

ANDREW MURRAY

EXPERIENCING THE
Holy
SPIRIT



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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Experiencing the Holy Spirit

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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.