

## The Mystery of the Spirit

### The Work of the Spirit Today

#### Lecture 7

Controversy is the fertiliser that helps the theology of the church to grow. If you look at the early creeds, the first is the shortest. As time goes along, theology becomes more and more developed – not because God adds new truth to revelation, but because people add new interpretations to God’s revelation.

Let me explain how this works with a couple illustrations from church history.

### The Development of Doctrine

#### Humanity of Jesus

The first major controversy was the person of Jesus Christ. This one began before the New Testament was complete. Was Jesus truly human? Some Gentile church goers, who wanted to hang onto their cultural heritage from Plato, questioned the humanity of Jesus. If the material world was evil – something to be escaped – as they had always been taught, how could God become a man? To neoplatonic thought, the prospect was absurd. So alternative theories began to surface: Maybe Jesus only appeared to be human; or maybe Jesus wasn’t God from birth – perhaps God came upon him at his baptism and left him before his crucifixion. Jesus was just a man.

In response, we have Hebrews 2 and the whole of 1 John arguing for belief in the humanity of Jesus. From that point forward, the doctrine of the incarnation was a watershed. Anyone who did not accept it was not a Christian.

1 John 4:3 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup>and every spirit that **does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God**. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

#### Deity of Jesus

The deity of Christ was another flash point. Was he equal to God? Or would it be better to describe him as the perfect man – created, but first among all other creation? From this controversy came a clear biblical argument for not only the deity of Christ, but also the Trinity – one of Christianity’s most distinctive doctrines.

#### Salvation

More than a thousand years later, it was the doctrine of salvation that had the winds of controversy swirling around it. Was salvation something to be earned by keeping the sacraments of the church in addition to faith in Jesus? That is what the Roman Catholic Church taught. But Martin Luther and other reformers found no basis for this doctrine in Scripture. In fact, they found that salvation was by faith alone apart from works.

The doctrine of salvation became more fully defined: by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Anyone who did not believe this could not be a true Christian.

As church history continued to flow, other doctrines became the subject of debate – the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible; the six day creation; the role of women in the church; the end times.

## **Holy Spirit**

For the past 100 years, teaching about the Holy Spirit has been the most contentious issue. Not so much about who He is – His personality and deity were settled via controversies earlier on in church history. Today, the issue is about what He does and how he does it.

Is speaking in tongues the normal proof of the Holy Spirit's presence in a believer? Should we expect miracles and healings today? Does God speak through prophets – giving us an authoritative word in the present tense?

Two hundred years ago, no-one was asking these questions. In fact, 120 years ago no-one was asking these questions. Between the close of the New Testament canon and 1901, no-one was asking these questions. Why? Because incidences of speaking in tongues, of miracles, of healings, of prophecies in church history were sparse – and found only in groups that were regarded by mainstream Christianity to be apostate.

But from 1901 through today, all of that changed. What happened in 1901? The Pentecostal movement began. In just over one hundred years, Pentecostalism and its associated movements have circumvented the globe winning followers and participants in staggering numbers. Over a half-billion people classify themselves as Pentecostal or charismatic believers today.

Here in Australia, charismatics are the most visible representation of Christianity – from the 20,000 strong Hillsong Church to traditional denominations like Baptist and Anglican that accept charismatic practices. Even the Roman Catholic Church has a strong and growing charismatic contingent.

Is this fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as is claimed? Or is this phenomenon demonic? Or is there some other explanation?

In the coming weeks, we will use the Bible to critique the peculiar doctrines of Pentecostalism – such as baptism in the Holy Spirit, filling of the Holy Spirit, tongues, miracles, healings, and prophecy. For tonight, we want to take a brief survey of church history so that we might better understand this movement.

We'll conclude this session with a quick look at God's Word to answer the question, "Does it really matter?"

## **The Holiness Movement**

We cannot understand Pentecostalism without taking into account the Holiness Movement (with origins in what is called Pietism) that preceded it. The seeds for Pentecostalism's brand of experiential, individualistic Christianity began in the 1300s with John Wycliffe and Jan Hus – the latter was burned at the stake on claims he was a heretic (though he was not).

