

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (Acts 1.8)

Jesus said “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

As theological students, my wife and I were invited to spend a long weekend at a church which had recently been transformed by charismatic renewal.

We accepted an offer to be prayed for by the lay reader and the curate so that we might experience the Baptism in the Spirit. They took Patricia off into another room leaving me alone in the vicarage kitchen. Eventually, they burst back into the room and told me Patricia had had a wonderful experience of God.

“Oh no,” I thought, “It’ll never happen to me.” The two men prayed for me at length whilst I studied the plastic tablecloth. The more they prayed, the worse I felt. It would never happen. Eventually they stopped and said, “Don’t worry. Just believe it’s happened and you will experience it.” Negative as always, I thought that was a polite of saying they had prayed long enough.

Disappointed, I began to collect our cases to return to London. And I relaxed! It was then that it hit me. I was almost bowled over by a sense of God’s love, power and greatness. On the train I couldn’t stop grinning in a dazed sort of way, much to the amusement of my student friend. In the weeks that followed, I found I wanted to pray continuously, and particularly to praise God. We met in prayer groups and had some really wonderful times.

CHRISTIANS NOT EXPERIENCING THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:14-16). The Holy Spirit was present in these believers but there was no evidence of his dynamic inward presence. As the NIV puts it “the Spirit had not yet been made manifest to the Christians in Samaria by the usual signs.”

GO ON BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Paul writes “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit; speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph 5:18-20). The phrase “be filled with the Spirit” in NT Greek is present continuous: “Go on being filled with the Spirit.” Whatever your previous experience there is more to receive. It is manifested in the following ways:

1. THE FULNESS OF THE SPIRIT IS SHOWN IN INSPIRED WORSHIP

He inspires our worship: Jesus said “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

Paul encourages people to be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit” (Eph 5:18-19). “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts” (Col 3:16).

This is not just singing, whether in the “hymn sandwich” [hymn, prayer, hymn, reading hymn, sermon, hymn] many Free Churches have in their services or the set pattern of Anglican liturgy. It is inspired, uplifting, heart-felt worship which can transform people’s lives.

This worship may be simple worship songs. Years ago, I was really inspired by the following very simple worship song (because the Holy Spirit was inspiring it):

O, how I love Jesus
O, how I love Jesus
O, how I love Jesus

Because he first loved me

2. THE FULNESS OF THE SPIRIT IS SHOWN IN INSPIRED PRAYER

Paul says “Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests” (Eph 8:18)

Jude encourages believers to pray “in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20). As the NIV puts it this is prayer “According to the Spirit’s prompting and with the power of the Spirit.” Paul also says “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (Rom 8:26).

Prayer is a dialogue. We listen to God and discern his prompting, as well as speak to him in prayer.

3. THE FULNESS OF THE SPIRIT IS SHOWN IN THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

The gifts of the Spirit are important: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Cor 12:7-11)

So, the Holy Spirit provides:

- Wisdom and knowledge
- Faith
- Healing
- Miracles
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing between [good and bad] spirits
- Tongues (praise) and Interpretation of tongues (enabling others to share in the praise).

WHEN DO THE GIFTS CEASE?

Paul writes “where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹²For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Cor 13:8-12).

But when?

Verse 12 shows it is at the Second Coming: "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then **we shall see face to face**. Now I know in part; **then I shall know fully**, even as I am fully known."

IF WE REALLY WANT TO PLEASE GOD, WE NEED GUIDANCE. WE NEED TO HEAR GOD.

The Bible is fundamental to hearing God. It gives the fundamental principles. But we also need communication which is closely related to our circumstances: facing a specific problem, needing specific guidance for a particular issue. Hence the gifts of the Spirit. Prophecy, Word of wisdom. They can sometimes be sensed within us, without needing someone else to speak them out.

Yes, Scripture is fundamental, and all manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit must be submitted to it.

BUT

We need individual timed guidance and encouragement for current, specific circumstances (not just the general teaching of Scripture). We need such guidance for:

- knowing what God wants us to do, now or in the future.
- knowing how to meet a challenge, solve a problem and overcome a difficulty
- knowing what God wants us to concentrate on
- knowing how God wants us to worship at a particular time

That is why sermons are crucial. They are applying the teaching of Scripture to the current circumstances. The same is true of the gifts of the Spirit.

In addition, we continually need the gifts of:

- healing because sickness is constantly with us
- distinguishing spirits because demonic attacks are constantly with us

SEEK THE FULNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Whatever your previous experience of the Holy Spirit, including at your conversion, the Bible teaches us to “GO ON being filled with the Spirit.” Even if you have had a wonderful experience of the Baptism in the Spirit you need to “GO ON being filled with the Spirit.” There is more to experience.

Seek the Lord in private prayer about this. Meditate on what the NT says about the evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. But it could help to have an experienced Christian (or more than one) pray for you to experience the fulness of the Spirit.

Don’t settle for what you have experienced. Seek to go deeper with the Lord.