

The Coming of the Spirit: Content and Consequence

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INTRODUCTION



The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the “orphan doctrine” of Christian theology. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the doctrine of Jesus Christ were “formalized” at major councils of the universal Church in the first few centuries after Christ. Yet no “formal” or “official” statement on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been set forth by the universal Church. The Nicene Creed (4th C.) contains many significant statements about Jesus Christ. Yet only a few

sentences about the Holy Spirit are included in the Creed. Thus, the doctrine of Spirit has been problematic in the history of the Church.

In this article, we will examine the result of the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost, ten days after the Risen Jesus returned to his Father in heaven.

THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When the Spirit comes,
the *content* is Jesus,
the *consequence* is
communion.

What happens when the Holy Spirit comes? We can answer this question by considering the coming of the Spirit in terms of *content* and *consequence*. “Content” refers to the “message”

or “teaching” that the Spirit brings. “Consequence” refers to the “result” of the Spirit’s coming. When the Spirit comes, the “content” is *Jesus*; the “consequence” is *communion* (fellowship, relationship).

Content: The Spirit Testifies About Jesus

The Spirit has one message; that message is *Jesus!* On the night before his death, Jesus taught his disciples important truths about the Holy Spirit and his relation to Jesus:

John 15:26 [Jesus said] “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—*he will testify about me.*”

John 16:12 [Jesus said] “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, *he will guide you into all the truth.* He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 *He will glorify me* because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said *the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.*”

These verses show that the Spirit will “testify” about Jesus; the Spirit will “glorify” Jesus. Jesus even says that the Spirit will guide us “into all the truth.” Jesus Christ is “the truth” (John 14:6). Therefore, the Spirit will guide us to Jesus!

Pentecost

We can learn much about the Spirit’s message (“content”) by examining what happened on the day of Pentecost. Ten days after our Risen Lord ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon the gathered assembly in dramatic fashion. In the Book of Acts, Luke writes:



Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

In regard to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, many in the charismatic tradition focus primarily on the issue of “tongues.” For them, the most important work of the Spirit is to impart the gift of “tongues.” As we will see, however, the greatest gifts the Spirit imparts have nothing to do with “tongues.”

When the Spirit came upon the assembly, Peter explained what was happening:

Acts 2:16 [T]his is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: **17** “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit *on all people*. . .

When the Spirit came at Pentecost after Jesus had ascended to heaven, something *new* and important happened. For the first time in human history, the Holy Spirit was “poured out on all people.” Before the coming of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was given *only* to prophets and leaders like Moses and Elijah, men of God who were given a particular mission at a certain time in history. With the “incarnation” of Jesus Christ, however, sinful humanity’s relationship to God was forever changed.¹ In the person of Jesus Christ, who is both fully God and fully man, God and humanity are *reconciled*; that is, the relationship between God and man that was broken by human sin is now healed and restored (see 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:20). Humanity no longer stands condemned under the “old Adam; instead, humanity now stands *forgiven* and *reconciled* to God in the “second Adam,” Jesus Christ (see Romans 5:12-19). Therefore, man is no longer “separated” from God because of human sin; rather, God and humanity are now forever *united* in a fellowship of love, joy and peace in Jesus. It was not possible for the Holy Spirit to be “poured out on all people” until sinful humanity was healed, cleansed and forgiven in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

After Peter explained to his hearers what was happening when the Spirit came in power on the day of Pentecost, he continued his message. It is important to notice the “content” or main message of Peter’s sermon:

22 [Peter said] “Fellow Israelites, listen to this: **Jesus** of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. . .

32 God has raised this **Jesus** to life, and we are all witnesses of it. 33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, *Peter preached Jesus!* The *content* of his sermon was Jesus Christ. Peter did not speak about the gifts of tongues, prophesy or healing; he spoke about *Jesus*. Jesus said that when the Spirit comes, he will “testify about me.” This is exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit inspired Peter to preach about Jesus!²

