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## Receiving the Holy Spirit

**By David Wilkerson**

September 13, 2004 “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).

For years I’ve claimed to be filled with the Spirit. I have testified that I’ve been baptized in the Spirit. I’ve preached that the Holy Spirit empowers me to witness, and that he sanctifies me. I’ve prayed in the Spirit, talked to the Spirit, walked in the Spirit and heard his voice. I truly believe the Holy Spirit is the power of God.

I can take you to the place where I was filled with the Spirit, at eight years of age. I still remember my tears and my heart’s cry to the Lord. I recall the incredible vision of Christ I received. And I remember the passion for Jesus that resulted from that experience. The Holy Spirit has been my friend and close comfort ever since.

I’ve read everything that Scripture says about the Holy Spirit, from Genesis to Revelation. I’ve preached on Pentecost, on the need to be filled with the Spirit, on our bodies being temples of the Spirit. And I trust that the Spirit has spoken through me to his church.

Yet, lately, I’ve found myself praying, “Lord, have I truly received your Holy Spirit? Do I really know this incredible power that lives in me? Or is the Spirit just a doctrine to me? Am I somehow ignoring him? Am I not asking him to do for me what he came to do? Am I still carrying things, still doing things on my own, that he came to do for me?”

The fact is, you can have something very valuable and not know it. And you can’t enjoy what it is you have, because you don’t understand how valuable it is.

There’s a story about a farmer who worked his small farm his whole life. For decades he tilled the rocky soil, living poor and finally dying in discontent. At his death, the farm was passed down to his son. One day, while plowing, the son found a gold-streaked nugget. He had it appraised and was told it was pure gold. The young man soon discovered that the farm was full of gold. Instantly, he became a wealthy man. Yet that wealth was lost on his father, even though it was on the land his whole life.

So it is with the Holy Spirit. Many of us live in ignorance of what we have, of the power that resides in us. Some Christians live their entire lives thinking they have the Holy Spirit, yet they haven’t truly received him in fullness and power. He isn’t accomplishing in them the eternal work he was sent to do.

Now, I’m not talking about manifestations. Often, some believers seek the Spirit only when they’re in trouble and want him to manifest himself. They hope he’ll come down and sweep away their problems. But Peter says that’s not the truth about the Spirit. According to him, we have the treasure within us: “His divine power *hath given* unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3, italics mine).

At the Jordan River, John the Baptist told the Pharisees, “I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not” (John 1:26). Those religious leaders saw Jesus in the flesh, and they heard him speak. But they had no understanding of who he was. They didn’t know about his power and glory.

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Likewise, Jesus asked his own disciple, Philip, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?” (14:9). I want to ask you a similar question: how long have you testified that you’ve been filled with the Holy Spirit? Could the Spirit possibly say to you, as the Lord did to Philip, “Have I been with you all these years, yet you really don’t know me”?

I sometimes wonder if Christians today aren’t measuring up to the believers of Paul’s day. Something seems to be missing in the church today. We all know that Christians in the first century faced great afflictions. They endured severe testings, hard times, persecutions that were life-and-death. But they didn’t break down under the stress.

Paul says the church in Thessalonica endured the loss of their homes and possessions, everything they owned. Yet these believers weren’t rocked by the experience. He attributes their strength to the power of the Holy Spirit: “Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance ... and ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Thessalonians 1:5–6).

Paul then describes the testimony that came from their joyful endurance: “Ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word [the testimony] of the Lord ... [and] in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad [spoken of all around]” (1:7–8).

These believers had been “much afflicted,” yet they possessed true joy. They faced hardships and sufferings like no other body of that time. They lived with pressures you and I can’t possibly fathom. Surely their marriages were tested during those hard times. The devil must have come against those families at their weakest, stirring up problems of all kinds.

But the pastors and saints in that church wouldn’t quit. They didn’t complain about their circumstances. And they didn’t question God’s testings. Instead, there was rejoicing among that body of believers. And Paul told them, “You’re the talk of the nations! Your joy during your hard times has amazed and touched others, near and far.”

