

6. Responding to the Heavenly Dove

Be Filled with the Spirit

I met my wife, Sandy, when I was twenty-six, three years after becoming a Christian. I was searching for a godly woman to accompany me in serving the Lord Jesus. We married in a little church in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with many friends around us. Our honeymoon in Chicago was joyful but disastrous, with someone stealing our suitcases with our clothes and belongings and the many gifts we received at our wedding. Our honeymoon was cut short to three days because of it. I feel like I still owe her a proper honeymoon! When we returned home to the mobile home we had bought, we didn't have blankets or sheets for our bed, but even though we began to experience hardship and disappointment, our lives together were full of joy.

What's the story of your honeymoon or reception? If you are single, what's your story of peace amid hardship?

I have found that every person's experience of meeting Christ is very different. Some come to Christ at an early age through conversations with their parents. In contrast, others experience emptiness and go through a time of seeking before they stumble on the treasure hidden in the field—the Lord Jesus (Matthew 13:44). Upon conversion, many go through a honeymoon period where peace, inner joy, and spiritual power fill their lives.

How we wish that first intimate love would stay! Unfortunately, the honeymoon stage of Christianity can depart as we settle down to live in this world, trying not to let the world and its sinfulness seep into our lives. Many of us go through difficult outward circumstances that can test our faith. No matter what we go through, though, we can rest our hearts on the facts of the gospel—that God has showered mercy and grace on us and that we are to stand in faith in what Christ has done, not what we have done: **“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 5:1).

This joy and inner peace are a result of the Spirit of God coming to live in us to be our Helper and the One called alongside (Gk. *Paraclete*) forever. That thought bears repeating—the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus says, will be with us forever: **“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever”** (John 14:16). In another place, also, the Lord tells us: **“I will never leave you or forsake you”** (Hebrews 13:5). There are times in our lives when it *seems* that the closeness of the Holy Spirit has gone—when it appears that the honeymoon period is over and that the hard work of living life begins. I wish it were not so, but we all have times when the intimacy of our courtship/marriage to Christ seems to wilt, and life becomes hard work. If that is your experience right now, there is hope.

The Longing of the Spirit is to Remain

³²John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and **He remained** upon Him. ³³“I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, **‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him. This is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit’**” (John 1:32-33).

When John the Baptist gave testimony to the crowd as to the person of Christ, he said that the Lord told him that the One on whom the Spirit descends like a dove and remains would be the Messiah. Two thoughts stand out about his testimony: 1) The Spirit came down like a dove. 2) The Spirit remained on Christ. Let's discuss these two aspects of the Spirit's coming upon Jesus.

What significance is there in John's testimony that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove rather than a wind, fire, or some other picture of great power?

The Spirit Came Like a Dove

Why did the Spirit appear as a dove? Luke tells us, "**The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove**" (Luke 3:22). What can we learn about the character of the Holy Spirit from this statement of His appearance as a dove? He doesn't appear as a fire, a wind, a lion, or a lamb, but like a dove. What is it about a dove that we should know and learn about? Although the dove can look like a pigeon, they are very different in temperament.

My wife Sandy, as an American, had many of her friends and relatives visit us in England while we were church planting from 1981 to 1999. Because we were only seventy miles from London, we would always take our guests to Trafalgar Square, where thousands of pigeons congregate. You can buy birdseed to feed these pigeons, and it is incredible how bold these birds become when they discover that you have seed for them! They will land on you and eat the grain right out of your hand. However, a dove is very different from a pigeon. First, doves mate for life, and both work together to build their nest and raise their young. They are singular in heart for only one other. The other aspect of their nature is that, whereas pigeons are bold and not easily scared off, doves are the opposite; they flutter away at any sudden noise or anger.

William Barclay, the New Testament commentator, tells us that doves were sacred birds and not eaten. The Rabbis used to say that the Spirit of God moved and fluttered like a dove over the ancient chaos, breathing order and beauty into it. Of course, after the Flood in the Book of Genesis, Noah received news from a little dove that the water had receded and that there was peace on the earth as the dove brought back a freshly plucked olive leaf (Genesis 8:11). The dove has long been a symbol of peace in many cultures.

