

ARTICLES

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Let me begin by reading some passages from Holy Scripture:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4a).

. . . Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16–18, 22–25).

And then a further word of Scripture, as recorded in Acts 19:1,2–“ . . . Paul . . . came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? . . .” There has been a lot of discussion concerning whether these last three words should read “since you believed” or “when you believed.” I came across a very competent commentator the other day who said,

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“What difference does it make? It is still the same question: Have you received the Holy Spirit?”

My subject this morning is I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. Will you begin saying the Apostles' Creed with me, but be prepared to stop when I give you the sign:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

What do you believe? This is the important question. Some folks do *not* really believe in the Holy Spirit at all. An interesting story has come out of antebellum days. The master arrived back on the plantation after hearing a very forceful sermon on the Holy Spirit which had irritated him greatly. As he walked along the path to his house, one of his slaves heard him mutter, “There isn’t any Holy Spirit.” The slave, who was a deeply religious person, finally got the nerve to say, “Massa, if I was you, I would say, ‘As far as I knows, there isn’t any Holy Spirit.’” Or take the preacher in the Southwest who stood before his large congregation one autumn Sunday morning and said, “You know, the Holy Spirit is like the football spirit. You have to catch it to know what it is.” What a tragic lack of understanding of the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit.

There are other people who *over-believe* in the Holy Spirit. These are they who attribute ministries and works to the Holy Spirit that He never promised to perform. For instance, the Holy Spirit never promised to give guidance without the use of common sense. He never promised to aid in the process of maturity without the practice of discipline. He never promised to make it possible for a person to perform magical feats for the sake of ecstatic satisfaction or personal popularity. And, further, I do not believe that the Holy Spirit gives approval for the bypassing of moral and ethical principles in personal living under any circumstances.

There are others who attribute to the Holy Spirit words and works for which He is not responsible. There is a professor in a Roman Catholic college in the western part of this state who has made a life-long study of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. He said to a

friend of mine, "The Holy Spirit is so misunderstood and there is so much confusion about what He really says and does that some day I may write a book on the Holy Spirit entitled: **THINGS THEY MADE ME DO AND SAY**. Some people over-believe in the Holy Spirit.

But I suppose the great problem, the major problem, is the fact that far too many people who profess to be Christians *under-believe* in the Holy Spirit. There are some who say His ministry was limited to the Early Church. There are others who say that His continuing ministry is related only to official acts of state and church. There are others who believe that if you really follow the Holy Spirit in our day, there is created an irresolvable dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular. These say that truly spiritual individuals dare have no personal relationships to the secular world in any of its mundane activities.

There are others who under-believe in the Holy Spirit by hesitating to accept the validity of His personal ministries which are delineated in the Gospels, in the Acts, and in the Epistles. For instance, the eighth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans presents at least thirteen ministries of the Holy Spirit to the individual. Let me mention but four of them—very personal ministries—but people seem hesitant to accept them. Paul says the Spirit can give deliverance from sin. How we under-believe the Holy Spirit when we do not believe this and refuse to live in the reality of it. Paul also says that the Holy Spirit can give us a new mind and we can get rid of the carnal mind. The Holy Spirit makes possible a "spiritual mind." Paul says, furthermore, that the Holy Spirit is able to touch our mortal bodies with moment-by-moment healing. The promise is that He will quicken our mortal bodies. How many of us really believe this each day? Paul also says in Romans 8 that the Holy Spirit is available for every kind of needed guidance. He is the Spirit of guidance. But in spite of all this spiritual truth we find multitudes of professing Christians who under-believe the Holy Spirit.

It is my conviction that we need not only to believe in the Holy Spirit, but we need to know what we believe about the Holy Spirit. Within the last month I received a letter from a fellow alumnus and I am quoting verbatim: "Our training at Asbury, while convincing to us, did not provide us with many answers which we would like to be able to present from an intelligent viewpoint." Perhaps this is representative of many Christians. It is not enough to say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we need to know what we believe about the Holy Spirit. So I would like this morning during this Francis Asbury Convocation to declare five personal affirmations about the Holy Spirit. I understand

that one of the purposes of this message is to be a springboard for the Methodist Class Meetings which are to follow. I hope you will take these affirmations, look at them honestly in the light of Scripture, and perhaps all of us will come to some more basic centralities and certainties in our thinking.