These Christians had truly received the Holy Ghost. I wonder: what did they know about the power of the Spirit that so few Christians today seem to know? What is missing? Where is the joy of the Holy Ghost in our times of trial and affliction?

Never in church history have so many believers been so discouraged. In all my years of ministry, I’ve never seen so many believers under such affliction. There has never been a time like this, with families facing financial crises, enduring marital struggles, despairing over children in rebellion.

Right now, pastors all over the world are becoming disillusioned. They’re exhausted by their labors and heavyhearted because they see so little fruit. And their wives and families are being overwhelmed. These men are quitting by the hundreds in every nation. The leader of a large Pentecostal denomination recently told me, “Pastors are leaving left and right, and churches are closing by the dozens.”

Here is a typical letter we receive from ministers: “I pastor a good-size church. But my labors are so unfulfilling, so discouraging. I’m growing desperate to see something happen, some kind of breakthrough. I don’t know why I’m so anxious, or even what I want to see. But there has to be more than this. What am I missing?”

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My son Gary and I travel the world conducting gatherings of pastors and their wives. Yet everywhere we go, we see pandemic despair. Most pastors in poor countries have to work secular jobs to support themselves. There is little or no money for their families or even their ministries. And their poverty is worsening.

Over the past few months, our advance team has met with pastors in very poor nations. At one meeting, ministers came from various denominations. Within minutes after our videotaped presentation began, those men started to weep. The sight brought tears to our team's eyes. The broken pastors explained, "We're so discouraged. We work so hard, yet we see so little results. And we have no finances. Even if Brother Dave were to come to our country and speak, we couldn't afford to travel to the meetings. We can't even pay for our families' necessities. And our work is so hard, so trying. We're seeing many suicides, especially among young people. We feel so abandoned."

Our ministry rents buses so these ministers can travel to our gatherings. But many are so poor, they can't afford lodging, so they camp outside in tents. Last year, in South America, one man traveled ten hours to get to our meeting. He didn't have money for the return trip, so our team prayed and was led to give him \$1,000. When the pastor heard this, he wept. "That's a year's salary," he told us.

In America, the great problem is stress. There is widespread anxiety about the future, about job security. Some families are on the verge of losing everything. It's causing stress at work and at home, and people are succumbing to despair.

As a pastor, it's absolutely heartbreaking to see the many troubles facing Christians. Fathers and husbands are demoralized because they don't have jobs or are underpaid. They can't possibly support their family, and they're falling deep into debt. Multitudes of elderly people are in excruciating pain because they can't pay for their medications. The government can't solve these problems. Politicians hold only empty promises.

As we survey all these needs, all these pressing trials, we're driven to our knees. Day after day, we cry out to God, "Lord, what message can we offer? What can we preach to bring healing and encouragement to afflicted believers?" We feel the awful pain, yet we know we can't simply offer platitudes. We refuse to bring a shallow message of human sympathy, saying, "Don't be down. The sun will rise soon."

No, more is needed than mere pity or a pep talk. The Word of God must come forth, giving power to withstand every onslaught of trials.

This is not the message I started out to deliver. As I pondered the afflictions, despair and suffering, I thought, "This is all because of satanic attack." Immediately, I began working on a message called, "War on the Saints."

In Revelation, we find Satan giving power to something called "the beast." "It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations" (Revelation 13:7).

As I put the words together — "Power to make war ... against the saints ... to overcome them" — I began to reason: "That's it. This is why God's people are being so afflicted right now. It's the power of the beast. That's who is behind all the poverty, all the problems in families and marriages. A mad dragon is empowering a wicked government. Our leaders are being manipulated by wicked coalitions

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and special interest groups. The devil is forcing his agenda on our society.

“This is outright war against God’s elect. It’s about a mad enemy overcoming the faith of the saints, causing them to lose all trust in God. Multitudes of believers have become stagnant in their faith. And others have already been overcome. Their faith is shipwrecked. They became so discouraged, they finally gave up.

“As I look around at what’s happening in our country, it can’t be denied. The devil has spewed out of his mouth a flood of iniquity. He has brought forth a flood of afflictions against God’s people. And many are being carried away in that flood.”

