

# Explore: Depend on the Spirit

December 23, 2013

• *The Explore the Bible lesson for Jan. 5 focuses on John 15:26-16:15.*

In John 15 and 16, we come to Jesus' great instructions regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit. There is a popular phrase that says, "Oh, what a difference a day makes!" This certainly is true when it comes to Pentecost (Acts 2). Truly, the Holy Spirit's presence and work in Christ's disciples since that day until now has made all the difference. Two aspects of what it means to have the Holy Spirit with us are his inclusiveness and his empowerment.

## **Equally gifted**

One of the attitudes that drives me crazy as a pastor is when people in the church sell themselves short as far as what God can do through their lives. I have had people tell me they cannot get nearly as much out of the Bible by themselves, and that is why they need to hear from Bible teachers. The truth is, every believer of Christ can be assured of two absolutes in regard to the filling of the Holy Spirit.

First, all believers are given the same Holy Spirit. It is not as if the early disciples received more of the Spirit than we do today. Nor do preachers or Bible study leaders get more of the Holy Spirit than do the "regular" people sitting out in the pew. The fact, all believers receive the same Holy Spirit was one of the crucial parts of the church's beginning in the book of Acts. When the Greeks (non-Jews) first accepted the gospel, the Jews in Jerusalem were not quite sure what to make of them. The presence of the Holy Spirit made the difference. Peter said: "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (Acts 10:47).

In addition to this truth, it also is important to understand the Holy Spirit gives at least one spiritual gift to each follower of Christ. No follower of Christ ever should say God has not given him or her a gift. Not everyone is called to preach or teach, but everyone is called to do something. The Spirit gives gifts to each individual so the entire church can grow strong and be able to continue to do the work we are called to do. In God's own way and timing, he brings people together in local congregations—each with individual gifts and passions. The goal is that all would work together to accomplish great things.

### **Equally empowered**

We should also spend a few moments considering the work of the Holy Spirit. This certainly can be a place where many people get confused. In some translations, the word "Comforter" is used instead of "Counselor." And, I fear, this is the idea that many people have of the Holy Spirit; he is only here to comfort us, to make us feel better and maybe to give us some insight into what God's word tells us. This greatly diminishes the impact the Holy Spirit intends to have on our lives. While the Holy Spirit does comfort us in our times of trouble and difficulty, it is not the sum total of his work in our lives.

There are several ways the Holy Spirit empowers God's work within our lives. First, he is the "Great Coach." He not only helps us understand what God's word is telling us and how we are supposed to apply it to our lives, but also motivates us to actually get out there and live out that word. Like a coach, he knows how to draw out the very best in each of his "players," to help them grow as individuals and make the greatest contribution to the team.

Second, the Holy Spirit works in our lives to keep us focused. So many times, we tend to think about ourselves—our schedules, our circumstances, and even our own hopes and desires. We forget we are on this earth to win

more and more people into God's family. It is the Holy Spirit who gets our attention and reminds us what is most important. The Spirit also is working in the hearts of lost people at the same time. He is convicting them of sin and showing them "The Way" to salvation.

### **Comfort zone**

Like so many lessons in life, this one comes down to having faith. When people say they doubt themselves and their ability to be used by God, really they doubt God. Why would I say this? God has promised the Holy Spirit and all his work to each of us as Christ followers. The problem is most of the work of the Holy Spirit is done outside our comfort zone.

I remember a conversation between several of us as we prepared for a mission trip. Someone asked, "What if I do not know what to say when someone asks me a question?" The answer came from an experienced pastor and missionary, "If you will be faithful to do your part, God will give you the answers you need, when you need them."

There is great wisdom in this statement. Unfortunately, many Christians never experience the full work of the Holy Spirit because they have not ventured outside of their own personal comfort zones and out into the arena where the Holy Spirit is doing the greatest work.

This week, we should not just hear this lesson on the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, but choose to let the Holy Spirit empower each of us so we can overcome obstacles and be used by God to make a difference in this world. That is what happened when the Holy Spirit entered the first disciples, and it can happen in our lives as well.