



The Holy Secret

Lenten Study

Day 1

Read: John 14:15-20

The Third Person of the Trinity

In this Lenten study we will be looking at the attributes and work of the Holy Spirit. Although Lent is a penitential season, it is equally a time for self-examination. There will be some penitential aspects of this study, but its primary focus is to seek to better understand the Third Person of the Trinity and what may be missing in our lives: dependence on the secret that all Christians possess but too often overlook, the inner-working of Christ in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

This study was inspired by a statement in the Lenten study in *The Journey* two years ago (March 18, 2013): “It takes faith to be Christ to the world around us. The secret we have going for us is the Holy Spirit within us to guide and direct our lives.” In our passage for today, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples. As we will see in this series, the Holy Spirit existed from creation but only appeared at certain times and to certain people. Now the Holy Spirit was to be within the followers of Christ to comfort and guide us forever.

What we want specifically to note today is the triune nature of God. Jesus tells his disciples that the Holy Spirit will come from the Father (v.16), and that Jesus is in God the Father (v.20). The Holy Spirit is in Jesus and will pass from him into the disciples (vv.18-19). Thus, we have God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Three Persons of God—inter-connecting to accomplish His ultimate purpose.

As we will see later, what Jesus promises in this passage becomes real to his followers at Pentecost (Acts 2). Let us not keep this a secret, but show it forth in our words and our actions that the world may be brought to Christ.

R&D How conscious are you of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? Explain.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and kindle in us the fire of your love.

Day 2

Read: Genesis 1:1-5

The Holy Spirit in Creation

Today’s passage shows that God’s Spirit was involved in the very act of creation (v.2). See also Job 33:4 and Psalm 104:30. When we speak of the Holy Spirit, we are not talking about a lesser figure in the Trinity, one subservient to the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is co-equal among the Three Persons of God.

Forgive me a personal observation, but I have difficulty with the fact that, from time to time, the Holy Spirit is still referred to as the Holy Ghost. That occurs, for instance, when those of us in liturgical churches sing the Doxology. And the Holy Ghost terminology remains in the King James version of the Bible. The word *ghost* has a tendency to give us a mixed message, almost

making the Third Person of the Trinity sound spooky or as something that shows up only occasionally and in unwanted ways. Just the opposite is true. The Holy Spirit is not one to cause us fear. This is our closest friend!

Furthermore, this is not a “Johnny-come-lately” friend. As our Scripture for today tells us, the Holy Spirit was present from the birth of creation. And he is present in us from the moment of our birth into the relationship with Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of our lives. He who was involved in the very act of creation allows us to become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17).

R&D When did you first become conscious of the Holy Spirit in your life? Explain.

Prayer: Help me, Lord God, to become ever dependent on the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide my life.

Day 3

Read: Numbers 11:16-30

The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament

The background to our reading for today is that the Israelites, having escaped Egypt and living in the desert, weren't content with just manna to eat. They wanted something more substantial (meat) and were complaining against Moses. Moses, in his desperation, turned to God for the answer. He felt that he could not carry the burden of “these people” any longer without help. Thus, our reading.

What the people wanted was meat, which God decided to provide. What Moses wanted was help in leading the people, and God did that as well. The Holy Spirit obviously rested on Moses (v.17) and God promised to place the Spirit on 70 of Israel's elders to equip them to aid Moses. Not only did God do that but he placed the Holy Spirit on two of the elders who were not present with the 70. As Jesus would later tell Nicodemus (John 3:8), the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled, but will move in directions we may not be able to understand. We can't put God in a box of our own making. He is, after all, God; and He moves in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

So, here was see the Holy Spirit at work among the Israelites in the Old Testament. Empowered by God, Moses had worked spectacular miracles among his people in escaping Egypt, bringing water from rocks, manna from heaven, etc. Yet, the Israelites continually became impatient and discontent. It was a “what have you done for us lately?” attitude. We can be guilty of the same thing in our day. But we have a secret: the Holy Spirit is within us and within the Church to bring dramatic change if we avail ourselves of this precious gift we have.

R&D What is going on in your life or in the life of your worshiping community that needs an infusion of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and awaken us to the possibilities you have in mind for us today.

Day 4

Read: Numbers 27:12-23

Joshua

Just as the Holy Spirit had come upon the 70 Israelite elders, he rested upon individuals whom God had chosen to lead the people. First Moses, and now Joshua. Moses had led the people

to the Promised Land, but God had other plans about who would carry on the work. An act of disobedience by Moses had disqualified him for this final step, but God allowed Moses to look upon the land that the Israelites would conquer.

Joshua was a man indwelt by the Holy Spirit (v.18) and God instructed Moses to lay his hands upon him for the task ahead. Joshua, along with Caleb, had encouraged the Israelites to take the Promised Land when the other spies sent out by Moses had shown fear and cautioned against this action, stirring the people to rebellion (Numbers 14) and leading to 40 years in the desert. Joshua had, during this time, been the right-hand man of Moses. By God's direction, steps were taken to demonstrate the passing of leadership from Moses to Joshua (vv.22-23).

Whereas all Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, God still chooses special people for leadership in our day and empowers them for the task ahead. Over the years of my life I have had the opportunity to see this happen many times. Often, the person God chooses is not one others would have seen as having leadership potential. But, as God illustrated in the choice of David, "The Lord does not look at things man looks at" (1 Samuel 16:7b). If the leadership choice is God's, the Holy Spirit rests on that person and good things happen. When leaders are motivated by other factors, God's will is not done.

R&D In what leadership role have you felt empowered by the Holy Spirit? Explain.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and empower leaders to move Christ's work forward boldly and effectively in our day.

Day 5

Read: Judges 6:33-40

Gideon

Here we see a different kind of leader from Joshua...one who feels ill-equipped and is very reluctant to do what God wants him to do. Gideon lived in the time of Judges when Israel was falling away from the Lord and into hard times. The Midianites were the problem in Gideon's day. They camped in the Jezreel Valley, the agricultural center of the area. By controlling this rich and fertile land they were able to control the people who lived there.

Gideon, on the other hand, was of the weakest clan in Manasseh and considered himself to be the least in his family (6:15). Yet the angel of the Lord came to him, performed a miracle (6:20-21) and gave Gideon an assignment, which Gideon boldly carried out. Nonetheless, Gideon was a reluctant leader. It was not until the Holy Spirit came upon Gideon (v.34) that he called the people together to fight their enemies and free the land.

In our reading for today, we continue to see some hesitation on the part of Gideon. He was willing to be used by God to save the people, but he still wanted to do a little testing to make sure God was with him. We see how the saying "putting out a fleece" came into being. Gideon required two miracles before being willing to proceed. Demanding signs from God is an indication of unbelief; but God, in His mercy, allowed this to happen. This can give us some comfort when we, although having the Holy Spirit within us, experience doubt. Gideon would find (Judges 7) that carrying out God's plan necessitated increasing trust in Him, but led to total success.

R&D Have you ever asked God for a sign even though you knew what He wanted you to do?

