

## THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT

*By Allon Maxwell*

No one can read the Gospels or the Acts without realising that the preaching of the Gospel in the first century, opened the door to a revelation of the power of God in a way which is largely lacking in the 20th century church.

The miracles which accompanied the preaching of the Gospel, declared God's approval of the message. They confirmed the truth of the claim that the Christ in whose name the message was preached, was indeed risen from the dead and exalted to the position of supremacy at God's right hand.

One of the significant problems of our time is that most of the church has developed a theology which allows it to remain comfortable with its lack of power.

This theology, firstly explains away the present need for such power and, secondly, denies the possibility that gifts of the Holy Spirit, through which the power is revealed, can still be present in the church at all.

This denial rejects any present relevance for those marvellous elements of the Gospel which enable Jesus to reveal His unchanging compassion for the desperate. It rejects His willingness to meet all who come to Him, from the resources of the unlimited power now placed in His hands by God.

It takes away the hope, offered in the Gospels, of meeting with a God who does care after all, about rescuing those who are oppressed by the devil. ([Acts 10:38](#))

The thrilling experiential Christianity of the first century, with its God given guarantee of a future inheritance, ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#)), is replaced by a religion in which the guarantee is neither offered nor permitted!

This is empty religion, dangerously close to having the outward form of Christianity, but denying its power. ([2 Timothy 3:5](#))

### THE PROMISE FOR US TODAY

I am painfully aware, through hard personal experience, that there are indeed many false spirits in our religious world, that are not from God. ([1 John 4:1](#))

However, I am also convinced, beyond question, that the promise of the Gift of the Holy Spirit, ([John 14:15-17](#)), was for all true followers of Jesus, in all places and all time. ([Acts 2:34-39](#))

The promise has been preserved by God, in the Gospels handed down to us from those first century witnesses who wrote, under inspiration, about the things they saw Jesus do, and heard Him say.

The reality has been demonstrated in the life and witness of the first century church.

The wording of the promise makes it clear that it still remains as valid today as it was in the first century. It is as much a part of the Gospel for the 20th century as it was in the first.

If we understand Jesus correctly, we need both the Spirit's **fruit** and the Spirit's **power** to faithfully portray Him to those who hear the Gospel from us.

If we do recognise that real power is lacking from our experience, we must not oversimplify the solution. The lack of the Spirit's power is only a SYMPTOM of another major lack.

Before we presume to ask for any gift of the Holy Spirit, there are some hard questions which we much ask ourselves.

We will need to be prepared to wait as long as it takes, until we are sure beyond doubt that we have found God's answers to those questions.

We will need to be totally honest before God that we are prepared to accept those answers and act on them, whatever the personal cost may be. We must face the reality, that the cost can be very high indeed.

## **THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH**

The lack of the Spirit's power in our church, or in us, might mean that what we preach (if we preach at all!) is something that Jesus is totally unwilling to confirm. ([Mark 16:20](#))

The Spirit of God does not guarantee us instant infallibility. Nor does it relieve us of our responsibility for continuing prayerful and open-hearted search for understanding of Bible Truth.

We will need to go before God to ask Him to reveal to us THE TRUTH which is the heart of the Gospel. We will need to spend time in the Word of God to allow God to quicken the Truth to our hearts.

God's emphasis and God's priorities for Truth will almost certainly be different to anything we have inherited from men who deny the real need for the Spirit's power in the church.

It just might be possible that we have been blinded by "traditions of men". Tradition, even if true, can be emphasised at the expense of other more fundamental and essential truth, without which there can be no real foundation laid for true Christian faith.

Do we really dare to ask God to show us what it is that Jesus WILL confirm?

## **TO THEM THAT OBEY**

One essential condition of the promise was related to obedience to the teaching of Jesus. ([John 14:15-16](#) and [Acts 5:32](#))

The lack of the Spirit's power in our church, or in us, will almost certainly mean that there is something important missing from our obedience, which disqualifies us from the promise.