In the first century A.D., one could offer two doves instead of a lamb sacrifice under certain circumstances. Of course, the doves had to be caught and sold. Israel is a dream visit for any birdwatcher or ornithologist; being located at the land bridge between three continents, birds migrate in huge numbers through Israel, and it is a source of income for young people to catch birds and sell them. The trouble with doves is that they fly away at the slightest sound or disturbance. John the Baptist was convinced that Jesus was the One who should come because he saw the Spirit descend as a dove and remain on Him. Whenever the Holy Spirit comes, He brings peace to a man or woman of God. The Spirit did not flutter away from Jesus; He was at home with Christ.

The Spirit Remained on Jesus

Twice in the passage above (John 1:32 and 33), John the apostle tells us the Spirit remained on the Lord Jesus. I think we are to receive the message that the Spirit could settle down and thoroughly work through the Lord Jesus and not be grieved. I wish it were so with you and me. My experience over the years has been that my character can often grieve the Spirit. What grieves the Holy Spirit? Here's what Paul the Apostle wrote:

²⁹Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. ³⁰**Do not grieve the Holy Spirit** of God, by whom **you were sealed** for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice (Ephesians 4:29-31, Emphasis mine).

What does it mean to grieve the Spirit? The Greek word (*lypelte*) means to "experience deep emotional pain, severe sorrow or grief." In the context in which the term is used, the things that grieve the Spirit are not only poor choices of words but also the attitudes of the heart, e.g., the anger and bitterness that often goes on behind closed doors between spouses and children and youth. If we want the Spirit to remain on us, we must ask the Spirit to help us overcome attitudes of heart that grieve Him and cause Him pain. It is a changed character, the character of Christ, working in us by the transformative power of the Spirit, which causes Him to remain. The beautiful thing about the Spirit of God is that He does not leave us even though we might grieve Him. We are sealed for that great day when Christ will come, and with Him, we will enter into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. What is a seal? (v. 30). It is a stamp of ownership and authority.

All Believers Have the Spirit of God

Let's repeat it: all believers are given the Spirit at the moment of their conversion to Christ. "For in one Spirit we **were all** baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and **all** were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). When you placed your trust in what Christ did for you at the cross, you received the Spirit of God at that point. Paul is even more specific in his letter to the Ephesian church: "In him you also, **when you heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation, **and believed in him, were sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). The enemy has lied to some, telling them they have not received the Spirit. However, Paul states that you can't be a Christian without having the Spirit of God. Paul again says it so clearly in the book of Romans: "**Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him**" (Romans 8:9).

Suppose you are not aware of the Holy Spirit in you. In that case, your lack of awareness of His presence in your life might be that you have never invited Him to rule and reign over all the rooms of the temple of your heart (1 Corinthians 6:19). Are there specific areas of your life of which you are ashamed and have closed off to Him? These things grieve the Spirit and cause the intimacy between you and Him not to remain. Remember that the Holy Spirit is a person. He has definite ways. You may not always agree with God, but His ways are often not our ways, so we must adjust our ways to the Dove, for He does not adjust His ways to ours. It is the work of the Spirit to sanctify us and make us ready for God to use us. Let me put it to you this way: imagine that you are Michelangelo and working on the marble statue of David. The stone that will become this fantastic statue is all there, but to fashion it, you need to chip away at everything that is not a part of this

figure. He could see the finished product in his mind, and at every stage of his chisel work, the form begins to take shape as every bit of stone that is not part of the image is removed. This process is similar to the way the Holy Spirit in us is slowly chipping away at all that is not of Christ. The Spirit sees the finished work of what He is transforming us to be. We used to sing a song in England called "Jesus, Take Me as I Am." The words of the song were all about this process of transformation:

Jesus, take me as I am; I can come no other way.
Lead me deeper into You; let my flesh life melt away.
Make me like a precious stone, crystal clear and finely honed.
Life of Jesus shining through, giving glory back to You.

The Spirit's Fire Can be Quenched.

¹⁸In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. ¹⁹**Do not quench the Spirit;** ²⁰do not despise prophetic utterances (1 Thessalonians 5:18-19).

Is there a difference between grieving the Holy Spirit and quenching the Spirit?