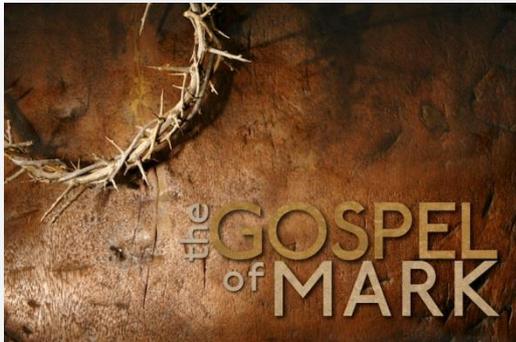
¹ Incarnation means “in flesh.” The eternal “Word” or Son of God became a human being (“flesh”) and lived among us (John 1:1-3, 14). Jesus is the “fully divine” Son of God; he is also the “fully human” son of Mary. In the historical man, Jesus of Nazareth, God and humanity are reconciled (joined together in love, joy and peace; see 2 Corinthians 5:19).

² As we saw above, the Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus (John 15:26). Perhaps this is why the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been problematic in Church history. The Holy Spirit does not call attention to himself; rather, the Spirit directs our attention to Jesus.

The Church has no other message for the world than Jesus. To be sure, the Gospel is Jesus! In the opening verse of his “Gospel,” Mark writes:

Mark 1:1 The beginning of the *good news about Jesus* the Messiah, the Son of God .

..



Mark 1:1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God

In the middle of the city is a magnificent church sitting on a hill, so that it is visible for miles in every direction. The beauty of the brightly lit church delights you, as it shines in the darkness. Notice, however, that you do not pay attention to the lights that make the church visible in the darkness; rather, you are consumed with the beauty of the building itself.

The Holy Spirit is like the light on the beautiful building. The light does not call attention to itself; rather, the light allows us to see the building. In the same way, the Holy Spirit does not call attention to himself, but rather points us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit opens our minds so that we can know Jesus as our Saviour.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are “awakened” to faith in Jesus. The Spirit makes “real” *in* us what Jesus has done *for* us in his sacrificial life and death. In other words, the Spirit “illumines” (“brings light

From the very beginning of his “Gospel,” Mark makes it clear that his message is *Jesus*. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Mark wrote his “Gospel” to bring us the “good news about Jesus.”³

Perhaps we can better understand the Spirit’s work in relation to Jesus by using an analogy (or, “comparison”). Imagine that you are on a journey to a distant city. Night comes and you find yourself traveling in the darkness. Suddenly, you see



Light enables us to see the cathedral at night. The Holy Spirit enables us to “see” Jesus.

³ The word, “Gospel,” means “good news.”

to”) our minds, so that we are led to the conviction that what Christ completed in his life and death “there and then” is real for us “here and now.” By the “awakening” power of the Spirit, we know that we belong to Jesus.⁴

The Holy Spirit Sets Us Free for Revelation

In terms of “content,” the Spirit reveals two basic truths about God and our relationship to God. First, the Holy Spirit reveals that we are “children of God.” The apostle Paul writes:

Romans 8:16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that *we are God's children*.

The Spirit sets us free to know God as “Father.” At the same time, the Spirit guides us into deeper truth about our heavenly Father. Paul writes:

Galatians 4:6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”



The Spirit reveals that God is “Abba, Father.”

Not only does the Spirit reveal that we are God’s children; the Spirit also reveals that God is “Abba, Father.” That is, God is the tender, loving Father, who welcomes sinners home with arms open wide with accepting love (see Luke 15:11-24).

The second great truth that the Spirit reveals about our relationship with God is “Jesus is Lord.” Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 12:3 Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and *no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.*



The Spirit reveals “Jesus is Lord.”

The Holy Spirit sets us free to know Jesus as “Lord.” We cannot know Jesus as “Lord” apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. We do not “make Jesus Lord” by a personal decision of faith. Rather, the Spirit sets our fallen minds free for revelation. The Spirit sets us free for God, free to know Jesus as “Lord.”

To be “charismatic” is much more than merely speaking in “tongues.” It is to know Jesus as “Lord” and God as “Abba, Father.” These are the great gifts of the Spirit!

⁴ In theological language, the “new thing” the Spirit brings to us is the *subjective* awareness of the *objective* salvation already completed for us in Jesus.

