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1

SPIRITUAL POWER

Spiritual power! What images and hopes that brings before the believer's mind! And rightly it should, for spiritual power is a proper longing for God's people to have.

However Christians may differ on the means to spiritual power, all agree that it relates to the work of the Holy Spirit. Understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit, therefore, should be important to the believer. A Christian is one who has received Jesus Christ; a spiritual Christian is one who displays Christ living through his life, and this is accomplished by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Spirituality, then, is Christlikeness that is produced by the fruit of the Spirit. What better portrait of Jesus Christ is there than "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23)? These characteristics describe the fruit of the Spirit, and they picture our Lord. Spiritual power is not necessarily or usually the miraculous or spectacular, but rather the consistent exhibition of the characteristics of the Lord Jesus in the believer's life. And this is the activity of the Holy Spirit, of whom the Lord Jesus said, "He shall glorify Me."

An understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is basic to Christian living. But one cannot fully comprehend the work of a person without also knowing something about that person. Likewise it is necessary to know something about the person of the Holy Spirit in order to fully appreciate His work. It may seem dull to the reader to pursue the study of the Spirit's personality and deity; but who He *is* is foundational to what He *does*, and a knowledge of both His person and work is basic to Christian devotion and living.

No other group among the totality of the people of God has ever been the beneficiary of so many of the ministries of the Spirit as has the body of Christ which began on the day of Pentecost. For example, the permanent indwelling of every believer by the Holy Spirit was not experienced before that day. His work of joining believers to the risen Christ was impossible before the resurrection of Christ and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. His teaching ministry, His comfort, and His intercession are benefits that all Christians may experience without restriction or limitation today. This is truly the age of the Spirit, and none of the people of God have been so greatly privileged as are Christians in this age.

Paul wrote only one circular letter to a group of churches, and that was Ephesians, which was sent to all the churches in Asia Minor. It is interesting to notice how frequently he mentions various ministries of the Holy Spirit in this letter. It is as if the Spirit were a wide-spectrum antibiotic for the ills of people in those churches. Paul reminded those who might lack assurance of their salvation that the Spirit had sealed them and that His presence in their lives was the earnest, or guarantee, of the everlasting character of their redemption (Ephesians 1:13–14). If God has put His own seal of ownership upon us in the person of His Spirit, then nothing can make our redemption more secure. The seemingly impossible work of uniting Jews and Gentiles in one body was accomplished by the Spirit, and this union brings with it an access or introduction into the very presence of the Father (Ephesians 2:18). Paul assures those who need the strength to let Christ reign in their lives that the Holy

Spirit will provide that ability (Ephesians 3:16), and when He does, they can begin to understand the dimensions of the love of Christ.

The practical and important problem of relationships to other believers is to be guided and guarded by the principle of “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God are the bases for this unity. Sin causes disunity and discord, and one of the gravest sins is the misuse of the tongue; so Paul reminded his readers that useless speech (to say nothing of sinful speech) grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:29–31). The Spirit’s presence in our lives should set a guard over our tongues.

The offensive weapons in the believer’s armor are the sword of the Spirit and prayer in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17–18). The way to spiritual power is to be filled with the Spirit, which simply means to be controlled by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit in the individual life and in the corporate life of the church is obviously a principal theme of this circular letter we call *Ephesians*.

The solution to the problems of the church today lies in solving the problems of individual Christians, and the remedy is a person—the Holy Spirit. He is the antidote for every error, the power for every weakness, the victory for every defeat, the supply for every need, and the answer for every question. And He is available to every believer, for He lives in each believer’s heart and life. The answers and the power have already been given to us in the person of the Spirit who lives in each of us.

A few summers ago I was about to leave home for three consecutive weeks of camps and conferences when I came down with laryngitis. In desperation I went to the doctor, seeking some miracle cure that would enable me to keep all the speaking commitments involved in those three weeks. My doctor simply told me to go home, go to bed, and drink large quantities of liquid. But this did not satisfy me. I thought he really wasn’t doing his job well because he had not prescribed some wonder drug. At my insistence he at last did give me some very expensive and (in my mind) supposedly

miraculously powerful pills. Nevertheless, he insisted that rest and forcing of fluids would do more than the medicine.

But I really did not believe him. At least I did not act like it, for I faithfully took the pills every four hours to the minute. But the only extra water I drank was that which was required to help swallow the pills. So every four hours I had two extra swallows of water. And I kept to my regular schedule instead of taking any extra rest. Somehow I did recover, but it was in spite of my conduct, not because of it.

If this were a book that offered you some new, miraculous, or secret formula for spiritual power, I am sure the sales of it would be phenomenal. You would probably devour its contents at one sitting. This is not that kind of book, however, for there is no new and startling formula for spiritual power. There can be nothing new or more to be added to that which God has already provided in the person of His Holy Spirit who lives in us. He is as available as water; there is no need for additional expensive pills, formulas, "secrets," or programs.

But the pity is that most Christians act as I did when I had laryngitis. We look for the new, the "miraculous," the guaranteed formula, the latest seminar, and we completely overlook the water that is freely available. We flock to the preacher or seminar leader who has some new secret for victory, and we ignore the Holy Spirit who has been freely given to us and who wants to overflow our lives. We do not need to *have* more of Him, but we do desperately need to *know* more of Him, and with the increased knowledge will come added faith, power, and control in our lives. To learn takes time. Not only, then, is there no secret formula; there is no instant spiritual maturity and power.

I hope this study of the Spirit will help you to learn more of Him and result in complete and constant yieldedness to His control, and full experience of His many ministries, to the end that the living Lord Jesus Christ will be exhibited in your life. When this is done, then we can know that we have learned well the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.