First, I BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ALWAYS AT WORK. The Holy Spirit is God and Christ at work in our world. This means that the activity of the Holy Spirit is both the evidence of the continuing creativity of God and the contemporary authenticity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe that the Holy Spirit is everywhere, always. I do not think that He has to be coaxed to work. I think He only has to be given an opportunity to work. We give Him an opportunity to work by getting all the hindrances and barriers out of the way so that His ever-active ministry in the world can be made manifest at all times.

When you and I think of the continuing activities of the Holy Spirit, we need to realize that He works both in predictable and in unpredictable ways. There are many areas of spiritual activity for which we do not have to plead with God to allow the Holy Spirit to work. It has already been promised that He will work in these areas. For instance, when we read the Bible we know He is at work enlightening and convicting and inspiring. When we pray, when we worship corporately, when we receive the sacraments, when we participate in Christian fellowship, when we witness, when we love, when we perform any of these spiritual ministries characteristic of New Testament Christianity, we can be assured that the Holy Spirit has already promised to work through them and will work. We need to accept the fact that there are predictable ways in which the Spirit always works. Every worship service of the church—this service—should be a time when the Holy Spirit is working. If His work is not being manifest then it is because we are not letting Him work.

But we must never forget the fact of the unpredictable activities of the Holy Spirit. This is a universe not only of the predictable but also of the unpredictable. A scientist wrote recently in "The Christian Science Monitor" about our unpredictable universe, how suddenly something will appear or something will happen in the physical universe that nobody predicted. The Spirit also works this way. Jesus, likening the Spirit to the wind, said that "it blows where it wills." We see it in divine providence. We see it in answers to prayer. We see it in the changing of human vocations. We see it in revival movements. We see it in miracles of healing. I am wondering if we do not also see it in certain

social revolutions. We must remember that the Holy Spirit works within unpredicted ways as well as those that are predictable.

This, then, is my first basic affirmation about the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit is always at work.

My second affirmation is this: **I BELIEVE IN THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE WESLEYAN INSISTENCE UPON THE ADDED DIMENSION OF THE SPIRIT'S ACTIVITY IN ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION.** Entire sanctification—Christian perfection—perfect love—was one of the great centralities in the ministry of Francis Asbury. Listen to him: “Preach sanctification directly or indirectly in every sermon. Oh, Purity! Oh, Christian Perfection! Oh, Sanctification! It is heaven below to feel all sin removed. Preach it whether they hear or forbear—preach it.” On his 68th visit to North Carolina, he wrote, “I am divinely impressed with a charge to preach sanctification in every sermon.” Preaching in Baltimore shortly before his death, after chastising the Baltimoreans for their regression, Asbury exclaimed aloud, “Come back! Come back! Oh ye Methodists, come back to the first principles, and God will make us a cyclone of fire, sweeping around the world and subduing all nations!”

Entire sanctification—Christian holiness—is the hallmark of Methodism. Herbert W. Richardson, Associate Professor of Theology at St. Michael's College in Toronto, writing on “The Holy Spirit and Protestantism,” suggested that the real Reformation took place under John Wesley. The early reforms instituted by Luther dealt merely with the seat of authority and left the aspirations of the masses untouched. But, suggests Professor Richardson, Wesley in his stress on holiness shifted the attention of religion from the state to the soul and thereby gave the common people a sense of their potential.

Truly one of the distinct features of the early Wesleyan emphasis was that perfection is for everyman. To Wesley, perfection was a practical way of life available to and necessary for every regenerate Christian. A contemporary writer has suggested that it was the idea of a “second blessing” that made perfection peculiarly Methodist.

I believe in this added dimension of the Spirit's activity in entire sanctification. God is calling us to a Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered life. God is offering us a baptism with the Holy Spirit. This call and offer come to us as Christians. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is not something that is automatically received when a man first becomes a Christian disciple. This is a separate gift of God. It is called “the Promise of the Father.”