Prayer: *Lord, You know how fragile and untrusting we can be; embolden us by Your Spirit to do all that You would have us do.*

Day 6

Read: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

David

Joshua, Gideon, and now David—the third of the Old Testament characters we will look at in relation to the Holy Spirit. Joshua had been mentally prepared by Moses for the task ahead of him, and the Holy Spirit came to spiritually equip him for that task. Nobody had prepared Gideon for what lay ahead of him until the Holy Spirit did so, but he became a mighty warrior for the Lord. Now, with David, we see another situation altogether.

Saul had failed as King of Israel. Samuel the Prophet found that hard to accept, but God made it clear that someone else was needed to replace Saul. God makes long range plans. This was not something that was going to happen immediately as with Joshua and Gideon, but the ground-work had to be laid...the right person needed to be chosen. So, we have this wonderful story of how Samuel, on the one hand, and Jesse, on the other, tried to make the choice for God. But, as we have noted earlier in this study, God does not look at things the way man does; God is not interested in outer appearances but looks on the heart (v.7b). Thus, the boy who had been left out in the field to tend the sheep is the one God chooses.

“From that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power” (v.13). David, empowered by the Holy Spirit, would become the great King of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus. It would be some time before he could ascend to the throne and many challenges would face him during that time, but he would become the person the Israelites looked back to as the great leader of their nation. Centuries later Paul would call him a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). That’s what can happen to a shepherd boy who is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

R&D *Reflect on someone you know who was changed dramatically when filled with the Holy Spirit.*

Prayer: *Lord, we need leaders today, of Your choice and filled with Your Spirit, to guide our way.*

Day 7

Read: Matthew 3:13-17

Jesus

We have seen how the Holy Spirit came upon particular people in Old Testament times. Now we reach a seismic shift, a point at which everything begins to change, the coming of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

John had been telling the people that Jesus would bring a baptism much greater than his own (3:11), and now Jesus appears and asks John to baptize him! John believed himself to be unqualified to do this; he felt that Jesus should baptize him. Furthermore, baptism was for the repentant and Jesus had not sinned. Jesus explains that he wants to be baptized “to fulfill all righteousness” (v.15); that is, to fulfill God’s plans for him. As the *Life Application Bible* points out, he was accomplishing several purposes: (1) confessing on behalf of the nation of Israel, (2) showing support for what John was doing, (3) inaugurating his public ministry, and (4) identifying with the repentant people of God.

As Jesus is baptized, the Holy Spirit comes upon him and the Father affirms him from heaven. Here again we see the Three Persons of the Trinity at work: God the Father affirms the Son, God the Son is baptized, and God the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus. God is one, but three persons at the same time.

Not only will Jesus now move forward in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, but he will be enabled to pass that on to those of us who follow him.

R&D What do you remember about your own baptism; or, if you were baptized as an infant, what do you recall about being confirmed?

Prayer: Father God, we are overwhelmed with what You have done for us and do for us daily through Your Holy Spirit within us.

Day 8

Read: John 14:15-31

Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

Today we look at an expanded portion of the passage we considered on the first day of this series. Then, we were being “introduced” to the Holy Spirit, so to speak. Now, we look more fully at what Jesus was doing for his disciples and others who would follow.

The disciples were, surely by this time, beginning to realize that Jesus would soon no longer be their constant friend, one who was always with them to teach them and to demonstrate God’s power through his actions. Think of what a loss that would be to them. He had been their everything, one on whom they totally depended. Yet, in his earthly life Jesus was limited by time and space. What he was promising to his disciples (and to us in the years to come) was to be with them everywhere and all the time. That would happen because of the Holy Spirit within them.

There was, of course, a price to be paid for being at one with Christ through the Holy Spirit: obedience (v.23). They (and we) could not expect to have the benefit of Christ’s life within them through the Spirit without obeying his teachings and following him as Lord and Savior. But, by doing so, the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, remind them of all that Jesus had said to them, and give them peace. That is the deep and lasting peace that comes from the relationship with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. It gives us assurance of the future and stands against the sin, fear, doubt, and daily conflicts that we all necessarily encounter. In all of this, the Counselor promised by Jesus to his disciples was to be with them forever. Now, by the grace of God, he is available to us as well.

R&D Are you able to see that we today are more blessed than Christ’s disciples who were with him constantly for three years? Explain.

Prayer: Come, Holy Spirit, and counsel us in all of our needs.

Day 9

Read: Acts 2:1-13

The Birth of the Christian Church

Christians, and even non-Christians, annually celebrate Christmas and Easter, but Pentecost receives much less attention. Yet, it is a very important day because, among other things, it

represents the birth of the Christian Church. Most of all, it celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus, then and forever.

The Jews celebrated Pentecost, also called the Festival of Weeks, 50 days after Passover. It was one of three major feasts (see Deuteronomy 16:16) and was in thanksgiving for the harvested crops. As a result, there were in Jerusalem at that time Jews and converts to Judaism from many nations and of many languages. This became a wonderful opportunity to reach them with words of praise to God in their own languages, and for Peter's speech (2:14ff) to be heard. It was therefore an important first step in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world.

What happened at Pentecost was a fulfillment of John the Baptist's prediction about the Holy Spirit baptizing by fire and the prophet Joel's statement concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29). Tongues of fire represent words to convey the gospel and symbolize God's purifying presence. God had confirmed the validity of the Old Testament Law with fire from heaven (Exodus 19:16-18). At Pentecost, God affirmed the validity of the ministry of the Holy Spirit by sending fire. God made His presence known in a spectacular way. He normally speaks to us in quieter ways in our day; but the source is still the Holy Spirit, and the presence and power of God are always with us.

R&D Have you encountered the Holy Spirit in dramatic ways in your lifetime, or have other Christians you know had such experiences? Explain.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for Pentecost. Help us, as the Christian Church, to celebrate it in a manner worthy of it.

Day 10

Read: Acts 2:[14-41], 42-47

The Disciples Are Empowered

What a change! Here were these early followers of Jesus—the disciples who had been with him from the first, and many others who had come to know him and follow him—who came across as doubters and afraid. And, of course, there was justification for their feelings. Jesus had turned their belief system upside down and “the powers that be” were not happy about it. Following Jesus seemed strange and was definitely dangerous.

And then comes Pentecost and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Peter, who had so often seemed to miss the point, becomes a new man entirely. His speech (vv.14-40) is right on point and is powerful. In fact, it was so powerful that 3,000 people accepted his message and were baptized (v.41).

But our focus for today is on this fellowship of believers who had been so changed by the coming of the Holy Spirit. They became the model for Christian churches everywhere. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching; for us, this would mean devotion to the study of Scripture. Fellowship with other believers, serious prayer, and the “breaking of bread” (a forerunner for us of Holy Communion) became essential to them. They were filled with awe and many miracles happened among them...something that still happens in less sophisticated parts of the Christian world today and probably also happens among us that we fail to see for our lack of faith. They shared what they had to meet the needs of others. They worshiped God regularly in praise and thanksgiving. Others began to see in them the presence and love of God and they attracted many to their number.

R&D *To what extent does your community of faith resemble these early Christians?*

Prayer: *Lord, bring back the fire.*

Day 11

Read: Acts 3:1-10

Peter Heals a Crippled Beggar

Today's passage is the first instance of healing by a disciple in the power of the Holy Spirit. Devout Jews prayed three times daily...morning (9:00 a.m.), afternoon (3:00 p.m.), and evening at sunset. At these times they would go to the temple to pray, and that is where Peter and John were headed at 3:00 p.m.

