

Experiencing the

Holy
Spirit

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Holy Spirit

Andrew Murray



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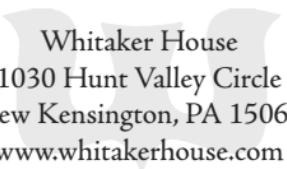
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EXPERIENCING THE HOLY SPIRIT
(previously titled *In Search of Spiritual Excellence*)

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PREFACE

In all our studies of the work of the blessed Spirit, and in our pursuit of a life in His fullness, we will always find the sum of Christ's teaching in these wonderful words: "*He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water*" (John 7:38). As we are convicted of the defectiveness of our faith in Christ and as we understand that believing in Him means a yielding of the whole heart, life, and will, we can confidently count on receiving the Holy Spirit's power and presence. When Christ becomes all that God has made Him to be for us, the Holy Spirit can then flow from Christ to do His blessed work of leading us back to know Him better and to believe in Him more completely.

The book of Hebrews speaks of Christ in His heavenly glory and power as the object of our faith. The Holy Spirit reveals the way into the Holiest by the blood of Christ and invites us by faith in Christ to have our life there. As we yield our hearts to the leading of the Spirit to know Christ and to believe in what is revealed, the Spirit can take possession of us. The Spirit is given to reveal Christ, and every fully accepted revelation of Christ gives

the Spirit room to dwell and work within us. This promise will surely then be fulfilled: "*He who believes in Me,... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.*" May God lead us to this simple and full faith in Christ, our great High Priest and King in the heavens, and so into a life in the fullness of the Spirit.

—Andrew Murray

INTRODUCTION

This book brings a simple but solemn message. The one thing needed for the church in its search for spiritual excellence is to be filled with the Spirit of God. In order to secure attention to this message and attract the hearts of my readers to its blessing, I have laid particular emphasis on certain main points:

- The will of God for every one of His children is that they live entirely and unceasingly under the control of the Holy Spirit.
- Without being filled with the Spirit, it is impossible for an individual Christian or a church to ever live or work as God desires.
- In the life and experience of Christians, this blessing is little used and little searched for.
- God waits to give us this blessing, and in our faith we may expect it with the greatest confidence.
- The self-life and the world hinder and usurp the place that Christ ought to occupy.
- We cannot be filled with the Spirit until we are prepared to yield ourselves to be led by the Lord Jesus—to forsake and sacrifice everything for this

“pearl of great price” (Matt. 13:46).

We have such a poor idea of the unspiritual and sinful state that prevails in the church that, unless we take time to devote our hearts and our thoughts to the real facts of the case, the promise of God can make no deep impression on us. I have presented the subject in various aspects to prepare the way for the conviction that this blessing is in truth the one thing needed; and to get possession of this one thing, we ought to say good-bye to everything else we hold dear. Owing to the prevailing lack of the presence and operation of the Spirit, it takes a long time before these spiritual truths concerning the need, the fullness, and the reality of the Spirit's power can obtain mastery over us.

Every day ought to be a Pentecostal season in the church of Christ. Christians cannot live according to the will of God without this blessing. I cannot exhort you, my readers, strongly enough to continue this search for spiritual excellence by calling on God in the confidence that He will answer.

When we read the book of Acts, we see that the filling with the Spirit and His mighty operation was always obtained by prayer. Recall, for example, what took place at Antioch. When the Christians were engaged in fasting and prayer, God regarded them as prepared to receive the revelation that they must separate Barnabas and Saul. It was only after they had once more fasted and prayed that these two men went forth, sent by the Holy Spirit. (See

Acts 13:2–3.) These servants of God felt that the blessing they needed could come only from above.

To obtain the blessing we so greatly need, we, in like manner, must liberate ourselves as far as possible from the demands of the earthly life. Let us never become weary or discouraged but ask that the Holy Spirit may again assume His rightful place and exercise full dominion in us. In addition, let us pray that He may again have His true place in the church, be held in honor by all, and in everything reveal the glory of our Lord Jesus. To the soul who diligently searches and prays in sincerity according to His Word, God's answer will surely come.

Nothing searches and cleanses the heart like true prayer. It teaches one to ask such questions as these: Do I really desire what I pray for? Am I willing to cast out everything to make room for what God is prepared to give me? Is the prayer of my lips really the prayer of my life? Am I willing to wait on Him, in quiet trust, until He gives me this supernatural gift—His own Spirit?

Let us pray continually, coming before God with supplications and strong crying as His priests and the representatives of His church. We can depend on Him to hear us.