Jesus spoke of an “hour of power” that would take place for the rulers of darkness. When he was led from the garden, he told his captors, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness” (Luke 22:53). The Greek word for “hour” here means “a short season.” In that hour of darkness, the beast would overcome Peter for a short season. Christ had warned him, “Satan is going to come against you, to sift you and try you.”

Yet here is the question Jesus really was asking: “Yes, an hour of darkness will come, not just upon Israel but on the whole world. I will not be here then, but my Spirit will. I am sending him to sustain you through every trial. He will abide in the hearts of all who believe in me. So, when that time of darkness comes, will you believe?”

We are now seeing the beginning of Satan’s last hour of power. Both in Daniel and Revelation, we’re warned about this last hour of gross darkness, which will cover the whole earth. And for a short season, it will look as if Satan is winning on all fronts.

Even now, there are ominous signs of such darkness. Our nation seems to be spinning into chaos. Television and the Internet spew filth into homes. Institutions that have undergirded our society appear to be crumbling and falling. Think about the recent controversy over the institution of marriage between a man and a woman. It seems hell has gained victory on this battlefield, casting aside all moral restraints.

Most tragic of all, Satan seems to have brought down the church in defeat. He has cast a spirit of death over God’s house, so that multitudes cry, “I can’t find a church where the Spirit is at work. Everywhere I look, there’s no fire, no conviction. It’s dead.”

You may say, “Brother Dave, you make it sound so bleak. It all seems so discouraging.” But the truth is, Satan has been given only a short time. That’s why he’s bringing forth everything of hell he possibly can.

Yet God foresaw it all. He wasn’t taken by surprise by any of the wickedness we’re seeing. No, he’s had a plan in place for his people all along. He formed this plan before Creation. And it’s a plan not just for our survival, but for us to overcome.

Only one thing conquers and dispels darkness, and that is light. Isaiah declared, “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:2). Likewise, John stated, “The light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5).

Light represents understanding. When we say, “I see the light,” we’re saying, “Now I understand.” Do

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you see what Scripture is saying? The Lord is about to open our eyes, not to see a victorious devil but to receive new revelation. Our God has sent us his Holy Ghost, whose power is greater than all the powers of hell: “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Now, in Revelation we read of hell spewing forth locusts and scorpions that have great power. We read of a dragon, beasts, horned creatures, as well as a coming Antichrist. Yet, we don’t know the meaning of all these creatures. The fact is, we don’t have to. We don’t need to worry about the Antichrist or the mark of the beast.

You see, there is living in us the Spirit of Almighty God and his Christ. Paul declares that the power of the Holy Spirit is working in us. In other words, the Holy Ghost is alive in us at this very moment.

So, how does the Spirit work in us in the midst of our hard times? His power is released only as we receive him as our burden bearer. The Holy Spirit was given to us for this very reason, to bear our cares and worries. So, how can we say we’ve received him if we haven’t turned over our burdens to him?

Think about it: the Holy Ghost isn’t shut up in glory, but here, abiding in us. And he’s waiting anxiously to take control of every situation in our lives, including our afflictions. So, if we continue in fear — despairing, questioning, going deeper into anxiety — then we haven’t received him as our comforter, helper, guide, rescuer and strength.

You may object, “The Holy Spirit was sent to empower us to be Christ’s witnesses.” That’s true, but what comprises our witness? Is it merely telling people about Jesus? Is it simply quoting the Bible? Is it just praying for people? These things are all a part of our witness, to be sure — but they don’t comprise all of it.

No, the witness to the world is the Christian who has cast his every burden on the Holy Spirit. Like the Thessalonians, this believer sees overwhelming problems all around, and yet he has the joy of the Lord. He trusts God’s Spirit for his comfort, and for guidance out of his affliction. And he has a powerful testimony to a lost world, because he embodies joy despite being surrounded by darkness. His life tells the world, “This person has seen the light.”