The gate called Beautiful was one of the favored entrances to the temple and therefore a popular place for a beggar to be asking for money. Giving money to those in need was considered praiseworthy in the Jewish religion. The crippled man asked for money, but Peter—by the power of the Holy Spirit—had something much better to offer. Peter makes it clear that it is not his own ability that brought the healing but that it was done “in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” Further, Peter not only tells the man to walk, but takes him by the hand and helps him up. The result is not only the healing, but the praise of God by the beggar and the wonder and amazement on the part of the people who observed the event.

Thus begins the ability of the disciples to do the things Jesus had done, as Jesus had promised (John 14:12). This gets to the heart of what the Christian faith is all about. Those who are disciples of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, are to be Christ to the world around them...not just in Peter's day but for all time until Jesus returns. There can be no greater calling. The world awaits the revealing of the presence and power of God in the lives of those of us who call ourselves Christians (Romans 8:19). The time is now.

R&D *How effectively are you and the members of your community of faith revealing the presence and power of God to those around you?*

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, work through me to reach others for Christ.*

Day 12

Read: Acts 4:23-31

The Believers' Prayer

The Jewish leaders were greatly disturbed by the healing of the beggar and the boldness with which Peter and John were speaking to the people. That led to their arrest and appearance before the Sanhedrin (4:1-22). They were warned to no longer speak in the name of Jesus, but were released after additional warnings, the leaders being afraid to punish them further because the people were praising God for what they had seen.

It never occurred to Peter and John to obey the Sanhedrin's command to speak no more in Jesus' name. They had been empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so and anything less would have been a complete betrayal of what now meant more to them than anything. In our reading they had been released and were reporting to the faithful what had happened to them. Would this lead to depression and fear, realizing the odds against these early followers of Christ? Although one might think so, just the opposite was the truth. They were now under the power of God and were ready for whatever troubles were likely to descend upon them.

Thus we come to what down through the centuries has been called the Believers' Prayer. Notice how these people prayed. They began by praising God. Then they told Him their particular problem and asked for His help. They didn't ask that the problem be removed, but that God help them in dealing with it. They weren't sorry for themselves; they were challenged! This is God-empowered, Holy Spirit praying and is a model for us in our day.

R&D *How might this model be used to improve your prayers? Explain.*

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for these early pioneers of the faith who prayed in boldness and followed through on their prayers.*

Day 13

Read: Acts 5:1-11

Ananias and Sapphira

Now we come to the other side of what the empowering of the Holy Spirit caused within the young Christian community. That empowering was to be taken very seriously, with dire consequences when not done so.

What Peter called lying to the Holy Spirit by Ananias and Sapphira was not the sin of greed or stinginess for holding back a part of the money that was rightly theirs. Despite the fact that these early Christians were living in a close community of faith in which they shared what they had to meet the needs of others (2:44-45), there was no obligation to sell their land and give it all to the church. Their sin—their lying to God and to God's people—was implying that they were giving the whole amount they had realized from the sale when in fact they were not. They were making it look as though they were more generous than they actually were. Such dishonesty could sabotage the ministry of the early Church. The Holy Spirit could not work effectively in an atmosphere of deceit.

William Barclay said, "This is one of the stories which demonstrate the almost stubborn honesty of the Bible. It is a story which might well have been left out because it shows that even in the early Church there were imperfect Christians. But the Bible refuses to present an idealized picture of anything."

Note that Peter points out that sin is sin against God. Barclay commented that failure of diligence is sin against God because He works through His people and has a right to expect the best of us. When we fail to use our gifts and talents for God's purposes, we sin against God. And, when we fail to tell the truth—as did Ananias and Sapphira—we are sinning against the Holy Spirit and the guidance he gives us in our hearts.

R&D *How do you react to the story in our reading for today? Why?*

Prayer: *Lord, help us never to take lightly Your rightful expectations of Your people.*

Day 14

Read: Acts 5:12-16

The Apostles Heal Many

As today's passage of Scripture makes plain, it was not just Peter and John who manifested the healing power of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. Many were also healed through the apostles, who also performed "many miraculous signs and wonders among the people" (v.12).

John Wimber, who founded the Vineyard churches, indicated that he did so because he didn't see things happening in Christian churches today that were like what happened in this early church. In other words, where is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our day?

"Signs and wonders" are apparently happening in other parts of the Christian world today and maybe, perhaps to a lesser extent and in more subtle ways, even in the churches of the West. In our country, maybe we need more "believing is seeing" than "seeing is believing." In other words, it is only as our trust in God grows that we are able to see clearly what He is doing in our midst.

Also, note that this early body of believers met in a public place to worship regularly. In other words, they were out among the people, and the result was that an increasing number joined the fellowship and others brought their sick to be healed.

Before our last move we were a part of a church that began, years ago, to have a weekly Tuesday night healing service. Originally, it was mainly members of the congregation who attended; but soon people were coming from all over the community because they saw the good things that were happening there. After our move we became members of a church that is located in a commercial and industrial complex; and, although most of our members would probably prefer to worship in a beautiful church building somewhere, we see the value of being out among the people.

R&D How can your congregation be a center of healing but also be out among the people?

Prayer: Empower Your people, Lord God, to be bright shining stars who attract others to Your Blessed Son by the movement of the Holy Spirit within us.

Day 15

Read: Acts 6:1-7, 7:54-60

Stephen's Testimony

The first part of our reading for today tells of the choosing of the church's first deacons, ones who would be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom to handle the practical ministry of service to others. Of the seven chosen, Stephen is singled out as "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (v.5b). Just how full of the Spirit Stephen actually was is told about in Acts 6 and 7. Because of great wonders and miraculous signs among the people done through Stephen, the Jewish leaders became concerned about him and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

Stephen before the Sanhedrin, in response to charges brought against him, gives a remarkable speech (7:1-53). It is a speech about Israel's relationship with God, drawing on Old Testament history. His main point is that the Jews repeatedly rejected God's will for them and the current leaders now rejected the Messiah, God's Son.

As the second part of our reading for today tells, the Jewish leaders were furious. "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." This was more than the Jews could stand, and they seized him, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. But even as he faced death, Stephen prayed: "Lord, do not hold this against them."

Fortunately we, in our day, don't face the dangers that Stephen and the early believers faced...although our Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world sometimes do. Yet, even in what may seem to be small ways, our faith is often tested. The Holy Spirit is with us to stand for gospel truth in whatever we face.

R&D *When was the last time you had to stand up for your faith in Jesus? Explain.*

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, that we do not have to face the dangers that were faced by the early Church, but give us courage to do what You would have us do.*

Day 16

Read: Acts 8:26-40

Philip and the Ethiopian

Today's reading gives us yet another amazing way in which the Holy Spirit was working in the newly formed church. Philip was another of the seven chosen to be deacons. He had gone to a city in Samaria where he proclaimed the gospel and worked miracles among the people to their great joy (8:5-8). But God had an even more important task for him. This gives us an example of how we can be doing a good thing but not the best thing that God has in mind for us if we are alert to the Holy Spirit within us.

