

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Pastor Weber's Message of May 31, 2009
"Are We Afraid of the Holy Spirit?"**

[Since today is Pentecost, we're going to focus on the Holy Spirit today and His activity within the church.]

[Topics: Holy Spirit; Pentecost; Spiritual Gifts]

Excerpt: Imagine yourself in Jerusalem witnessing Jesus ascension into the heavens. And he told you to wait there in Jerusalem because something great is going to happen because God is going to pour out his power.

In **Acts 1**, it says they all gathered for 10 days in the upper room. Now when we have prayer meetings you can hardly hear us. But if you've been around Jews who are praying, you can hear them! You can hear the prayers at the "Wailing Wall" in Jerusalem way before you get there.

That upper room was really a trying time for the disciples as they were trying to process what had gone on these past 40 days with Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. They really didn't have any idea about what the power was going to look like that Jesus talked about. And so they have been praying about these things these last 10 days.

And then on Sunday morning, they had gathered together in the upper room to pray again together. Now all of a sudden things begin to happen. Scripture says a gigantic wind comes in the house. And then it says tongues of fire came down from heaven and rested on each one of the disciple's heads. This showed that God was pouring out the Holy Spirit on each one of them.

Now up to this point, God had been calling one person at a time. He called Noah, Moses, David, Solomon, each of the prophets. Basically God called out very few people where he gave the Holy Spirit. But now the door was flung open and that fire came down on every head of all the disciples who had gathered there. Well, this caused quite a stir.

We'll talk about all that happened on that day of Pentecost and what it means to us. Now let's ask the question: what if that happened here today? We just sang a song about, "Oh God, come on down. Open your heavens and come on each one of us."

What if God actually did that in some way today, like he did in Jerusalem? Suddenly we have a wind in the room so that we could hardly hear anything. And fire comes down from the ceiling and rests on each one of our heads.

Would we say, "Praise God, he answered our request in the song" or would we be stampeding to the door in fear? But that's what God did that day. Sometimes God will do some unusual things. Are we prepared for those things?

In **John 20:21-22**, after His resurrection Jesus "**breathed on the disciples**" and said, "**Receive the Holy Spirit.**" **Luke 24** records that He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. It seems apparent that Jesus gave them understanding through the Holy Spirit even before Pentecost.

Then, in **Acts 1:7-8**, just before He ascends, Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem. "**He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates [when the kingdom would be established] the Father has set by his own authority. 8) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'**"

So that's what happened on Pentecost. All kinds of power were poured out. People began to speak in languages they didn't know and others began to hear in their own language where they came from. This was a huge miracle that took place, because God wanted people to know that the coming of the Holy Spirit isn't just like yesterday.

It's the Spirit of God coming to make a difference in the lives in his church. It's the Spirit of God coming to transform people and to get them over barriers that existed before. Now the language barrier has been broken. It's the reversal of the effect of the Tower of Babel, where languages were confused. This caused unity in the church and so God could work with us.

Now pastor Glen called today's sermon, "Are we afraid of the Holy Spirit?" "because he believes we are afraid, especially because of our tradition and also the evangelical tradition. Now we have always believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are working to one degree or another. Now some evangelicals believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit stopped with the death of the apostles and went on vacation after that.

But we have been afraid of the Spirit because anytime someone came up to us and said, "The Lord said to me ..." our skin crawls. When the subject of the Holy Spirit comes up, we always seem to take the negative view. It's like we're afraid of the Holy Spirit. When talking about Charismatic or Pentecostal groups, we usually don't have anything nice to say.

But we shouldn't do that. Some of them do some unusual things like fall on the floor or speak in "tongues." It's true people do those things. It might be the Spirit of God moving them or it might be the flesh. But you know what? We all have flesh. A pastor once said, "The Pentecostals do it one way and we criticize them. We evangelicals do it another way. We just like our version of flesh better."

We all have our own hang-ups of how God works, don't we? We need to be aware of what God is doing through the Holy Spirit. Let's not go to either extremes, into one ditch or the other.

Now in **Acts 2:12** we read, "**Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?' 13) Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine,'**"

It's so easy to make fun of people. But what was really happening? God was pouring out his Spirit on the church, wasn't he? It's so easy to mischaracterize things.

14) "Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.'" We see that Peter had a revelation of what all this means.

