

A Mighty Wind

The person of the Holy Spirit has been and, I suppose, will continue to be, a point of controversy and dividing factor among Christians. The sad truth is that this doesn't need to be the case. But, it's mankind's nature to complicate rather than simplify.

So, in the next twenty minutes or so, I am going to straighten out all the kinks, smooth all the roughs, and fill in all the potholes concerning the Holy Spirit. And, if you believe that, meet me in the parking lot after church. I have a bridge that I need to sell.

The problem with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the same problem with most doctrines in the Bible: it is progressive. What that means is that we are not told all at once the nature, activity, purpose, form, or given a painting of what the Holy Spirit looks like.

And so we read; we study; we ask questions; we scratch our heads (often). Where do we start? At what point in our biblical endeavor do we begin our hot pursuit of understanding the Holy Spirit?

Do we study God first? Do we start in Genesis and plow our way through the Old Testament before we tackle the new? Or do we start with the new, with Jesus, and make our way through to the Revelation and get a handle on the resurrection and second

coming before we bite into Genesis, God, and creation? The answer to both these questions is yes.

Good news: when you study God, and when you study Jesus, you are studying the Holy Spirit. From Genesis through Revelation, in every kink, rough, and pothole, the Holy Spirit is right there with the Father and the Son, slugging it out with the powers of darkness for the souls of men.

So, whether you start with Genesis where 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters,' (Gen 1:2) or Revelation, where, by the way, many new Christians want to start, John says, "On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit," (Rev 1:10) or somewhere in the middle, like Psalm 139:7, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" Wherever you start, you are going to find the Holy Spirit at work.

John's Gospel points us to the beginning. That's as good a place to start as any.

Genesis: the Beginning. Destroy the foundation and what is built on it comes down, whether it is a building, a tree; stinkin' moles tunnel in my yard and killing my grass by destroying the roots.

Poke holes in Genesis and you lose creation, marriage, the identity of the enemy, the flood, and so on. Evolution

becomes the explanation of man. We lose our identity with God.

Genesis 2:7; the LORD God formed the man (adam) from the dust of the ground (adamah) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. And our journey began.

Two things from this passage: we are formed from the earth. That makes us 'earthly'. Second: God breathed the breath of life into man. This is our tie to the heavenly. When sin entered the picture, we didn't lose our 'earthiness', we lost our heavenly tie. Man didn't physically stop breathing; he stopped breathing spiritually.

And from Adam blaming Eve, to Eve blaming the serpent, to Cain blaming Able leading to murder, to God grieving that he made man and sending a flood: the fall of man caused God's heart to be filled with pain (Genesis 6:5).

But God had a plan. And this plan involved breathing the spirit of life back into man. It's interesting that the Hebrew words for spirit, breath, and breathe, though they are not the same words, are all tied together in imagery. It is correct to say that God's Spirit blows through the pages of time like a mighty wind.

And we can see the activity of this spirit, breath, or wind of God working in a place

called Ur. **Genesis 21:1; The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.”**

And Abram did as God asked. God established a covenant relationship with Abraham that would be passed on to his descendents. Though he made his share of mistakes, Abraham became the father of the faithful. We learn from the life of Abraham that the life of faith that God calls us to is not an easy one. Like Abraham you and I may be called to make some painful decisions. But also like Abraham, we can fix our confidence securely in God. We learn from Abraham that God will provide.

Our next stop on the pages of time is a visit with a man known as quite a trickster named Jacob. He stole the blessing of the firstborn from his brother, Esau, and had to get out of town. (Genesis 27) Never the less, God confirmed to Jacob the blessing of the covenant that he had made with Abraham in a dream. (Genesis 28:10-15) God later changed his name: **“Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”**(Genesis 32:28)

God kept his promise to Jacob through his son Joseph, who his brothers sold into slavery. He became second to Pharaoh in Egypt and saved his family from famine.

Moses then led Israel out of Egypt to Canaan where Joshua took them into the Promised Land. All of this under the care and guidance of God’s Spirit.

Now we come to the time of the Judges. This was a time of downward spiral morally, religiously, and socially for Israel.

But God, in his faithfulness, in his determination to breathe the spirit of life back into man, called individuals like Deborah, Gideon, and Samson to deliver his people from their enemies and draw his people back to himself.

During this dark time, the story of Ruth, the Moabite daughter-in-law of Naomi, stands in stark contrast to the ‘all about me attitude’ of God’s chosen people. Through her marriage to Boaz, her genealogy records that she is the great grandmother of David, a man after God’s heart.

David: A poet, musician, military leader, giant slayer: his journey with God’s Spirit began one day when he was called from the field where he was tending sheep. A prophet waited for his arrival. A shepherd boy would be anointed king.

Of all the stories of David, one might have a tuff time choosing a favorite. One I’m sure most people know is the story of David and Bathsheba.