What does it mean to receive such a baptism of the Spirit? For one thing it means a rejection of the sovereignty of all unholy spirits. I believe in a spirit-world. There are both good and evil spirits. People can be misguided into thinking they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit when actually they may be under the influence of an unholy spirit. A continuing responsibility of the Christian is to “try the spirits” to see whether they be of God. The reception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit results in the rejection of the sovereignty of all unholy spirits.

But it means more than this. It also means a refutation of the supposed sufficiency of the human spirit. Here is a crucial area for most of us, whether we are clergy or laity, preachers or teachers or church officials. We are good people. We have good motivations. We plan good things. We want to succeed for the sake of Christ’s Kingdom. But we have a tendency to substitute the sufficiency of the human spirit for the indispensable power of the Holy Spirit. We need to hear again the Word of God spoken through the ancient prophet, which is as true this morning as when it was first uttered: “Not by might,” however legitimate that might is; “nor by power,” however necessary certain power structures may be; “but by My Spirit, saith the Lord.” How magnificently Bishop Kenneth Copeland expressed it last night, “*I am not able. HE is able.*”

This is God’s call to us—to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Two things will inevitably happen when you and I receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. First of all, there will be an inner cleansing. The baptism of the Holy Spirit does something within the individual. Call it “cleansing.” Call it “purity.” Or call it “wholeness.” Something happens within the individual that makes possible what the Apostle Paul called the growth of the fruit of the Spirit.

Let me share with you what a contemporary Methodist minister has said about the possibility of inner purity:

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Instead of throwing up your hands in despair or throwing away your hunger for God in reversion to some lesser idol, seek it. Seek it for ten years, for twenty years, for thirty. Are we to refuse the challenge of the quest? On this would I venture my eternal salvation—if you will make the purity of God your quest, the God of purity will give Himself to you, in such fullness, that your questions will be transcended in the splendor of the experience which has overtaken you.

Something else also happens when we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." We must not be confused about what it means to have spiritual power. Unfortunately in our day, and it is doubtless due to the prevailing sensate culture pattern of society, too many have the idea that power means the ability to do something sensational or spectacular. This is not the New Testament concept of spiritual power. The meaning of power is adequacy, the ability to achieve purpose. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for a Christian to *be* and to *do* what God intends.

The ability to *be*—the Holy Spirit gives adequacy to reproduce Christ within one's personality and life. The ability to *do*—the Holy Spirit gives adequacy to proclaim Christ to those beyond us, to move through God's world as His witnesses.

William Barclay speaks of the Holy Spirit as the person who enables us to cope with life. The word "comforter," which is applied to the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, has in it the Latin adjective "fortis" which means "brave." A "comforter" is one who puts courage into a man. And how we need this courage in our day—to *be* and to *do* what God appoints.

I believe in the authenticity of the Wesleyan insistence upon the added dimension of the Spirit's activity in the work of entire sanctification. This emphasis is what Methodism in our day needs more than anything else.

I have shared with you two of my basic affirmations about the Holy Spirit. I have three more affirmations to discuss. Because of the brief time remaining I can deal with these only in a very summary fashion.

Thirdly, I BELIEVE IN LIFE-IN-THE-SPIRIT AS WELL AS IN BELIEF-IN-THE-SPIRIT AND EXPERIENCE-IN-THE-SPIRIT. Sanctification has been described as a flower of three petals: a doctrine to be believed; an experience to be received; a life to be achieved. When we talk about Life-in-the-Spirit we need to distinguish between three concepts in the New Testament Scriptures—"gift," "gifts," "fruit." The GIFT of the Holy Spirit refers to the Christian's personal experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a universal offer. The GIFTS of the Holy Spirit refer to the ministries of the Spirit through personal service. These are always particular and selective, in accordance with the wisdom of God. The FRUIT of the Spirit has reference to spiritual maturity in one's sanctified life. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering,

gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” Such fruit is certainly a universal possibility for Spirit-filled Christians.

What is the secret of this Life-in-the-Spirit, this maturing in spiritual experience? The secret, first of all, is the indwelling, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. But there is also the imperative of spiritual disciplines. Albert E. Day writes: “The continuity of God’s Grace is dependent upon the practice of the grace of self-mastery.” The fruit of the Spirit in one’s life is dependent upon the cultivation of the seeds of the Spirit within, through the disciplined responses of love.