Being obedient to the Lord's call upon his life, Philip headed down the road from Jerusalem to Gaza where he encountered an official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. The man was reading from the book of Isaiah but not understanding what he was reading. The particular passage provided a perfect opening into the gospel message, and Philip took advantage of it to lead the Ethiopian to the Lord, baptizing him on the spot. This gives us an example of how God can use us to reach others for Christ if we are alert to the opportunities to do so. Our situations are not likely to be as dramatic as the one Philip faced, but the Holy Spirit can guide us to do what we can in the situations we face.

Our reading ends with Philip immediately being taken from the scene and appearing in Azotas where he preached the gospel until he reached Caesarea. He had accomplished what God intended him to do with the Ethiopian, a person of influence who could have had a role in leading the Ethiopians to Christ. But now God had other plans for Philip. We probably don't know anyone whom God has transported in the miraculous method with which he seems to have moved Philip, but the point is that He has work for us to do; and, if we are alert to the Holy Spirit within us, He will get us where He needs us to be.

R&D *Have you ever had the opportunity to clarify a passage of Scripture to another person? Explain.*

Prayer: *Lord, help us to be so open to the Holy Spirit that we will sense what You want us to do in the situations we face in life.*

Day 17

Read: Acts 9:1-19

Saul's Conversion

The conversion of the Apostle Paul is arguably the most important thing that has happened in Christianity since Pentecost. It also must be one of the most dramatic spiritual reversals in history. Here was Saul, a leading Pharisee, one who had stood approving of the death of Stephen (8:1). On the road to Damascus to capture and imprison "those of the Way" (as Christians were called at that point in history), Christ speaks to him after a light flashes from heaven that literally

knocked him to the ground: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Taken blind into the city, he remains there for three days until relief appears in the person of Ananias.

The arrival of Ananias is a story in itself. The Lord speaks to him, telling him to go to Saul (who will become Paul), but Ananias already knows about Saul. He questions whether this can really be what God wants him to do. There would be great danger in going before one who was “breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (v.1). But he is told to go and he does so, laying hands on Saul to receive the Holy Spirit. Paul is baptized and the rest is history.

Not many of us will have had a conversion anywhere near as dramatic as happened to Paul. However, God had a special purpose for his life. He would be the one to carry the gospel to the Gentiles and become the foremost interpreter of the Christian faith. Where would we be without Paul? Yet, where would we be without many other faithful Christians down through the centuries? Where would you be without the one or ones who led you to Christ? All of that is a work of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will use us to reach others for Christ.

R&D In what ways do you believe God uses you to reach others for Christ?

Prayer: Lord, You know that I am a weak instrument in Your hands, but help me to see the ways You want to use me for Your purposes.

Day 18

Read: Acts 9:36-41

Peter Heals Dorcas

We know that Jesus had the power to raise the dead, for he did so on several occasions (Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 7:11-17; John 11:1-44). Now we see Peter doing so. However, Peter was not doing this in his own power but by the same power with which Jesus raised the dead...the power of the Holy Spirit. In a later study, we will see that Paul also raised someone from the dead (20:7-12). There are claims that such things happen in our day as well.

The point of this and other dramatic events that we will be considering in this series is that the Holy Spirit is a powerful force for good in our world if Christians have the faith and boldness to allow that power to be demonstrated. The incarnation of Christ—Christ among us here on earth—did not end when Jesus ascended into heaven. The incarnation is still going on. Jesus is living in our day and is doing the things he did when he walked this earth; it’s just that he is doing them through those Christians who are willing to accept the responsibility to be who they are called to be as followers of Christ, those who are obedient to the Holy Spirit within them.

God’s gift to us that we might be Christ to the world around us is the Holy Spirit Jesus promised to his followers, the same Holy Spirit that came upon the believers at Pentecost. God may not have us raising the dead, but there is much He has for us to do if the world is to be brought to Christ. We may simply be people who do the sort of things Dorcas did: “always doing good and helping the poor” (v.36), so long as we are doing those things because of the love of God within us.

R&D What things does the Holy Spirit have you doing?

Prayer: Lord, help us not to shirk back from anything You want us to do.

Day 19

Read: Acts 10:1-23

Peter's Vision

In today's reading we see yet another amazing way the Holy Spirit was working in the fledgling days of the Christian faith. Cornelius, a God-fearer, as the Gentiles were called in that day, had a vision in which he was told to send men to Joppa to bring back Simon Peter. In the meantime, Peter has an amazing vision of his own. In it, a large sheet was lowered down from heaven on which were animals orthodox Jews were not allowed to eat. Yet, Peter was told to kill and eat of them. When Peter questions whether it is proper for him to do so because, to him, they are impure or unclean, he is told by a voice from heaven that he should not call anything impure that God has made clean. This happened three times.

While Peter is still contemplating the message, the men from Cornelius arrive. The Holy Spirit speaks to Peter and tells him to go with the men. After hearing what the men have to say, Peter invites them into his house. In the passage of Scripture that follows today's reading, Peter goes to Caesarea to speak with Cornelius. In the meantime, Cornelius had called together family and close friends to hear what Peter had to say. After the two men have exchanged their visions, Peter spoke to those assembled about Jesus and the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the message (10:44).

What do we make of all of this? Primarily that God was expanding the vision of the leaders of the early church that they might open the door to Gentiles. It was a vital change of direction for Jewish Christians because they had seen themselves as God's chosen people who had elaborate rules and regulations they had followed in the past. Now, were they to abandon all of that and accept as brothers and sisters in Christ ones they had formerly thought unclean? That was the message, and God had given it to them in a dramatic way through the visions of Peter and Cornelius. Sometimes we, too, may need a dramatic message from God to face our prejudices or to see the larger picture.

R&D Have you ever experienced what you would call a vision from God? Explain.

Prayer: Lord, make us open to whatever method You might use to awaken us to what You want us to do.

Day 20

Read: Acts 12:1-19

Peter Escapes from Prison

Several significant people are a part of this story. King Herod was Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great. His sister was Herodias, who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-28). He was partly Jewish and persecuted Christians to please the Jewish leaders. He had chosen Passover as a time to wreak havoc on the Christians because many Jews would be in Jerusalem for the celebration. Herod died suddenly in A.D. 44 (12:20-23). James, whom Herod martyred, was the brother of John and one of the original twelve disciples. John wrote the Gospel of John, three Epistles, and the Revelation. John Mark is the Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

We see another amazing example of what God was doing in the early days of the Church. The body of believers prayed diligently for the imprisoned Peter, and an angel comes to his rescue.

Note how God does for us those things we cannot do for ourselves (loosing chains, opening a locked gate) but leaves it to us to do our part (Peter had to clothe himself and follow the angel).

Whereas we see again the movement of the Holy Spirit among the faithful that brought such spectacular results, we also see in this story our weak and doubting selves. Here was this body of believers praying faithfully for Peter only to be in disbelief that their prayers had been answered when Peter appeared at the door. In this Lenten season, it is good to remind ourselves of the power of prayer on the one hand and our lack of faith on the other.

R&D When has an answer to prayer been a surprise to you? Explain.

Prayer: Dear Lord, make us bolder in our prayers and more grateful for the results.

Day 21

Read: Acts 13:1-12

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Set apart by the Holy Spirit, sent by the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit...that is what we see in this passage.