Wycliffe, an Englishman, and Hus (a Czech) broke with Roman Catholic doctrine by teaching the requirement for personal faith – in response to the authoritative Word of God. This belief motivated Wycliffe to translate the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible into English so that all people could have access to it. Martin Luther was influenced by Wycliffe and Hus when he set off the Reformation.

From Pietism came denominations like Brethren, Baptist, and Methodist. The latter began with John and Charles Wesley. The Wesleys were missionaries sent by the Church of England to Georgia in America. Their mission was unfruitful. John and Charles began attending prayer meetings at Aldersgate Street in London to search for answers. It was there that they both had a powerful revival experience in 1738 that impassioned them with a zeal to reform the Anglican church. “Methods” were set out to guide seekers to experience personal renewal with God – thus the name Methodist.

The appeal of this movement was for people to turn to God for a personal salvation experience, and to pursue personal holiness according to the methods. The Wesleys dispatched missionaries to preach this revival message across Europe and America. Soon revival was spreading – especially in rural areas of America. So great was the pace of conversions that the fifty years between 1790 and 1840 is now known as the Second Great Awakening. Camp meetings packed out with people desperate to get right with God and stay right with God.

Because the Wesleys – and the leaders who succeeded them in Methodism and Wesleyanism – emphasised the importance of human decision followed by human devotion, their theology was skewed away from the teachings of God’s sovereignty (i.e. Calvinism), and towards the free will of every person to choose or reject God on their own terms. Logically, if salvation was a human decision, then it also carried with it the potential to be forfeited.

Revivalism spread in other quarters, too – for example, through the ministry of D. L. Moody (who lead campaigns in England and the US and founded the Moody Church in Chicago), and in the famed Welsh Revivals.

By the time we get to the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, altar calls are common and Evangelicalism (as it is beginning to be called) is the dominant force in Christianity . . . as well as in politics. William Wilberforce, who lead the call to abolish slavery, was an evangelical. So was Richard Johnson, the first missionary to Australia.

### **The Pentecostal Movement (First Wave)**

What is now a worldwide phenomenon began in a small Bible study class on the first of January 1901. Charles Fox Parham, a former Methodist preacher, was teaching when Agnes Ozman suddenly began to speak in an unknown tongue. It was concluded that this was the baptism of the Holy Spirit – an experience that every believer should seek. Parham founded a new denomination – Apostolic Faith – and travelled the country promoting this new experience of God.

In 1906, at the Asuza Street revival in Los Angeles, Pentecostalism took off. William Seymour, a disciple of Parham, was the preacher. Scores of people sought the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues. Seymour capitalised on this movement by keeping the meetings open seven days a week – three services a day – for more than three years. By the end of the Asuza Street Revival, thousands of seekers had broken through with the Spirit and were speaking in tongues.

Pentecostal denominations began to form. (These were called Pentecostal because of their aspiration to repeat the events of the day of Pentecost when the first disciples spoke in languages

they had never studied.) The largest of these denominations is the Assemblies of God, which is the body Hillsong is associated with.

Pentecostals formulated a clear doctrinal stance on the work of the Holy Spirit:

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience subsequent to salvation. Not all believers are baptised in the Holy Spirit. It must be sought beyond the salvation experience.
2. Speaking in tongues is the unmistakable and normative sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
3. All spiritual gifts in the New Testament – including healings, miracles and prophecy – are to be sought and used today.

Pentecostalism spread around the world quickly. Its denominations attracted both new believers and transfers from traditional churches who found the excitement and immediacy of the Pentecostals to be appealing.

### **The Charismatic Movement (Second Wave)**

By the 1960s, Pentecostalism was a strong force within Christianity. It went from being an aberrant sect regarded by the traditional churches to be apostate to a movement to be envied by many church leaders. In the 1960s and 1970s, Pentecostal practices – such as tongues, healings, miracles – spilled over into traditional churches.

Now people who longed for a personal experience of the Spirit could seek it without leaving the church they already belonged to. Both Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches permitted and eventually welcomed a Pentecostal flavour to their church's historical teachings.

With Pentecostalism spilling over into most denominations, its numbers and influence multiplied. The Charismatic Movement more than doubled the number of people identifying with this experiential, individualistic form of Christianity.

So what is the difference between the Pentecostal Movement and the Charismatic Movement? Simply put, it is organisation. Whereas the Pentecostals formed denominations and uniform doctrinal statements, the Charismatics stayed within existing denominations and permitted great variation on doctrine. In fact, doctrine was intentionally played down in favour of experience.