Communion: Consequence of the Spirit's Coming

As we have seen, the *content* of the Spirit's message is "Jesus." The *consequence* of the Spirit's coming, however, is "communion." The Spirit's *primary* work is the creation of "fellowship." Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In this passage, "grace" is attributed to Jesus and "love" is attributed to God the Father. *Fellowship*, however, is attributed specifically to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the *mediator* of communion (fellowship).⁵ The Holy Spirit mediates, or "creates," communion in two directions: 1) vertical and 2) horizontal.

Vertical Direction of Communion

Before the Spirit relates us to one another in love and sends us out into the world in missionary outreach, the Spirit first relates us to God the Father and God the Son in worshipping acknowledgement of who they are *for us*. The Holy Spirit brings us into a vertical relationship, where we *know* God the Father as "Abba" and Jesus as "Lord." This is the "vertical" direction of communion.

To "know" God is to enter fellowship with God expressed in worship, devotion and commitment.

"Knowing," as enabled by the Spirit, however, is not merely intellectual knowledge "about" God. "Knowing" involves the whole person—mind, heart and will. "Knowing" is *participation* in the eternal communion of love shared by the Father, Son and Spirit. Thus, "knowing" God includes the "acts" of devotion, worship and commitment. "Knowledge" of God and "love" of God cannot be separated or divided. To "know" God is to enter communion, fellowship and relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Horizontal Direction of Communion

Believers are the people who know God the Father as "Abba" and Jesus as "Lord." When the Spirit reveals the truth about our relationship to the Father and Son, the

⁵ A "mediator" is one who brings people together in fellowship or communion. The Spirit creates fellowship or communion among believers. In addition, the Spirit creates fellowship between believers and God.

Spirit also unites us in communion or fellowship with other believers. This is the “horizontal” direction of communion.

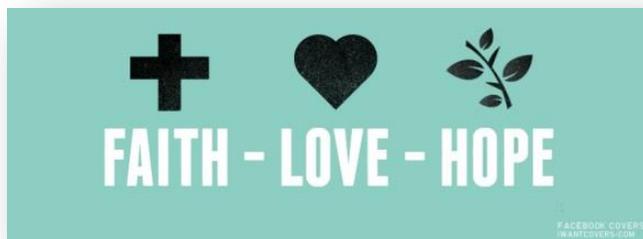
Returning to the Book of Acts, Chapter 2, notice what happened after Peter preached his sermon about Jesus on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The *consequence* of the Spirit’s coming upon the assembly at Pentecost was “fellowship” (or, “communion”). The people devoted themselves to “fellowship,” expressed in communal prayer and eating (“table fellowship”). We should not be surprised that the Spirit joins believers together in love and fellowship, for the Spirit is the eternal “bond of love” between the Father and the Son. Likewise, the Spirit is the “bond of love” among believers.⁶

When the Spirit unites us to Jesus Christ, and through Jesus to the Father, we become members who “belong to all the others.” That is, the Holy Spirit unites believers in a communion or fellowship of love. Paul writes:

Rom 12:5 [S]o in Christ we, though many, form one body, and *each member belongs to all the others.*



The Holy Spirit gathers the community in faith, builds it up in love and sends it out into the world in hope.

As a fellowship or communion of believers who “belong” to one another, we find our identities in *relationship*. To be a “person” is to have our “being-in-relationship.” The Christian is not an isolated “individual.” He or she is a member of a *community*.

As theologian George Hunsinger notes, “Between the first and second coming of Christ, the principal work of the Spirit is to form the community of Christ.” The Holy Spirit gathers the community in *faith*, builds it up in *love* and sends it out into the world in *hope*.

A Community of Faith

Believers come together to form a community of *faith*. By faith, we *know* God as “Abba” and Jesus as “Lord.”⁷ Unbelievers, on the other hand, do not have this knowledge—yet! The difference between believers and unbelievers is a matter of

⁶ When we think of the Spirit as the “bond of love,” we must remember that the Holy Spirit is a divine *Person*, not a “thing.” The Holy Spirit is fully God. He is the “Third Person” of the Holy Trinity.

⁷ “Faith” is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). “Faith” is specifically the work of the Holy Spirit.