First we are told that God had a special purpose for Barnabas and Saul (Paul) as a result of worship and fasting. God had work for them to do. That work would be what we have come to know as Paul's first missionary journey. The Holy Spirit sets apart people in our day for special purposes as well. Some are called to ordination, others to missionary efforts. But all of God's people are empowered with gifts for ministry (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4) and that is our "setting apart" for the work God has for us to do.

Next, the two are sent, following further fasting and the laying on of hands. They would be traveling over a wide area preaching the gospel, working miracles, and leading people to Christ. They wouldn't be doing this alone; they not only had the Holy Spirit guiding them, but they knew that they had the prayers and support of the community of faith in Antioch from which they were sent. Think of the comfort and satisfaction that can be had by that sort of support! We should want that for our ministry efforts today.

Finally, we see the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their missionary travels. Specifically, on the verge of leading Sergius Paulus to the Lord, satanic interference comes in the form of a sorcerer named Elymas. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Paul is able to cause Elymas temporary blindness, a miracle that aids the proconsul, "who was amazed at the teaching about the Lord" (v.12), in becoming a believer. In his encounter with Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus pointed out that the Spirit blows where it pleases (v.8); there seems to be no limitation to what the Holy Spirit can do to deal with a matter at hand.

R&D To what extent do you feel supported in your ministry by the body of Christ of which you are a part? Explain.

Prayer: Blow, Holy Spirit, through my life and the lives of those who are conscious of your work within them that the world may be brought to Christ.

Day 22

Read: Acts 16:6-10

Paul's Vision

Paul is now on his second missionary journey. In our reading for today, we see the Holy Spirit guiding Paul and his companions in three situations. First, they were “kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia” (v.6). Then, when they tried to enter Bithynia, the Spirit would not allow them (v.7). Next, Paul has a vision in which “a man of Macedonia” begs him to come into Macedonia, which he does.

We don't know how the Holy Spirit tells Paul not to go into Asia. That could have happened through a strong inner conviction, words from God could have been spoken to his inner self, he could have had a vision (as he did of the man of Macedonia), or it could have occurred in other ways. The important point is that Paul wanted to know the will of God, and so should we. The *Life Application Bible* suggests some ways to seek God's will: (1) make sure your plan is in harmony with God's Word; (2) ask mature Christians for their advice; (3) check your own motives to see if you are seeking to do what you want to do or what you think God wants; (4) pray to God to open and close the doors as He desires. That's practical advice, but the Holy Spirit can speak to us in these practical ways.

If we reflect back on our lives, we should be able to remember situations in which God “opened or closed” doors in relation to the direction we were headed. Things that perhaps seemed disasters at the time ended up being blessings in the long run. Lent is a good time for such reflections because they make us more conscious of God's presence in our lives through the Holy Spirit within us.

R&D Reflect on a recent example of inner guidance you have received from God.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that You love us so much that You want to guide the direction of our lives.

Day 23

Read: Acts 16:[16-21], 22-40

Paul and Silas in Prison

Paul and Silas are in serious trouble in Philippi. Paul had exorcized an evil spirit from a slave girl who was making money for her masters by fortune-telling. The loss of income by the slave owners threw them into a rage and they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities (vv.16-21), accusing them of illegal activities. The crowd got worked up and the authorities had Paul and Silas flogged and thrown into prison.

Now we come to the good part of the story. Instead of being resentful for what had happened to them, Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns in their prison cell. At this point the Holy Spirit intervenes, there is an earthquake, the foundations of the prison are shaken, the prison doors fly open and the chains fall off the prisoners. This leads to the jailer panicking and considering suicide because he believed his prisoners had escaped. Paul shouts that the prisoners are still there and there is no reason for the jailer to harm himself. Overwhelmed by what has happened, the jailer asks Paul what he must do to be saved. The result was that the jailer and his household accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and were baptized.

This is a message of assurance to us that God is with us in the toughest places. There can be joy in the midst of pain and suffering when our priorities are right...when we, like the jailer,

“believe in the Lord Jesus” and are saved (v.31). Paul gives us another illustration of this point in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote it years later when he was in a Roman prison, but it is considered his letter of joy: “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice!” (4:4).

R&D Think of an instance in which, because of your love of Christ, you have been able to find joy in the midst of a difficult situation.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, we are grateful for the fact that you are with us in our pain, sorrow, and grief.

Day 24

Read: Acts 19:1-12

Paul in Ephesus

Ephesus, along with Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt, was one of the great cities on the Mediterranean Sea in Paul’s time. It was a part of the Roman province of Asia and is now a part of Turkey. Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years.

The issue being dealt with in our passage of Scripture was the nature of baptism. John’s baptism was one of repentance from sin only and not evidence of new life in Christ. The Ephesian believers had received the baptism of John and needed further instruction concerning the message and ministry of Christ. They believed in Jesus as the Messiah, but did not understand the significance of his death and resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit into their lives. As a result of Paul’s teachings, twelve men were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus (v.5). When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

In the early days of the church, the Holy Spirit came upon believers in a variety of ways. Usually this would occur when the person professed faith in Christ. Because these twelve Ephesians earlier had only an incomplete understanding of their profession of faith, their infilling occurs after Paul has revealed further truth to them. Resembling what had happened at Pentecost, God used these outward signs as inward assurance of being united in the body of Christ, the Church. Speaking in tongues has been a controversial subject in the Church down through the years. It should not be so. We should neither limit how the Holy Spirit may work in the lives of other Christians nor set as criteria for belief those experiences that have happened to us. As the saying goes, just because you came to faith as a result of God pulling you from a hole you had fallen into, you shouldn’t try to lead people to Christ by pushing them into holes.

R&D What has been the most amazing work of the Holy Spirit in your life? Explain.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as to those ways in which we still fail to understand who you are in our lives, please teach us those ways.

Day 25

Read: Acts 20:7-12

Eutychus Raised from the Dead

Now we have the instance of Paul raising someone from the dead; and perhaps we smile in wondering how we might have survived a sermon that went on until midnight! The burning of the lamps and the fact there were many people on this occasion probably added to the warmth of the room and combined with the long talk to make Eutychus sleepy. The reference to him as a

young man indicates he was in the range of 8-14 years of age. Bringing Eutychus back to life would certainly have been a wake-up call to all present, so Paul continues to talk until daylight!

In view of the central theme of this story, perhaps two other things might be overlooked. The first is that the breaking of bread is mentioned twice (vv.7, 11). In the early days of the church, believers sharing a meal together was a common occurrence. Perhaps it was like the “covered dish” or “carry in” suppers many of us have experienced in our churches. This was a special time of fellowship, especially considering that these were not wealthy people and there were often slaves among them. Getting to eat a shared meal together was a big deal. They called it a “love feast.” During it or at the end of it the Lord’s Supper would be celebrated.

Also note that after the miracle concerning Eutychus, Paul did not depart. He stayed on until daylight, sharing with the people and undoubtedly assuring them (and himself) that the young man was all right. As a result, “The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted” (v.12). We may have a picture in our minds of Paul as a tough guy who was always on the move. This story shows his compassionate and gentle side. It’s a reminder to us that the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit is love (1 Corinthians 13).

R&D How meaningful are meals together in your congregation? Explain.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to be ever conscious of the needs of others within our fellowship of faith.