Here is my fourth affirmation about the Holy Spirit: **I BELIEVE THAT THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS INDISSOLUBLY RELATED TO JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.** When we become attached to the Holy Spirit we do not bypass either Christ or the church. If your so-called spiritual experience is leading you around either Christ or the church, you are not following the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be filled with Jesus Christ. Our Master said: “I will send you another comforter. He will live within you.” Who is the first comforter? Jesus. Now another one is coming. The second comforter will be like the first comforter. What does it mean to be spiritual? How often we have used this term. It is so easy to say, “He is spiritual” or “She isn’t spiritual.” How do we judge true spirituality? To be spiritual means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be filled with Christ. Therefore to be spiritual means to be filled with Jesus Christ.

Nor does the Holy Spirit bypass the church. There is no anti-thesis between the Spirit and the Church of Jesus Christ. The Revelation of our Lord reaches a climax as the Spirit *and the Bride* say “Come.” (Rev. 22:17). A study of church history reveals that the great movements of the Holy Spirit across the centuries have been related to the church. In this regard remember that Methodism in its beginnings was one of the greatest movements of the Spirit that the world has ever witnessed. The Holy Spirit is at work in our world, building the Church of Jesus Christ, and preparing the Bride for the “marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Finally, **I BELIEVE THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SPIRIT OF HOPE.** I believe that one of the evidences of the abounding presence of the Holy Spirit will be found in the manifestation of that spiritual mood which John Henry Jowett called “apostolic optimism.” I see the Holy Spirit creating hope in several areas. First of all, the Holy Spirit gives me the hope that I can be victorious as a Christian. Secondly, the Holy Spirit gives me the hope that the redemptive ministries of the

church will be effective. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit gives me the hope that Christ is fulfilling His purposes in history. Christ is not merely above history. Christ is not merely beyond history. It is not adequate merely to say that someday Christ will come back into history. The Holy Spirit inspires me with the belief that Christ is in history, that God is working out His purposes now in our world. And the Holy Spirit gives me the further hope that ultimately there will be ushered in the eternal kingdom of God. Then we will understand what it means when the Word declares "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever." Hallelujah!

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT. I believe that the Holy Spirit is always at work. I believe in the authenticity of the Wesleyan insistence upon the added dimension of the Spirit's activity in the work of entire sanctification. I believe in Life-in-the-Spirit as well as in belief-in-the-Spirit and experience-in-the-Spirit. I believe that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is indissolubly related to Jesus Christ and His Church. I believe that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Hope.

And now a closing word. The power of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the world begins with His presence and ministry in the individual person. We read Acts 2 and Galatians 5 and we thrill as we recognize the realization of all of this in the experience of the great-hearts of faith through the Christian centuries. But we always come back to the very thing that Paul asked the churchmen at Ephesus: "Have you received the Holy Spirit?"

There may be some here this morning who want to receive Him. The steps are well defined. *First* of all, believe Christ's imperative and Christ's promise about the Spirit. Recognize what Christ said about the impossibility of living for Christ or doing Christ's work apart from the personal ministry and power of the Holy Spirit. And while you are believing His imperatives about the Spirit, also believe His promise: "I will give Him to you." *Second*, confess your need of spiritual power. "I have tried to do it myself, I have depended upon what I thought I had, but it has not been adequate. I must find another source of power for this business of living for Christ and representing Christ to others." *Third*, make a total surrender of your self. Surrender not merely this thing or that thing or some other thing in your life. It is going to mean that you hand over your entire self to the Spirit. There must come that decisive moment when I say to God, "I no longer have any right to myself. I am Thine, entirely Thine." *Finally*, after we have surrendered we find it our spiritual delight to enter into a continuing covenant

of obedience with our Lord, as the Holy Spirit comes into our lives in His fulness to abide.

Have you received the Holy Spirit in His fulness? If you have not, and if you want to, will you do it while I pray?

LET US PRAY:

And now, Lord, we open our total selves to Thee—our minds, our emotions, our bodies, our wills. We hand over to Thee everything that we have and are capable of ever having. We hand over to Thee what we are and anything that we may be capable of becoming. We present all our members as living sacrifices, and we now thank Thee for the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Help us to go forth in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

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