After an affair, David sent her husband to the front line, where he was killed. When Nathan confronted David, he confessed.

Psalm 51 reflects his prayer:

**Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.**

**² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.**

Skipping down to verse 10, I want you to see something.

**Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain
me.**

Do not take your Holy Spirit from me. God’s presence and spirit was very important to David. One of the reasons may have been that he had seen first hand what happened to a man who once had God’s Spirit and had it taken away.

When David was anointed king, the current king, Saul, was not dead or removed from the throne.

Saul began well as king over Israel. But he did not rule himself well. In an attempt to please the people, he disobeyed God and God told Samuel, **“I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.”** (1 Samuel 15:11)

Samuel meets with Saul and informs him that, **“Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”** (1 Samuel 15:23)

Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil (or injurious) spirit from the LORD tormented him. (1 Samuel 16:14)

David was summoned to play the harp when the evil spirit came upon Saul. This began a long relationship with many ups

and downs. Saul became jealous of David and attempted to kill him.

David saw first hand what the removal of God's Spirit could do to a man.

After the reign of Solomon, David's son, whom God gifted with wisdom, the kingdom divided. And it was a juggle of good king, bad king, up to the time of scriptural silence, just before the real king was born.

Isaiah 63:9-14 gives us a summary of how God's covenant people were guilty of grieving the Holy Spirit.

In all their distress he too was distressed,
and the angel of his presence saved
them.

In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.

¹⁰ Yet they rebelled
and grieved his Holy Spirit.

So he turned and became their enemy
and he himself fought against them.

¹¹ Then his people recalled the days of old,
the days of Moses and his people—
where is he who brought them through the
sea,

with the shepherd of his flock?

Where is he who set
his Holy Spirit among them,

¹² who sent his glorious arm of power
to be at Moses' right hand,
who divided the waters before them,

to gain for himself everlasting renown,
¹³ who led them through the depths?
Like a horse in open country,
they did not stumble;

¹⁴ like cattle that go down to the plain,
they were given rest by the Spirit of the
LORD.

This is how you guided your people
to make for yourself a glorious name.

After a brief silence of 400 years, the king that would forever reign on David's throne is born. Mary conceived from the Holy Spirit, (Matthew 1:20) and gave birth to the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. (Matthew 3:11) By the Spirit, Jesus begins his ministry. And by the Spirit, he gives his life. And by the Spirit, takes it up again.

And there you have it. The progressive journey of the Holy Spirit from forming Adam from dirt to Israel's promised Messiah. From being grieved by rebellion to crushing the powers of darkness by resurrecting Jesus, like a mighty wind blowing through the pages of time.

That's part one. That was my introduction. From Psalm 51 to Jude, the little letter right before Revelation, the Holy Spirit is mentioned 93 times. We are just getting warmed up.

I haven't told you yet how God through the Holy Spirit enables man to breath again. The Spirit's work wasn't finished when Jesus rose from the dead. But, we won't cover all 93 references. I'll make it brief.

Do you remember the teacher, Nicodemus, who came to Jesus at night? Jesus told him, "You must be born again."

Jesus was referring to a new beginning for man. Man was going to be able to breath again. No more animal sacrifices, temporally rolling back sin.

After his resurrection, Jesus gave, "instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen." (Acts 1:2) And told them "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5)

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

They went into the streets and began to preach. After the people heard the message and realized what they had done, they asked, what do we do?

³⁸Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

⁴¹Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:38-41)

And this was the new beginning for man. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we can truly breath again.

I have one more thing I want to show you, and then I’ll quit.

Every Lord’s day, we come as a body of believers around this table. “Do this in remembrance of me,” Jesus asked.

And there is something else that is very important to remember, so important in fact that Paul give us a clear picture of the event.

Writing to the Roman Church about sin and the grace of God, Paul asked this: “**don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4)**

You do realize that without the empty tomb, Christianity would be just like any other religion. If the Roman guards or the Sanhedrin could have produced Jesus body, I doubt that the New Testament would have ever been written. What purpose would it serve if there were no resurrection?

Just as communion connects you with what we refer to as the Last Supper, Baptism connects you with resurrection power. The same power that formed Adam from dirt, the same power that parted the Red Sea, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, is the same power that breathes new life into you.

I’m just going to share one of the benefits of baptism, and then we are done.

When the accuser of the brethren, or the powers of darkness whispers in your ear, maybe something like, “You’re not a Christian, you’re not saved. How could you be, after what you have done? Just look at you.”

You have a point in time that you can refer to and say, “I was born again. You have no claim here. I belong to Jesus.”

On a cold February, 1950, Marion David Russell was born to Marion Raymond and Hilery Levetta Durham Russell. On a cold January, 1970, right here, Marion David Russell was born again.

The powers of darkness have no claim on me. I know that I belong to Jesus. I have identified with him in his death, burial, and resurrection. Have you?