Day 26

Read: Acts 27:27-44

The Shipwreck

Our reading today tells a story that is sort of like the reverse of Jonah’s sea voyage. When the ship was in trouble (Jonah 1:15), the crew threw Jonah overboard. Here the crew seems to see Paul as their ticket to earthly salvation. It had been a long and treacherous voyage, and Paul was present as a prisoner. He was being taken to Rome for trial and expected death. But the men obviously saw something in Paul that gave him authenticity, and they were willing to follow his suggestions although there was little reason to believe that he knew anything about how to save a ship in bad weather other than his faith in God.

After lightening the ship, eating a meal to give them strength and following other suggestions from Paul, the ship heads toward shore where it will break up from the pounding surf. The soldiers want to kill the prisoners. They feared that they would pay with their own lives for those who escaped. Julius, the centurion, was in charge, however; and he was very impressed with Paul. Thus, he takes the responsibility upon himself and protects the prisoners. As a result, all 276 people aboard the ship were saved, as Paul had promised.

What we have in this story is an illustration of at least two Christian truths. One is that Holy Spirit-inspired leadership can work to the good of all who follow. Paul was listened to not because he knew anything about sailing but because Julius and others saw in him an authenticity that came from his relationship with God even though they likely knew nothing of such a relationship. The presence and power of God shown through Paul, and it can through us when we allow the Holy Spirit to guide our decisions. The other truth is that when you are in trouble it sure helps to have someone who is praying.

R&D Recall an instance in which prayer saw you through a rough time.

Prayer: *It is trust in You, Lord, that helps us through the turbulent seas of life.*

Day 27

Read: Acts 28:1-10

Paul at Malta

Today ends our trip through Acts in which we have been able to observe the Holy Spirit at work in the early church. Paul has landed on Malta and finds a hospitable but superstitious people. When a snake bites Paul, the people think him a murderer whom the gods will allow to die that justice might prevail. When this does not happen, they decide he must be a god. It doesn't take Paul long to begin to show something about the real God.

Invited into the chief official's house, he prays for the man's father, lays hands on him, and he is healed. This results in many more being brought to him for healing. Nothing is said of Paul preaching the gospel to these people, but we can be sure he did so, and that many were led to the Lord. Needless to say, Paul and his companions were honored in many ways, and sent on their way with gifts of needed supplies.

I received an email this morning based on Matthew 7:11: "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" The verse is illustrated by the story of the young man about to graduate from college who wanted, more than anything else, a sports car that his wealthy father could afford to give him. Instead he received a Bible. He furiously threw the Bible down, left the room, and never saw his father again. However, as executor of his father's estate, he came home and began to go through his father's things. Among them was the Bible, marked at the Matthew verse. As he picked it up, the key to the sports car fell out of the Bible.

It's just a story, of course, but is a poignant reminder that God loves us and wants the best for us, just as He did for the people of Malta who looked to other gods. For them, He hid a man of the true God in the middle of a shipwreck. He does things like that.

R&D To what extent have these stories of the Holy Spirit at work in the early church emboldened you to look for God to work in miraculous ways in our day? Explain.

Prayer: *Come, Holy Spirit, and show us the way to be Christ to those around us in a world desperately needful of your presence and power.*

Day 28

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Temples of the Holy Spirit

While we have been illustrating that Christians have the Holy Spirit within them to guide and direct their lives, Paul's assertion, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?" shows us just how fully indwelt we are!

In today's reading, Paul is dealing with the question of sexual morality. The Corinthians had been justifying promiscuity and prostitution on the grounds that "all things are lawful" for followers of Christ. Paul corrects them by pointing out that all things are not helpful. Jesus set us free from sin that we might no longer be controlled by it. That didn't mean that we should revert to being controlled by our lusts and desires.

Christianity places high value on the body because our physical existence is to be in service of the Lord. Christians believe in the resurrection of the body. We will live in renewed bodies in

the presence of the Lord forever. For now, because the Holy Spirit dwells within us, our mortal bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, holy places in which God abides.

How, then, can a Christian justify joining this body, consecrated to Christ and filled with his Spirit, to a prostitute? Paul reminds the Corinthians, “The two will become one flesh.” Our bodies are already joined to the Lord, being in one spirit with him. How could we then join that body in immoral relations with others? We do not have the right to give ourselves over to sinful practices. We are not our own; we were bought with a price (v.19b-20): Jesus’ death on the Cross. We are to glorify God in our bodies because they are temples of the Holy Spirit.

R&D What does being a temple of the Holy Spirit mean to you? Explain.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, who has taught us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, help us to realize just how precious we are to You.

Day 29

Read: Romans 12:3-8

Gifted by the Holy Spirit

Now we come to a major turning point in our study. Up until now we primarily have been looking at how the Holy Spirit operated in Old Testament times (coming upon individuals in certain situations) and in the early days of the Church. In today’s reading we face the question: How is the Holy Spirit to operate in our day? Paul gives us the answer.

In the infancy of the Christian Church, there were not congregations such as we have today. There were individuals (the apostles, the seven deacons, those directly connected to them such as Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy) and fledgling groups, but nothing like the congregations in which Christians worship and fellowship now. Therefore, the focus in our studies has been largely upon individuals and the miracles that God wrought through them to awaken the world to the presence and power of God in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit.

God seems to work in a different way today. His plan is apparently to work through the churches, and today’s reading tells us how. The members of each congregation are provided different gifts of the Holy Spirit to work for the benefit of all (see also 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4). Once the Christian Church was established, there was no reason for the “signs and wonders” of the early days to cease; it is just that they would normally occur from within congregations that people might be drawn to Christ’s Church rather than to become followers of an individual or a movement. This places the focus clearly on us to know our spiritual gifts and to exercise them as the Holy Spirit inspires us to do so.

R&D In what ways has the Holy Spirit empowered you to minister to others in your congregation and from your congregation to the world around you?

Prayer: Use me, Lord, as You will, to do what You would have me do.

Day 30

Read: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

The Holy Spirit Comforts Us

There are two sides to the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Whereas we are given things to do—gifts to meet needs in the world—we find from today’s reading that the Holy Spirit comforts us when we’re in trouble. We do what is expected of us; we receive help in our difficulties.

The comfort we receive from God is not an end to our difficulties, but the strength, encouragement, and hope to deal with them. And, as Paul points out, it is in receiving inner comfort from the Holy Spirit that we are equipped to comfort others. And that, again, gives us things to do as we minister to those in difficulty who need comfort. This is like a circle of God’s love flowing into us and through us to others.

There is, of course, an additional aspect of today’s teaching. It has to do with the suffering of Christ that flows into our lives (v.5)...something we may be particularly conscious of during Lent. Paul is implying (and Peter agrees: 1 Peter 4:12-13) that Christians should rejoice when we suffer because, in our own suffering, we experience a taste of what it meant for Christ to suffer for our sins.

We share the sufferings of Christ as we share in his ministry. The more we are attentive to and compassionate about the pain and suffering of those around us, the more we share in that pain and suffering. This process draws us closer to Christ. We more greatly identify with him as we attempt, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to be Christ to others. We are, in fact, better shaped into being the kind of people God wants us to be. Paul pointed out (in Romans 5:3-4) that suffering produces perseverance, which, in turn, produces Christian character.

R&D In what ways does God comfort you? Explain.