Believer, you know that the Lord is a God who often hides Himself. He desires to be trusted. He is often very near to us without our knowing it. He is a God who knows His own time. Though He tarries, wait for Him. He will surely come. (See Habakkuk 2:3.)

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HOW THE BLESSING IS TO BE TAUGHT

*And it happened...that Paul...came to Ephesus.
And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did
you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”*

—Acts 19:1–2

About twenty years after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, this incident took place. In the course of his journey, Paul came to Ephesus and found in the Christian church some disciples in whom he observed that there was something lacking in their belief or experience. Accordingly he asked them the question, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Their reply was that they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized by disciples of

John the Baptist with the baptism of repentance, with a view to faith in Jesus as One who was to come, but they were still unacquainted with the great event of the outpouring of the Spirit or the significance of it. They came from a region of the country into which the full Pentecostal preaching of the exalted Savior had not yet penetrated.

Paul took them at once under his care and told them about the full Gospel of the glorified Lord who had received the Spirit from the Father and had sent Him down to this world so that every one of His believing disciples might also receive Him. Hearing this good news and agreeing with it, they were baptized into the name of this Savior who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Paul then laid his hands on them and prayed, and they received the Holy Spirit. They obtained a share in the Pentecostal miracle and spoke with other tongues.

In these chapters, it is my desire to bring to the children of God the message that there is a twofold Christian life. The one is that in which we experience something of the operations of the Holy Spirit, just as many did under the old covenant, but we do not yet receive Him as the Pentecostal Spirit, as the personal indwelling Guest. On the other hand, there is a more abundant life, in which the indwelling just referred to is known and experienced. When Christians come to fully understand the distinction between these two conditions, they will find the will of God concerning them.

Therefore, it is a possible experience for each believer, having confessed the sinfulness and inconsistency that still marks our lives, to dare to hope that the Christian community will once more be restored to its Pentecostal power. With our focus on this distinction, let's ponder the lessons presented in this incident at Ephesus.

Do Not Rest Prematurely

For a healthy Christian life, it is indispensable that we be fully conscious that we have received the Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

Had it been otherwise, Paul would never have asked the question, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" These disciples were recognized as believers. This position, however, was not enough for them. The disciples who walked with the Lord Jesus on earth were also true believers, yet He commanded them not to rest satisfied until they had received the Holy Spirit from Himself in heaven. Paul, too, had seen the Lord in His heavenly glory and was by that vision led to conversion. Yet even in his case, the spiritual work the Lord required to have done in him was not completed. Ananias had to go to him and lay his hands on him so that he might receive the Holy Spirit. Only then could he become a witness for Christ.

All these facts teach us that there are two ways in which the Holy Spirit works in us. The first is the

preparatory operation in which He simply acts on us but does not yet take up His abode within us, though He leads us to conversion and faith and ever urges us to all that is good and holy. The second is the higher and more advanced phase of His working, when we receive Him as an abiding gift, as an indwelling Person who assumes responsibility for our whole inner beings. This is the ideal of the full Christian life.

Where Do We Stand?

There are disciples of Christ who know little or nothing of this conscious indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It is of the utmost importance to understand this statement. The more fully we come under the conviction of its truth, the better we will understand the condition of the church in our times and be enabled to discover where we really stand.

The condition I refer to becomes very plain to us when we consider what took place at Samaria. Philip the evangelist had preached there. Many had been led to believe in Jesus and were baptized into His name, and there was great joy in that city. When the apostles heard this news, they sent down Peter and John, who, when they came to Samaria, prayed that these new converts might receive the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 8:16–17.) This gift was something quite different from the working of the Spirit that led them to conversion, faith, and joy in Jesus as a

Savior. It was something higher; for now from heaven and by the glorified Lord Himself, the Holy Spirit was imparted in power with His abiding indwelling to consecrate and fill their hearts.

If this new experience had not been given, the Samaritan disciples would still have been Christians, but they would have remained weak. Thus it is that in our own days, there are still many Christians who know nothing of this gift of the Holy Spirit. Amid much that is good and amiable, even with much earnestness and zeal, the lives of such Christians are still hampered by weakness, stumbling, and disappointment simply because they have never been brought into vitalizing contact with power from on high. Such souls have not received the Holy Spirit as the Pentecostal gift to be possessed, kept, and filled by Him.

Can We Worship with Sincerity?

It is the great work of the gospel ministry to lead believers to the Holy Spirit.

It was the great aim of the Lord Jesus, after He had educated and trained His disciples for three years, to lead them to the point of waiting for the promise of the Father and receiving the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. This was the chief objective of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, when, after summoning those who were convicted in their hearts to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness

of sins, he assured them that they should then receive the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 2:38.)

