

Come Holy Spirit – Stability and Risk

Introduction.

Paul came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ²He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'

For many Christians today the Holy Spirit exists as a credal belief – we are Trinitarian – but not so much an experiential belief. Were we today to be asked St Paul's question, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' we would certainly know that there is a Holy Spirit, but our answer that we had indeed received the Spirit would perhaps be based more on doctrinal conviction than conscious experience. My predecessor in York, David Watson, once introduced a sermon series with a quotation suggesting that if God were to withdraw the Holy Spirit from the church 90% of our activities would remain the same. That's a little unkind, but you see the point.

There are notable exceptions – there is a whole stream of Christianity known as Pentecostal – referring to whole denominations and networks, or Charismatic – referring to renewal movements within all the historic denominations. Globally these are vast movements (estimated currently as 279 million Pentecostals and 300 million charismatics – including me.) Both are larger than the Orthodox Church (250 million). Another key exception, with a very different spirituality, is of course the Society of Friends, with its central belief in the inner light through God's Spirit.

Whatever our tradition or experience, what are we to make of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a person (not an influence or force)

- The Spirit *searches* (1 Cor 2:10), *knows* (1 Cor 2:11), *teaches* (1 Cor 2...13), *dwells* (1 Cor 3:16), *accomplishes* (1 Cor 12:11), *gives life* (2 Cor 3v6), *cries out* (Gal 4:6), *leads* (Gal 5:18), *bears witness* (Rom.8:14), *desires* (Gal 5:17), *helps* (Rom 8:26), *intercedes* (Rom 8:26-7), *works* (Rom 8:28), *strengthens* (Eph 3:16) *is grieved* (Eph 4:30). Gordon Fee 'God's Empowering Presence' P. 830

'not exceptional endowment but permanent presence, not so much of a power but a partner.' John V Taylor

The Holy Spirit is like, for and about Jesus.

The Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9, Gal 4:6) of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:19) of Jesus (Acts 16:7)

John 14::16 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in^{*} you. ¹⁸ 'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

Another one like me to be with you for ever.

I want to divide my time between the stability and assurance provided by the Holy Spirit's personal presence, and the risk and challenge which is the inevitable consequence of being filled with and following the Holy Spirit.

E.G. Both Indwelling and Coming as with the Temple

The church is God's temple - the place of his presence (1 Cor 3:16f, 2 Cor.6:16, Eph. 2:19-22, 1 Tim 3:15f). He dwells among (1 Cor. 3:16) *and* within (1 Cor 6:19) his people.

The Spirit dwells in and among us, but that is by no means the full extent of the Spirit's ministry.

'But will God indeed reside with mortals on earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built! ... May your eyes be open day and night towards this house ... May you hear from heaven your dwelling place ... and the glory of the Lord filled the temple.' 2 Chron 6:1 - 7:3

Stability

Apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus would have no relevance for us. All Christian experience is mediated by the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 2:18 for through him (Christ) both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. Phil. 3:3 'We worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Jesus Christ.'

So every encounter you have with the Father or the Son is made possible by the Holy Spirit – whose ministry, in this case, is 'self-effacing.

The Holy Spirit stands on our side of the relationship with the Father and the Son and makes it possible for us to know and confess them.' Tom Smail

This stability comes through:

- the Scriptures (which the Spirit inspired and illuminates)

- the sacraments

(E.G. many Christian traditions invoke the Spirit as they set aside bread and wine for Holy Communion.

In the C of E - 'Grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit these gifts of bread and wine may be for us the body and blood of Christ)

Baptised into Christ's church

(1Cor 12.13 For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.)

- the assurance of the Spirit's permanent presence

'to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth' John 14

All this is by grace, received by faith

'You receive the Spirit by ... believing what you heard' Gal. 3:2

All of this is because of the cross

John 7:37 On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." ' ³⁹Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

None of this (so far) are to do with conscious or emotional experiences., it is objective

But

There is a strong experiential subjective element as well

'It must be candidly acknowledged not only that the experience and life of the Spirit were for the most part more radically in the centre of things for Paul and his churches than for most of us, but that the Spirit was a more genuinely experienced reality as well.' Gordon Fee 'God's Empowering Presence' P. 896

'As Paul implies elsewhere, the initiating experience of the Spirit was usually very vivid, an event often deeply moving and profoundly transforming, which the young Christians would have no difficulty in recalling (E.G. Rom. 5v5, 1Cor.6 9-11, 2 Cor 1 21-22, Gal 3 3+f, 1 Thess 1 6).' J. Dunn 'Rom. 1-8' P.328

The New Testament argues from experience of the Spirit to assurance

Romans 8:15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

1John 4:13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world.

Growth in Christian character - walk by (conscious co-operation with) the Spirit - the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5)

The Spirit becoming visible – manifestations of the Spirit (1Corinthians 12)
(Charisms are not a talent list)

Not just the assurance of a personal relationship with Chris, but the assurance of the future Christ has secured for the world.

The Spirit is the first fruits of the harvest which will be reaped at the end of the age (Rom 8:23), the down payment, the first part of what will be received in full when Christ returns (2 Cor 1:22, 5:5, Eph 1:14), the seal which guarantees 'the day of redemption' (2 Cor. 1:21-2, Eph.1:13, 4:30) the present dynamic power of the future age (Heb 6:4,5, Acts 1:8, 1 Cor 4:4).

This is both assuring and disturbing – 'The Spirit has given both the first fruits and the hope of full liberation, and we are stretched between the two.' Peter Hocken P4
Those indwelt by the Spirit cannot be content with the world as it is.

But is not the Spirit also the Comforter? (John 14-16)

Rather the Advocate (the lawyer for the prosecution) who expects you to testify!

John 15:26 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf.²⁷You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

Risk

Unpredictable (because the missionary Spirit is vastly more creative and imaginative than we are)
But not unreliable, (because the Spirit has the character of Jesus).

John 3:8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

Vitally important today – because of the numerical decline and ageing of the church.

We are fishing in a shrinking pool

'More of the same just means less of the same.' Archbishop of Adelaide

We have to invite the missionary Spirit to lead us into new ways of engaging our culture with the gospel and new ways of being the church within it.

John 14-16 The whole world is on trial before Christ and you have been subpoenaed by the prosecuting council to be a witness

John 20 – participating in the continuing mission of Jesus

²¹ Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'²² When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.

Following the missionary Spirit

Acts 1:8 Empowerment for witness beyond our comfort zone

Acts 2 Pentecost and Joel's prophecy - wisdom in mission for all

'Luke's point is not the pyrotechnics – but spiritual transformation.' 'The real event of Pentecost is the empowering of the disciples by the Holy Spirit.' Luke Timothy Johnson

Acts 3 to the end - a missionary journey into the unknown

After each incident ask - Do you think they expected that?

Vital for our time of changing culture and discontinuous change.

The need for all Christians to be filled with the Holy Spirit for witness in the world as it is today.

Conclusion –

The stability gives us the assurance for the risk

'If the Spirit is making Jesus more real, neither caution nor convention, nor reputation nor love for any other creature ought to make us resist his possession of us.' John V Taylor

The risk grows our faith, and is the context for 'walking in the Spirit'

'Christians ... are caught up into the desire of the Spirit of God to make men and women profoundly aware of Jesus Christ, of what he is himself, and of what he makes available to the whole world, so that in him they may be confronted by the question and the call of God, and make their free choice.' John V Taylor

+Graham Cray – April 2018