Prayer: Holy Comforter, make me ever conscious of the pain and suffering of those around me that I am be a comfort to them.

Day 31

Read: John 16:5-11

The Holy Spirit Convicts of Sin

We have been looking at some of the personal benefits to us of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Today’s passage may not be so comfortable to us, but is needful of consideration, particularly during Lent. It has to do with the Greek word *elegchein* in verse 8. Let’s look at what William Barclay says about that word.

“It is the word which is used for the cross-examination of a witness, or a man on trial, or as an opponent in an argument. It has always this idea of cross-examining a man until he sees and admits his errors, or acknowledges the force of some argument he has not seen. Now clearly such cross-examination can do two things—it can *convict* a man of the crime he has committed or the wrong that he has done; or it can *convince* a man of the weakness of his own case. In this passage, we need both of the meanings.”

The Holy Spirit “will *convict* the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.” That is good news in the sense that it promises that people—whether or not they are Christians—will have some inner knowledge when they have done wrong. For Christians, it calls us to repentance and confession of sins, although there is clearly discomfort in having to face our sins! For non-Christians, a similar discomfort may lead them to want a better life that can only be

found in Christ.

Furthermore, according to Barclay, the Holy Spirit will *convince* people of righteousness. What leads people to accept (as Barclay puts it) a crucified Jewish criminal as the Son of God? The work of the Holy Spirit that convinces people of the sheer righteousness of Christ, who rose from the dead and is at the Father's right hand.

R&D Reflect on the inner conviction you may experience from time to time because you have not done the will of God.

Prayer: *Father, forgive.*

Day 32

Read: Romans 8:18-27

The Holy Spirit Helps Us in Our Weakness

This passage has to do with praying when we do not know how to pray. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us. The Spirit assists us in our prayers. The Spirit within makes us children of God and able to pray to Him as *Abba*, Father (see 8:15).

There are many times in the life of the Christian when we just don't know how to pray about a situation or a person. We are unable to determine what God's will would be in such a circumstance, and thus do not know how to pray in accordance with His will. Or, we are in a tough spot ourselves, perhaps going through a dry time spiritually, or in bad health. We just don't have the energy or confidence to pray properly. We cannot adequately express our love of God, our worship of Him, our sense of repentance, or even our needs.

At such times, we just groan rather than coming up with words. We know our need but we can't express it in our own words. Yet, something is going on within us, a longing, an aching, what Paul refers to as a groaning. This groaning is a work of the Holy Spirit within us, praying with us and for us. As a result, we can have special confidence in those prayers because they are from God (the Holy Spirit) and to God (the Father). God knows what those inarticulate groans really mean. He knows that they are aligned with His will and purpose.

Thus, when we carry a weight too heavy to put into words, we can rely on the Holy Spirit within to pray for us and know that there cannot be a better interconnection within the Trinity than that!

R&D Recall an experience in which you have been unable to form your own words of prayer and have relied on the Holy Spirit to pray your prayer for you.

Prayer: *Gracious Holy Spirit, you aid us in our weakness in so many ways, including praying within us, for which we are eternally grateful.*

Day 33

Read: John 14:25-27

The Holy Spirit Teaches Us

Another attribute of the Holy Spirit is as our teacher. That happens in several ways. First, Jesus assured the disciples that they would remember all of the things that he had said to them. That gives us confidence in the New Testament because the disciples were eyewitnesses to all that Jesus said and did, and the New Testament is a record of that. Thus, as we study Scripture, we can

be confident that we are receiving the teachings of Jesus just as though he were with us in our day.

But the Holy Spirit also teaches us in the school of life. If we are open to his guidance, we learn from him in the encounters of the day. We learn from him in worship and fellowship with other Christians, and from the Holy Spirit-inspired teachings of others. We can learn from him in our successes and failures, and in serving others.

Jesus mentions peace. The peace of which Jesus speaks is not the absence of conflict but a closeness of relationship with God. Jesus, whose relationship with the Father was perfect unity, could bestow this peace through the Holy Spirit. He who had been the principal witness to the love of the Father would be leaving. His future witness had to be through his followers, and that witness could only be valid on the basis of an inner confidence that resulted from a deep-seated peace.

Jesus was also convinced that his disciples should have a clear warning of the dangers they would face in the world because of their loyalty to him. They confronted a very serious situation! Jesus came to reconcile the world to the Father (3:16) and met rejection and crucifixion. Now the disciples would try to carry that ministry forward. By the power of the Holy Spirit, that remains our calling.

R&D Reflect on the “peace that passes all understanding” that we should be experiencing as Christ’s disciples today.

Prayer: Teach us, Lord God, in all the ways available to You, that we may see You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly.

Day 34

Read: John 16:12-15

The Holy Spirit Guides Us into All Truth

There was no way that Jesus could tell his followers everything they would need to know in the years ahead. So, he promises them that the Holy Spirit will teach them and guide them into all truth. This foresees a continuing revelation of truth that would occur down through the centuries, and that revelation would come through the action of the Holy Spirit.

There is a caution here. When the spiritual renewal movement swept through churches in this country several decades ago, there became a great emphasis on spiritual experiences that Christians were having. That was healthy in that it brought new life into many people and congregations, making them more aware of the work of the Holy Spirit. However, out of it came a dangerous trend...not among those who had had the spiritual experiences but from those who had found Scripture too limiting to the kind of life they wanted to live. So, over time, to the Anglican principle that we are to be guided by Scripture, reason, and tradition (with Scripture being the underlying test of the other two), experience was added. That allowed people to say that human relationships that Scripture forbade were all right because the personal experience of those concerned made them feel that they were all right. In fact, however, all experiences must be evaluated against Scripture; and, when found wanting, rejected.

The truth into which the Holy Spirit guides people is gospel truth. It will find its roots in Scripture. The beauty of this is that God is giving us a pathway to follow: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11). If we let him, the Holy Spirit will guide us and keep us on the right path.

R&D *In what ways have you felt guided into truth through the Holy Spirit? Explain.*

Prayer: *Lead me into all truth, Lord, and guide me along the pathway of life You have in mind for me.*

Day 35

Read: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The Holy Spirit Sanctifies Us

In today's reading Paul is describing some characteristics of unbelievers. Those people whose sins fall into the categories listed by Paul aren't automatically and irretrievably condemned to hell, however. All of us are sinners, and Paul has listed only some exemplary sins. He goes on to point out, in verse 11, that the Corinthians to whom he is writing had engaged in these sinful activities until they gave their lives to Christ and were baptized, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit. They had sinned, but they had turned from their evil ways.

The problem is that, in a permissive society such as the one the Corinthians lived in...and we live in today...sin isn't taken very seriously. In our day many people, including some Christians, think it is acceptable to continue doing those things that Paul condemns. So Paul's warning, clearly stated, is a wake-up call to the human race.

The good news, of course, is that we can change. God calls us not only to leave our sinful ways behind us but to become mature Christian disciples, and that is a process. As the *Life Application Bible* states it: "Paul emphasizes God's action in making believers new people. Three aspects of God's work are all part of our salvation: our sins were washed away, we were set apart for special use ('sanctified'), and we were pronounced not guilty ('justified') for our sins." If we obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit rather than the ways of the world, we can mature as Christians and be the people God calls us to be.