Such a Christian has truly “received” the Holy Spirit, because he allows the Spirit to provide everything he needs to overcome. A downcast believer simply isn’t a testimony.

Consider the example of Paul’s life. This great apostle spoke of having the “sentence of death” upon him: “We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9). He explains, “We were pressed down, burdened, beyond strength. We even despaired of life. We were utterly at a loss, with no way of escape.”

As Paul looked at his dire situation — afflictions, troubles, hunger, persecution, cold, nakedness, imprisonment, a thorn in his flesh, cares and anxieties over churches, plots and attempts on his life — his response was, “This is the end. There’s no way out. Humanly speaking, there’s only one response I can see, and that’s death. The only way out of this trial is to die and be with Jesus.”

Beloved, God allowed every one of Paul’s trials. And it forced the apostle not to rely on himself, but to fully trust the Holy Spirit to deliver him. Scripture says, “And having done all, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13). We’re being told, in essence, “You’ve exhausted all your human efforts. You’ve tried to solve

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your own problems, and you've come to the end of yourself. Now let God do it all. He will accomplish your deliverance, by the Spirit who lives in you."

Paul is talking about more than a passive sigh of, "Oh, I'll trust God with this." No, he's speaking of being so helpless, so resigned, that you have to rely on a "God which raiseth the dead" (2 Corinthians 1:9). His conclusion was, "God alone is able to deliver me from this hopeless 'death' situation. Only his Spirit can resurrect an entirely new way of deliverance."

Paul trusted the power of the Spirit, and God delivered. "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:10). What an incredible statement. Paul is saying, "The Spirit delivered me out of a hopeless situation. He's delivering me even now. And he will continue to deliver me, in all my afflictions."

Let me sum it all up: receiving the Holy Spirit isn't evidenced by some emotional manifestation. (Yet I do believe there are manifestations of the Spirit.) What I'm talking about is receiving the Spirit through a quiet, ever-growing knowledge. Receiving him means having an ever-increasing light about his delivering power, his burden bearing, his provision.

I repeat Peter's words: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). According to Peter, the divine power of the Spirit doesn't come as a manifestation. He comes first "through the knowledge of him that hath called us."

"And of his fullness have all we received" (John 1:16). Moreover, the Holy Spirit is not fully received until he is fully in charge. We simply haven't received him if we haven't given him complete control. We have to cast ourselves totally into his care.

Let me give a final example, to illustrate this. In Genesis 19, we find Lot and his family in a terrible crisis. Judgment was about to fall on their city, Sodom, and so God had sent his angels to deliver them. Lot opened his door to these messengers of the Lord, and they entered the house. They had the power of heaven to deliver that whole family. But the angels weren't received.

You see, Lot's wife couldn't conceive of changing her life. As she heard the angels urging her husband to leave Sodom, she must have thought, "I don't want to leave my nice house, my furniture, all my friends. Surely that can't be God's will. I'll pray that the Lord delays his judgment. He has to work a miracle for me."

In the end, the angels had to force their will on Lot and his family, dragging them out of Sodom. God's plan all along was to deliver them in the process of fleeing. He was going to feed and clothe and take care of them. But, as we all know, Lot's wife looked back and died, turning into a pillar of salt.

The angels' message was clear: "If you want God to be in control, then you have to give up the reins. If you look to him for deliverance, you've got to let go of your plans and be willing to go his way." In short, the Holy Spirit doesn't use his power to deliver doubters. Unbelief aborts his work. We have to be willing to let him make changes in our lives, if that is God's chosen way of delivering us.

In my opinion, many believers today haven't experienced deliverance because they're holding onto their own plans. I ask you: are you willing to let the Holy Spirit lead and guide you? You haven't received him unless you've gone to him with every burden you have. I urge you, go to prayer and

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name every crisis you're facing: "Here it is, Holy Spirit. I turn this situation over to you. And I trust that your power abides in me. I'm not going to lose sleep over this matter. I give it to you." Then trust!

You simply have to take your eyes off your condition. Yes, there is darkness all around. But you have seen the light. Are you willing to trust the Lord to carry you through? Believe the Word he has given you: "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:10).