of God's Spirit. Age would not stand in the way. Sons and daughters will speak the mind and heart of God. Old people will receive dreams from God. The young will see visions from God. Servants and slaves will be full of God's Spirit. Men and women alike will be clothed with this Spirit.

Did you know the story behind the term *Christian*? The first believers were Jews who called Jesus the Messiah (or in Greek, the Christ). That term told Jewish people that Jesus was the prophesied anointed one of God, anointed by God's Spirit to bring salvation. Messiah and Christ are the Hebrew and Greek terms for *anointed one*. Now because the first believers focused on Jesus as the way for humanity, they became known as *The Way* among their Jewish peers. However, in the city of Antioch, the message spread in the non-Jewish, Greek-speaking population. What stuck out to them was the idea that God would anoint someone with His Spirit to save us. The Greek folks there began calling believers Christians (Acts 11:19-26). One meaning of that is that they are identified with an anointed one; however, another is that they are anointed themselves with God's Spirit. That is the meaning of Christianity. Through the work of Jesus the Christ, we have been forgiven and have received an anointing from God that changes us and empowers us to bring redemption to this world.

Thus, when the Apostle Paul arrived in the city of Ephesus and found people hoping in Jesus, he was puzzled. He was expecting more from them, much more than just hope. I'm not sure that the morality espoused by early Christians was much different from other God-fearing people. I'm not sure that the fact they had hope was different. What was different was their fellowship with God. They were anointed with the same Spirit that made Jesus intimate with his father and incredible in his deeds. They received the same clothing as Jesus. They experienced

the same compassion, mercy and love pulsing through their hearts. The Ephesian believers neither exhibited nor testified to that. So Paul asked, “*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*” (Acts 19:2) They didn’t even know there was a Holy Spirit. Paul baptized them in Jesus’ name and then prayed for them until they had obviously received what was promised.

Sadly, so many believers need to be asked the same question: *Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?* People know there is a Holy Spirit, but too often they know little else about the one Jesus promised to us as our teacher, counselor and guide. Is there one of us with a teacher, counselor or guide that we don’t know. How then can we be ignorant of the Holy Spirit? Especially if he is communicating with us and clothing us with power? How can we be ignorant of him if he is changing our hearts?

St. Paul did not assume the Ephesians had not received the Holy Spirit. He asked. We can start out with the Holy Spirit but then grieve him. We can resist the Holy Spirit and douse his fire. Have you received him but then had your heart crust over with hurt, anger or bitterness? Did you start out with the Holy Spirit but become disillusioned by painful events?

I started out idealistic with a passion for God, but there were disillusioning experiences. I found my faith wavering. I stumbled with sins and the distance between God and me expanded. I fell so short of God’s purpose for me. Not intending to, I grieved the Holy Spirit and resisted his fire. God has taken me from idealism, through disillusionment, to conviction and determination. I’m not done repenting. I’m not done learning. I’m not done changing. I’m not done with this clothing and counsel. Different areas of my life are undergoing change. How about you?

God has promised you the great gift of himself. Jesus will give you his own spirit. This Spirit is no tame pigeon. Whether you have grieved him, resisted him or never known him, the issue is, "Do you want him?" Do you want him now? Will you receive him now?