R&D *How do you cope with the permissive attitude of those around you concerning the sins Paul listed?*

Prayer: *Holy Father, it is beyond comprehension that You forgive us and set us on the road to eternity with You, but we praise You and thank You for doing so.*

Day 36

Read: Galatians 5:16-25

Life in the Spirit

In today's reading, Paul gives us another list of sinful behaviors. The fruit of the Spirit are then given as the positive reverse of those characteristics. These are qualities that, through the work of the Holy Spirit, are to be reproduced in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We could spend time considering those negative things we are to avoid; but, if we truly "grow" the fruit of the Spirit, that healthy growth will give us the strength to resist the blight of fornication, impurity, licentiousness, and the like.

Again, it is a matter of maturing as Christians. As the Holy Spirit gains ever-greater control of our lives, God's presence and power will increasingly reflect through our lives into the lives of others. An amazing way in which that happens is by our showing forth the fruit of the Spirit.

Let's take a few moments now to reflect on where we are in our attempt this Lent to recognize the importance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. God wants to shape us in the image of Christ that we may be Christ to the world around us. The fruit of the Spirit would have been perfectly manifested in Jesus. Take some time to consider each of these fruit and how it is showing forth in your life. Forcing yourself to manifest a fruit of the Spirit would be as useless as pulling a green apple off a tree and proclaiming it ripe. The fruit must come forth from the Holy Spirit within you to be real.

R&D To what extent do you see the fruit of the Spirit being manifested within your community of faith?

Prayer: Lord, please grow in me the fruit of the Spirit that I may be fruitful for You.

Day 37

Read: 2 Timothy 3:10-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21

The Holy Spirit Inspired Scripture

Paul gives us a definition of Scripture: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (vv.16-17). Paul was, of course, talking about what we call the Old Testament because the New Testament was still in its formative stage. Peter affirms Scripture by saying that Scripture did not result from the private interpretation of those who wrote it, "but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (v.21). The point is that the whole Bible is the Holy Spirit-inspired word of God. It is trustworthy and is to be applied to our lives.

Scripture does all the things Paul says it does and more. Paul makes a couple of other important points. First, Timothy has known the Scriptures from his infancy. His grandmother and mother were both godly women who taught him Scripture. Like them, we have a responsibility to teach our children and grandchildren about the Bible. If children are grounded in Scripture, it will stand them in good stead all of their lives. Even if they go through a period of doubting their faith in Christ, their knowledge of Scripture can be a major factor in bringing them back to the Lord.

Secondly, Paul knew that Timothy had been convinced of the authenticity of Scripture in his life because of the people from whom he had learned it. Authenticity is seen in the lives of people who live what they profess, and we know they are worth paying attention to. We will be effective in teaching others the importance of Scripture only in proportion to the extent our lives reflect faithfulness not only to Christ but to what the Bible tells us about how we are to live, and it is the Holy Spirit within us that makes this possible.

R&D Who was primarily responsible for causing the Bible to be an essential part of your life?

Prayer: Lord, grant that we may hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest Holy Scripture and that we may hold fast to it and it to us for the remainder of our lives.

Day 38

Read: John 15:18-27

The Holy Spirit Testifies of Christ

In this passage, Jesus warns his followers of the persecution they will face. It was Jesus' goodness, not his greatness, that his adversaries detested; and any disciple who truly tries to follow

Jesus' example will face similar rejection.

An old joke that used to make the rounds was about the bishop who pointed out that his early predecessors continually faced martyrdom, but when he was out and about he was, instead, offered a cup of tea. That joke is less funny these days. My email is littered with articles about persecution of Christians in our day. In some parts of the world, Christian churches are routinely burned and believers are killed. Even in our country, there are those who constantly fight against Christmas and prayers, signs and symbols that are sacred to Christians.

A consolation for us is that Jesus faced persecution much greater than we can imagine, and he is with us through the Holy Spirit in anything we may face.

Finally, Jesus mentions responsibility and gives us reason for hope. The coming of Jesus presented an inescapable challenge to those who would follow him. We are to testify to the truth we have found in Jesus Christ, regardless of the opposition we face. The good news is that the Holy Spirit is with us to give us the strength to endure. Here Jesus uses two names for the Holy Spirit: Counselor and Spirit of truth. The first signifies the supporting, encouraging, and strengthening work of the Spirit. The latter points to the inspiring, informing, and reminding work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit ministers to both head and heart.

R&D What forms of persecution do you face in your life as a Christian?

Prayer: Give us strength and courage, Dear Lord, to deal with situations and circumstances that are contrary to Your will.

Good Friday, Day 39

Read: Romans 8:1-17

Life through the Spirit

What Paul calls the Spirit of life in verse 2 is the Holy Spirit. As we have seen in this series, he was present at the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2) and he is the presence and power behind the rebirth of every Christian. He is within us to guide us through the Christian life.

According to Paul, there are people who are dominated by their sinful nature and there are those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. All of us would fall into the first category if Jesus Christ had not made a way for us to escape. Because of Jesus, we can have a life of fulfillment and peace. Instead of being focused on all of the things we shouldn't want and shouldn't be doing, we can look at life with hope, joy, and love because of the Holy Spirit within us. There is great freedom in that.

This abundant life (John 10:10) is possible for us because of what Christ did for us when he died on the cross for our sins, provided a means for us to be in relationship with the Father, allowed our sins to be forgiven, sent the Holy Spirit, and gave us the opportunity to live with him forever. What more could we want? As the Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit, we are now children of God—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—to whom we can cry, “*Abba, Father.*”

This Good Friday we identify with Christ in his suffering; but, as the preacher said, “It’s Friday, but Sunday’s a-comin’.”

R&D What does sharing in Christ’s suffering (v.17) mean to you? Explain.

Prayer: Lord, help me truly to live by the Spirit.

Day 40

Read: Matthew 20:25-28

Servanthood

As I said at the beginning of this series, this study was inspired by a statement in the Lenten study in *The Journey* two years ago (March 18, 2013): “It takes faith to be Christ to the world around us. The secret we have going for us is the Holy Spirit within us to guide and direct our lives.” The Lenten study for that year was called “Blessed to Be a Blessing,” and today’s passage of Scripture was the one being studied that day. It seemed a fitting close to our study of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was trying to calm the waters of controversy caused by the mother of James and John asking that her sons might sit at his right and his left in the kingdom. Needless to say, the rest of the disciples were not happy with the request. Calling them all together, Jesus did a crucial teaching on what the Christian life is all about: servanthood. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant” (v.26). As disciples of Jesus Christ in our age, we are here to serve others. That’s something we wouldn’t likely do, left to our own desires.

The point is that there is much to do in order that the world may be brought to Christ. We can accomplish what God expects of us only to the extent we see ourselves as His hands, mind, and spirit in the places where we find ourselves in this life. And it is clear that we cannot do that on our own. We must have the presence and power of Christ to be Christ to others. That presence and power comes to us and lives within us by the Holy Spirit. How far will we go in accomplishing Christ’s mission for us? As far as we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, enable us, and protect us...because he will do all of those things if we let him.

R&D *What has been most helpful to you in the study of the Holy Spirit? Why?*

Prayer: *Come, Holy Spirit, and let your light enkindle the fire of love in our hearts.*

by Harry C. Griffith

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