Thus, among Charismatics some believe the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a separate event to salvation, while others equate it with salvation. Some believe a person must speak in tongues or else he or she is not saved, while others don't expect everyone to have the gift of tongues.

What loosely tied Charismatics together was an expectation that the Holy Spirit works today in power through tongues, miracles, healings and prophecy (revelations). A prominent spokesman for the Charismatic Movement is Pat Robertson, who has the popular television programme The 700 Club and is the founder of Regent University.

Because Charismaticism is not defined doctrinally, a range of movements developed within it. These include the Word of Faith Movement – where it is taught that the Kingdom has come so believers

are entitled to claim blessings for themselves. Another is the Health and Wealth Gospel, which teaches that it is God's will for all believers to prosper materially.

It should be noted that a key component in the spread of Charismaticism is music. Charismatic Movement mirrors its ambition – a deeply personal experience of God. Accordingly, the music reduced lyrics to simple sentiments often repeated several times. As one Charismatic leader explained, hymns are not conducive to experiencing God because the lyrics engage too much of the mind. Experience of God only comes when the mind is disengaged and the emotions are opened up.

Most of the music produced for congregational singing in the last fifty years has originated from Charismatic sources.

### **The Vineyard Movement (Third Wave)**

A frequent critique of Pentecostalism and Charismaticism was the apparent dumbing down of doctrine. It was said that no serious Bible scholar was included in these movements.

That changed in the 1980s with the Vineyard Movement. C. Peter Wagner, a professor at the esteemed Fuller Seminary, together with John Wimber, set off a new direction in the experience of the Holy Spirit. Wagner called it the Third Wave.

Other theologians joined the movement, including Jack Deere of Dallas Seminary and Victor Matthews of Grand Rapids Seminary.

The idea of the third wave was missiological. That God would bring about mass conversions as signs, wonders, and miracles were performed to convince people of the truth of God's Word. This was the topic of Wimber's books titled Power Evangelism and Power Healing.

Vineyard theologians taught that all the gifts, including tongues, miracles, healings and prophecy, are available today. They further taught that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was not an experience to be sought post-salvation, but rather coincided with salvation. The filling of the Holy Spirit, however, was an experience to be sought after.

### **New Calvinism (Fourth Wave)**

I haven't read of anyone calling New Calvinism the fourth wave, but I think it is. New Calvinism began recently and is the most influential development in Christian theology today. Among its proponents are John Piper, Wayne Grudem, Don Carson, Mark Driscoll, C J Mahaney and Albert Mohler. You could also include Peter and Phillip Jensen in this group.

What is new Calvinism? It is Reformed doctrine (i.e. sovereignty of God, depravity of man, irresistible grace, etc.) with Charismatic practices (i.e. allowing for tongues, healings and prophecy).

This movement is so strong that Time Magazine identified it last year as one of ten forces changing our world today.

New Calvinism is theologically rich. Pick up a theology book from Koorong that was written in the last ten years and chances are it was written by a New Calvinist.

Personally, I embrace and welcome nearly all of the theology of this movement. But is Calvinism and Charismaticism really compatible? Can you have both Sola Scriptura and prophecy?

## Does it matter?

To close, I want to look at 1 Timothy 4 and see how it answers the question, "Does it matter?"

1 Timothy 4:12-16 (NKJV)

<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

What are the most evidences of salvation that we should desire? Is it experiences, like tongues or miracles? Verse 12 indicates that it is not. Character is the valid evidence.

<sup>13</sup> Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

What is the believer to seek? A subjective experience of the Holy Spirit? Or objective instruction from God's Word? The verse is clear.

<sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.

Yet there is a place for dependence upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to minister to the Body of Christ for its edification.

<sup>15</sup> Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

Yet character, not phenomenon is the emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

In both verse 13 and 16, Paul emphasises the importance of doctrine. We must quantify what we believe the Bible teaches. Whenever a new movement arises, we must examine it according to the Word of God. Is it biblical? Is it right? What are the excesses? What is right and true?

As someone has said, if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything. Therefore, for the stability and health of our Christianity, we must continually study God's Word in our quest to know God and to know doctrine.