We will need to go before God to ask Him to reveal to us, and convict us to the point of Godly sorrow, of those vital personal TRUTHS about Sin and Righteousness and Judgement. ([John 16:8-11](#))

***These are essential to obedience!***

We need to learn them for ourselves, before we can expect Jesus to confirm anything we dare to preach in His name.

Has our baptism in water been founded in true repentance and a heart's cry for forgiveness and a clear conscience?

Do we continue to ask God to speak clearly to us about our sins so that we can grow in the grace and holiness which are the goal of this New Life we say we have been given?

Are we compromised with the World? Or are we separated irrevocably from this world by our commitment to radical, costly obedience to His teaching about the way of life that pleases God?

Do we share the love of Jesus for this lost world of ours to the extent that we are willing to take up and carry a real cross with Him?

## **TO GLORIFY JESUS**

Why do we want this Power? We must resolve this question, honestly, before any other.

Are we prepared to glorify Jesus ALWAYS and NEVER ourselves?

Do we want people to look up to US, or to fall on their knees before Jesus?

Can we be trusted to use what we are given, always only to point others to Jesus and never to satisfy our own self-interest?

Do we want to be served? Or are we willing to serve?

Do we want to give, or to receive?

Are we willing to give up ALL that we have? Or do we want financial rewards?

Let us be totally honest about all this. We would be better to have no power at all than to be wrong about our motives in any of these things.

## **CHOSEN OUT OF THE WORLD**

Can we face persecution and rejection? If we do get this right, persecution is guaranteed, perhaps even from the friends of a lifetime; and certainly, from the church at large which labels our distinctive Abrahamic Faith as heresy.

## **WHAT GIFT?**

If we are ever to experience real gifts of the Holy Spirit, we must make love our priority ..... that Divine love described by Paul, which marks the indwelling presence of God.

[\(1 Corinthians 13:1-8\)](#)

Only with that priority settled; with all personal ego, pride and ambition set aside, are we encouraged to seek gifts.

And if we do seek gifts, we must remember that it is prophecy that Paul encourages, NOT tongues! [\(1 Corinthians 14:1\)](#)

Would we be content with that same gift of prophecy (and no more) which was seen in John the Baptist?

John worked no miracle. For him the power was in the words through which God convicted so many of their need for repentance.

Would we be content with one of those "lesser" invisible gifts, in which the left hand will never get to hear what the right hand has done? Gifts such as helping (1 Corinthians 12:28), or giving aid, or extending acts of mercy, (Romans 12:8), all of them concealed from the public gaze.

All of these "lesser" gifts are equally works of power, by the same Holy Spirit which moves mountains, or opens the eyes of the blind. And all of them are far more often needed than those other more spectacular revelations of the power of God.

Perhaps we will need to redefine our understanding of what "power" really is!

If we have fixed our eyes and egos on the spectacular; if we find those other less visible things less exciting and less satisfying, we are not yet ready for any real gifts of the Holy Spirit ..... and we will be open to deception from the many false spirits that are abroad in the church around us.

### **HOW WILL WE RECOGNISE OUR GIFT?**

We will need to be totally open to hear from God what it is that God really wants to do. From that point it no longer depends on our human ability to hear, but on God's infinite ability to communicate with those whose hearts are pure, and who are willing to hear and do what He says.

### **JESUS IS LORD**

What it amounts to, is this. Are we looking for an "experience", or for Jesus as Lord of all our being?

If Jesus Himself is missing as Lord of Life, there can be no real experience of the Holy Spirit.

However, where there is true surrender to Jesus, and where there is real love for Jesus ..... enough love to lead us into life changing obedience to ALL His commandments, there will be no lack of the Spirit's power for anything that God wants to do.

I do believe that I have seen REAL gifts of the Spirit at work in the lives of those who have this life changing love for Jesus; a love found only in a deeply humbling personal encounter with Him, at the cross. Their lives bear the fruit of radical obedience, in a way which is rarely encountered in this generation.

Any gift that I may have seen and believe to be valid, is totally founded on that TRUTH.