15) "These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16) No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:" And suddenly the Prophet Joel comes alive to Peter. And he realizes that this is what God has been saying.

17) " 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions,"

Young people will begin speaking on behalf of God. No matter how we interpret the word "prophesy" whether it means preaching or prophetic words that come from God to a person about a particular situation. It doesn't really matter. What matters is that we should expect our children to have a walk with God that is so relevant that they are speaking on behalf of God.

Parents are you expecting us to do that for you downstairs in Sunday school in 40 minutes in front of a teacher? It will not happen. Rather, that's the kind of life flowing out of you as you spend time with your kids, talking to them about God, praying with them, teaching them to pray to God, teaching them to read God's Word and understand it. That's where it's going to come from.

On the day of Pentecost, miraculous things would happen not just to older people but also to our children and young people. We should be expecting our young men to see a vision about what God wants them to do in their life. Every young person should see a vision as to how God wants him or her to step out in faith because the Holy Spirit is motivating them.

"your old men will dream dreams." We should expect the Holy Spirit to give dreams to our older people of where God wants to take our congregation. Pastor Glen had just been reading of a church comprised of about 15 older people – average age of 75 – caught a vision from the Holy Spirit. And God turned that congregation around and he filled it with young people and it's now a congregation of 300-400 people.

God doesn't want us to be afraid of the Holy Spirit, but rather say, "Holy Spirit come and show me what you want. Give me a dream; give me a vision of what it is you want to do." God wants us to move forward.

18) "Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." Yes, that was a prophecy that came true. Men and women were going to speak into the lives of other people. They, individually, were going to carry the Word of God to mankind.

19) "I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord." Joel is saying that God will move in ways that will even dramatically affect nature.

21) "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." God is telling them that he is going to move in everyone from the children to the old people. His object in

all of this is that he is opening the door of salvation to everyone! God is inviting everyone to come to him. The Holy Spirit is carrying that load with us. God wants to work through us. The Holy Spirit wants to work through us today to motivate and excite and to bring a vision to our heart.

Pastor Glen spent all day yesterday with others in training for this year's summer camp. Their desire is that God would send the teens away from that camp with a vision of life, with what God wants to do in their life. Now some of them won't know God at all when they arrive. We want them to go away knowing that God has come to them, and that they can enter into a relationship with him.

They need to know that God has a plan for them whether that's being a successful business-person, maybe a pastor or a church planter, whatever it is. They need to catch the vision of what God is doing in their life.

We don't need to be afraid of the Holy Spirit. God will never do anything to us that's not good for us. When you go through the Book of Acts, God did all kinds of things. God healed people when the shadow of an apostle passed over them. The Holy Spirit directed Paul not to go to northern Asia Minor but rather go over to Macedonia. He directed Philip to go over and talk to the eunuch who was sitting on the chariot.

The Holy Spirit was very active in the church. And he wants to work in our lives today, as well.

Pastor Glen then read a quote from the book, *Dancing in the Dark*, by Graham Buxton, (page 60). *"This communal life in the Spirit is what Anderson calls a 'lived transcendence', which assumes a number of forms: the life of a kenotic and 'ek-static' community; a reality of life in solidarity with the world; and an eschatological life in God."*

So we have a view of connecting with the world and a view of connecting with God. The kenotic view is where we connect from one to another, where we connect with everyone. And the ek-static view is how we connect with God and how we relate to him.

"The challenge to the church is to be open to the Spirit so that its ministry is not characterized by an unreal dichotomy between the 'sacred' and the 'secular'."

We need to make certain that our connection with people is as important as our connection with God.

"Such openness demands sensitivity and boldness as we respond to the creative initiatives of the Spirit, for 'the wind blows wherever it pleases' (John 3:9): at times the Spirit may lead us along unlikely paths and into unpredictable places."

The Holy Spirit will move us along to places we didn't expect. He works in places we might not have expected, if we're open in letting him do that. We can't always predetermine what we want to do. If we always do that then we close the door to what the Holy Spirit wants to do. Now we shouldn't be against planning. But we need to say; "This is our plan, Holy Spirit, subject to you. Where do you want me to go? What do you want me to be? How do you want me to function? "

“...To participate in the life of God is to be willing to embrace (or to be embraced by!) the unpredictability of the Spirit and to thrill to the divine adventure!