“knowing.” We cannot say that believers are “in Christ” and unbelievers are “not in Christ.” God has reconciled “all things” to himself in Jesus. *All* humanity is included in the reconciliation accomplished in the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ—yet, not all know it! As Christians, we do not stand against the world; we stand *for* the world. We are “for” the world because God is “for” the world (see John 3:16). God sent his beloved Son to save *this world*. We are sanctified (“set apart”) by the Holy Spirit as a community of faith in order to bear witness to the love with which God loves *this world*.

A Community of Love

The Holy Spirit brings together a *variety* of people in order to unite them in a “community” or “fellowship.” The members of the community of faith come from all nations, tribes and ethnic groups. They come from different socio-economic, vocational and educational backgrounds. The task of the Holy Spirit is to unite these different elements into a communion of love. In holding together *those who are different*, the Spirit fulfils his eternal role as the “bond of peace.”



As the “bond of love,” the Holy Spirit brings together the various elements of the community in order to create a fellowship of *love*. The task of the community of faith is to bear witness to one another that we are a fellowship of love.

After he had washed his disciples’ feet, Jesus said:

John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, *if you love one another.*”

As theologian Karl Barth argues, Christian “love” *begins* at the point where our fellow man becomes our “neighbour,” thereby causing us [at least sometimes!] a “mortal headache,” because we cannot withdraw from them, when, in fact, that is exactly what we would like to do! The community of faith is a community of “sinners.” Therefore, it must be a community of *forgiveness*. In the

The believer who is
“filled with the Spirit”
is the one who is
rich in love.

community united in love by the Spirit, one sinner may love and forgive another, despite their mutual sin. The one who is “filled with the Spirit” is the one who is *richest in love*.

A Community of Hope

The Spirit does not unite the individual members of the Church into a communion as an end (“goal”) in itself. The Church is called to *witness*; its service is the “service of testimony.”

As he was about to return to the Father from whom he came, Jesus commanded his disciples to go into all the world as his *witnesses*:

Matthew 28:18 [Jesus said] . . . go and *make disciples* of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Acts 1:8 [Jesus said] But 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.”

Christians are called *out* of the world (in terms of conformity to it) even as we are called *into* the world (in terms of solidarity with it). Our *distinction* in relation to the world is a *preparation* for our work *in the world*. God calls us “out” of the world in order to call us “into” the world. God sends us into the world to bear *witness* to the love with which God has loved the world.



The community of faith must bear witness to the love with which God has loved the world.

The mutual testifying of love and forgiveness to one another is the Christian community’s “basic equipment” for witness to the world. The community of faith is not an end to itself; rather, we are the community *for the world*. The Spirit sends us into the world because God loves the world, and he has reconciled it to himself in Jesus. *God’s love for the world* is the basis of our commitment to the world.

If we turn inward upon ourselves merely to protect and preserve our religious institutions, then we have nothing to offer the world, for we have become a reflection

of the world—not a light to the world.⁸ The world is full of institutions, cliques, parties, sects and special interest groups who exist solely to serve their own interests. Jesus calls us to move beyond self-interest, even our own “communal” interest, in order to take the Gospel into all the world.

SUMMARY

The *content* of the Spirit’s coming is Jesus. Jesus said, “When the Spirit comes, he will testify about me.” When Peter preached his great sermon on Pentecost, he preached Jesus! The Spirit frees our sinful minds, so that we may know God the Father as “Abba” and Jesus as “Lord.” The knowledge of who we are in relation to the Father and Son is the great gift of the Holy Spirit.

As the *consequence* of the Spirit’s coming, the disciples were united in communion and fellowship. They expressed their fellowship in communal prayer and eating. The Holy Spirit is the mediator of communion. The Spirit lifts us up into communion with God, where we participate in the Father-Son relationship by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit unites believers into a fellowship of love and sends us into the world to bear witness to the love God has for the world. The Spirit gathers the community in faith, builds it up in love and sends it out into the world in hope.

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Please visit our website at www.AsiAfricaMinistries.org. If you have questions about this article, or any article on our website, you may contact us at office@AsiAfricaMinistries.org.

⁸ Critics say that evangelical Christians have a “fortress mentality.” That is, they “hide” from the world behind the walls of their churches. They appear to be so “heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.” In other words, they seem so concerned with “going to heaven” when they die, that they have little energy left to serve the world that God loves.