Paul aimed at this when he asked his fellow Christians if they did not know that they were each a temple of the Holy Spirit. He reminded them that they had to be filled with the Holy Spirit. (See Ephesians 5:18.)

Yes, the supreme need of the Christian life is to receive the Holy Spirit and, when we have it, to be conscious of the fact and live in harmony with it. An evangelical minister must not merely preach about the Holy Spirit from time to time, but also direct his efforts toward teaching his congregation that there can be no true worship except through the indwelling and unceasing operation of the Holy Spirit.

To lead believers to the Holy Spirit, the great lack in their lives must be pointed out to them.

This was the intention in Paul's question, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" Only those who are thirsty will drink water with eagerness, and only those who are sick will desire a physician. In the same way, it is only when believers are prepared to acknowledge the defective and sinful character of their spiritual condition that the preaching of the full blessing of Pentecost will find an entrance into their hearts.

Many Christians imagine that the only thing lacking in their lives is more earnestness or more strength and, if they only obtain these benefits, they will become all they ought to be. This makes the preaching of a full

salvation of little avail. Only when the discovery is made that they are not standing in a right attitude toward the Holy Spirit, that they have only His preparatory operations but do not yet know Him in His indwelling, will the way to something higher ever be open or even be desired.

For this discovery, it is indispensable that the question should be put to each individual as pointedly and as personally as possible: "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" When the answer takes the shape of a deeply felt and utterly sincere concern, then the time of revival is not far off.

Help to Take Hold of This Blessing

In the Acts of the Apostles we read often about the laying on of hands and prayer. Even a man like Paul—whose conversion was due to the direct intervention of the Lord—had to receive the Spirit through laying on of hands and prayer on the part of Ananias. (See Acts 9:17.)

This implies that there must be among ministers of the Gospel, and believers in general, a power of the Spirit that makes them the channel of faith and courage to others. Those who are weak must be helped to take hold of the blessing for themselves. But those who have this blessing, as well as those who desire to have it, must realize and acknowledge their absolute dependence on the Lord and expect all from Him.

The gift of the Spirit is imparted only by God Himself. Every fresh outpouring of the Spirit comes from above. There must be frequent personal dealing with God. The minister of the Spirit whom God is to use for communicating the blessing, as well as the believer who is to receive it, must meet with God in immediate and close communion. "*Every good gift...is from above*" (James 1:17). Faith in this truth will give us courage to expect, with confidence and gladness, that the full Pentecostal blessing may be looked for and that a life under the continual leading of the Holy Spirit is within our reach.

The proclamation and the taking hold of this blessing will restore the Christian community to the primary Pentecostal power.

On the Day of Pentecost, speaking "*with other tongues*" (Acts 2:4) and prophesying were the results of being filled with the Spirit. Here at Ephesus, twenty years later, the very same miracle was again witnessed as the visible token and pledge of the other glorious gifts of the Spirit. We may depend on it that where the reception of the Holy Spirit and the possibility of being filled with Him are proclaimed and taken hold of, the blessed life of the Pentecostal community will be restored in all its fresh power.

An increasing acknowledgement of the lack of power in the church exists today. In spite of the multiplication of the means of grace, there is neither the power of the divine salvation in believers nor the power for conversion

in preaching. Little conflict exists in the church between worldliness and unbelief.

This complaint is justified. If the expression of it became strong enough, the children of God might be led to cast themselves on the great truth that the Word of God teaches. When faith in the full Pentecostal blessing is found in the Christian church again, the members will find their strength and be able to do their first works.

The Church Needs Men Who Testify

We need more pastors and teachers who preach Christ Jesus as John the Baptist did—as the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. It is only the minister who stands forth as a personal witness and living proof of the ministry of the Spirit whose word will have full entrance into the hearts of the people and exercise full sway over them. The first disciples obtained the baptism on their knees, and on their knees they obtained it for others. It will be on our knees also that the full blessing will be won today. Let this be the attitude in which we await the full blessing of our God.

Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed? To be filled with the Holy Spirit of God and to have the full enjoyment of the Pentecostal blessing is the will of God concerning us. Judge your life and your work before the Lord in the light of this question, and present your answer to God.

Do not be afraid to confess before your Lord what is

still lacking in you. Do not hold back, although you do not as yet fully understand what the blessing is or how it comes. The early disciples called on their Lord and waited with prayer and supplication.

Let your heart be filled with a deep conviction of what you lack, a desire for what God offers, and a willingness to sacrifice everything for it. Then you may rest assured that the marvel of Jerusalem and Samaria, of Caesarea and Ephesus, will once again be repeated. We may and we will be filled with the Spirit.