In connection with this thought, there is a quote from Karl Barth, which basically says that we can't just look to the New Testament church in Acts for our example. That was their reality in their day. And the Holy Spirit is doing something different in our day. Now some of the things will be similar. But we have to be careful and say, “Well God never did that before, so he won't do it now.”

Well, God never poured flames of fire on people before either. And so we have to be open to God's working within reason of course.

“In a stimulating discussion of the impulse towards adventure which is God's gift to human beings, Paul Tournier reminds us that the world ‘enthusiasm’ literally means ‘feeling God within oneself.’ To be filled with the Spirit is to be enthusiasatic!!

...Specifically, it is to be an adventurous person, willing to embark on risky and perhaps dangerous pursuits. Tournier suggest that all of us are endowed with this spirit of adventure because we are all made in the image of an adventurous God.

God loves to challenge things and create new worlds. God's kingdom is always increasing. And so Graham Buxton is saying we have a God who likes to be unpredictable. And so we need to be open to what he's going to do. We need to be open to what he going to say to us. And so we have to wrestle with that.

On Ascension Day in 1956, Karl Barth, gave a prayer and said, “O Lord our God!... We all know that only one thing will please and honour thee – earnestly asking for thy Spirit, earnestly searching for thy truth, earnestly longing for thy help and guidance. We also know that even these can only be thy work in us. Wake us up, O Lord, that we may be awake!...Shed thy light upon...us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

He's talking about the Holy Spirit stirring within us. We need to search for the Spirit to move us. Now the last few years we've been focusing on Jesus Christ and who he is as the Son of God and the Son of Man.

When Jesus ascended back to the Father, he poured out his Spirit on us. And that's our connection to God. Just as Jesus did all kinds of things people didn't expect, the Holy Spirit wants to work in our lives. And we don't know what that is. It maybe the way you talk to your neighbor. It may mean that you need to go volunteer to serve in some organization.

We have to keep seeking God and ask him, “What's next? And where do you want me to go?” We have all kinds of opportunities come our way. We need to ask God which ones we should do.

Now, **1 Cor. 14** talks a lot about the Spirit of God. The Corinthian church focused a lot on spiritual gifts. In fact some would say they were out of control on spiritual gifts. That was a wild and crazy congregation to be in. People were popping up all over the place speaking in tongues, prophesying, singing a song, and doing all kinds of other things.

Paul didn't tell them to stop it, because we don't do that kind of thing in this church. Paul said, let's do it, but let's do it in order. He encouraged the gifts, but said let's do it in proper order.

1 Corinthians 14:5, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified."

Paul said I wish you could do both. I would like every one of you in Corinth to speak in tongues and prophesy. And today, are you open to God speaking through you when the opportunity comes? Are you praying that God will use you as an instrument? Are you praying the Isaiah 6 idea, "Lord here I am, send me. And help me respond in those ways that are like you."

12) "So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church." As a congregation, are we eager to have spiritual gifts? The best way to get members to roll their eyes is to hand out a spiritual gifts inventory. We hate those. First of all, because we might actually find something out. And people say, "But I don't know what to do with my spiritual gift."

Now perhaps this isn't the best way to find out about spiritual gifts. The best way is to ask the Holy Spirit to work in you. "Would you help me to be eager to whatever you want to work through me, do so that I can build up the church and do my part?" Do we invite the spiritual gifts to flow through us? Do we pray that we can be an impact on the church?

Do we ask God, "How would you use me? In what ways could I volunteer to do things for this congregation or volunteer out in the community so I can make a difference in the world?" Hopefully all of us want to make a difference in the world, not because of us, but because of God living in us.

26) "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church."

Did you notice that they are all coming with some kind of spiritual gifts? Did you notice that they all wanted to participate? So Paul is telling them let's do it for the strengthening of the church. People in Corinth were eager to share something that week in their church.

These people were coming to church not to get the Holy Spirit but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They were coming inspired to offer to others and hoping they had an opportunity to give.

Do you know what would happen to this church if all of us were in tune to the Holy Spirit all week to a way that when we came here, we came equipped with something to offer? This place would even be more alive than it is. For example, you might just be carrying on a conversation at the potluck table with a new person and share with them a Scripture that struck you in a powerful way. And that maybe the Word that person needed for that week.

Too many of us come empty wanting to be filled up. God wants us to come with what he has already offered to us. Yes, we do it in order once we get here, and we do it to strengthen the body. It doesn't mean that we all get up and talk.

39) "Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40) But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

In other words, the Corinthians were selfish in their serving. They were spiritually stepping on one another. Paul said that's not how the Holy Spirit works. Likewise, we need to be eager to do what God wants us to do in our life. It can be other things than to prophesy and to speak in tongues. That was their two main spiritual gifts in Corinth.

Here is another quote from the book, *Dancing in the Dark*, by Graham Buxton (page 59). *"The characteristic action of the Holy Spirit, therefore, has to do with both unity and diversity, providing us with a metaphor, "the temple of the Spirit", which expresses the ontological (the nature of being) reality of the church in terms of unity-in-diversity."*

The nature of the church is a strange thing. We can be in unity as we worship together and listen to the message, yet every one of us is so different. There is such diversity, because of our background, ethnicity, age, etc.

"However, the Spirit is not only resident in this new temple of believers – he is president, too! This 'presidency' may be interpreted in terms of creative energy; 'the Holy Spirit in the church is the Spirit not of repetition but of creativity.'

God doesn't always act the same way. The church in the Book of Acts was in a completely different culture than we are in today.

The Spirit takes that which is of Christ and applies it imaginatively and with fresh relevance to both the church and the world. He enlivens the community of faith, leading it out of the sterility of dead tradition and opening it up to the new wine of the gospel.

God wants life and creativity. He wants us to move with the times. He would want us to look different 50 years later not just older. Unfortunately many evangelical churches are doing the same things today that they did in 1950. They haven't changed. And many of them agree that they need to become relevant to what's happening in our culture. We don't change the Gospel but we need to change how we deliver it.

The Spirit not only affirms the historical norms of the Christian faith; he seeks to bring those norms to life in contextually relevant and inspiring ways, so that faithfulness and relevance characterize the ministry of the church."

The Holy Spirit wants to take the historical norms of the faith and make them relevant to our day. He wants to make them creative and active for us. How does the Holy Spirit impact your life? How does he impact our community?

Pentecost is a time when God says, "I'm pouring out my Spirit and I'm going to enliven my church. I'm going to be creative in my church. I'm going to help my church be up to date carrying the old, old Gospel but doing it in a new, new way.

So how do you reach a Californian with the Gospel? The same way you reached a Greek in the first century? Nope. We have to reach Californians where Californians are. And so the Holy Spirit is creatively working in the church to move us forward. We need to be open to that.

Today's sermon is named, "Are We Afraid of the Holy Spirit?" because so often when we talk about the Holy Spirit we emphasize the negative or where things go differently than we expect. Our responsibility is to find out what is God doing through us individually and through our congregation collectively.

Pastor Glen doesn't want us to be afraid. He wants us to ask God, "What can we do?" What are those visions? What are those dreams the Holy Spirit can give to New Hope Christian Fellowship?" It's all about how we are going to impact our parish. Our parish is from Fontana to Santa Clarita. It's quite big where we all live. How does the Holy Spirit want to move us to impact this area?

We know that the Holy Spirit is going to be creative. Let's ask God that we be open to that. We need to pray and ask God to use us. Tell him that we are available and ask him to impact our community through us. And as God moves, you will become even more enthusiastic, because you will feel God in you, working through you.

When you start leading people to Jesus Christ and inviting them into a connection with him, when you start nurturing them, when you start praying for them and they become healed, and when you start praying for them and God blesses them in some way, you will become so excited you won't know what to do.

So let's be available to the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit work in us. Let's catch that vision.

Key Scripture: Acts 2:13-21.

General Group Question: According to Peter's sermon in Acts 2, why did God send the Holy Spirit to each and every disciple that was in the upper room on the day of Pentecost? Does your answer apply to all of us in the church today?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. What kind of dreams or visions does the Holy Spirit inspire today in believers both young and old?
2. Do we need to be afraid of the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?
3. Does the Holy Spirit move us in new directions or into uncharted waters so to speak from time to time? If he does, explain why.
4. What is the purpose for the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual gifts?
5. What does this statement mean to you: "We don't change the Gospel but we need to change how we deliver it."

6. Do you know what would happen to your local congregation if members were in tune to the Holy Spirit all week to a way that when they came to services, they came equipped with something to offer instead of coming here empty wanting to be filled up?
7. How has the Holy Spirit inspired you lately to serve in your local congregation or in your community?

Prepared by Larry Omasta