These two descriptions are similar and overlap, but grieving the Holy Spirit often relates to how we act towards others, like judging and unforgiveness, whereas quenching the Holy Spirit usually refers to how we react to the Holy Spirit's work and manifestation. Think of how the Pharisees responded to Jesus by accusing Him of casting out demons and working miracles in their midst by the power of Satan (Matthew 9:4). When we think of the word "quench," we immediately connect this word to putting out a fire or flame or of quenching one's thirst. When the Holy Spirit came upon the believers on the Day of Pentecost, there appeared tongues of fire (Acts 2:3). The Spirit sometimes manifests as fire or flames, i.e., the Pillar of Fire leading the Israelites in the wilderness or the tongues of fire that settled on the disciples on the Day of Pentecost. Since we are told not to quench the Spirit of God, we need to understand what throws water onto His fire so that we may enjoy the closeness of His presence. When you tend a fire, there are things you can do to fan the flames and feed the fire, and there are also things you can do to dampen the fire. The same is true of the Holy Spirit.

We can quench the Spirit by not respecting His presence. Some people believe that God no longer manifests His presence today through the gifts of the Spirit or the miraculous. They think that all of these gifts, which the early believers experienced, have ceased since we now have the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is relegated in their minds as only revealing God through the Scripture. Their theology does not give place to the Holy Spirit manifesting or showing His power in that way. When we limit the Holy Spirit through our theology, it is a way of quenching the Holy Spirit.

Usually, fear is the motivating factor behind quenching the Holy Spirit. We fear the lack of control. However, if we acknowledge that the Holy Spirit only takes what is Christ's and will only do the will of the Father, we know that we have nothing to fear. The Holy Spirit will not force His way upon anyone. He is likened to the Dove; remember that, but we cannot predict what the Holy Spirit will do.

I see a God in the Old and New Testaments who is not concerned with making us feel comfortable. He often calls us out of our comfort zone. Faith is usually uncomfortable and risky. One influential pastor used to say that faith is spelled R.I.S.K. The Lord will always lead us to truth and along a road that takes us closer to Him. As we engage in the work of the Kingdom along with the Spirit, who is our Helper, we will encounter opposition as we go against the tide of this world and proclaim Christ's victory over the enemy.

We are in spiritual warfare and live in enemy-occupied territory (1 John 5:19); therefore, our walking with Christ and abiding in Him will sometimes place us in a confrontation with the enemy and his works in this world. We know that Christ has the victory, but we live in a time when we do not yet see everything put under His feet. We can be assured that if we continue to follow the Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead us, we will be thankful for the road on which He takes us, for it will always lead us to closer fellowship with Him, thus resulting in a life of inner peace and joy.

We have noted that quenching the Holy Spirit and grieving the Holy Spirit bring similar effects and results. Both keep us from fulfilling our full potential in God, our spiritual destiny. Both take us down another road, away from God's presence and power.

[What everyday habits do we have that quench the Spirit in the life of a believer or a fellowship of believers?](#)

When I am not walking close to the Lord and obedient to Him, there is a lack of joy and an unsatisfied, irritated spirit. When I seem to snap at my family, I realize that I have to get apart by myself and get my heart right before the Lord before going and apologizing to my loved ones. Abiding or cooperating with the Spirit of God will lead to closer communion with Him, and it will put us in a place where it is easier to hear and discern the will of the Father.

The Filling and Renewing Power of the Holy Spirit.

After the Spirit's coming in the Book of Acts, when Peter and John healed a disabled man well known to the people in Jerusalem, Peter (again) took the opportunity to preach the gospel, and at least two thousand were converted. Instead of the elders and teachers of the Law being thrilled, they were indignant and warned the disciples "to speak no longer to anyone in this name" (Acts 4:17). Peter and John informed the disciples, who began to pray. It was a prayer of petition for the Lord to arise, act, and grant them boldness in the face of opposition. The Holy Spirit showed up again in a powerful way, "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4:31). This event was some time after Pentecost, possibly weeks later. It shows that the same people filled on the Day of Pentecost were again filled with the Spirit and enabled to speak with renewed power.

Charles Finney's Testimony to the Continuing Power of the Spirit

Charles Finney was a lawyer who was converted and touched by the Spirit and began to preach, leading over a half million people to Christ. He writes of his conversion in this way:

I was powerfully converted on the morning of the 10th of October, 1821. In the evening of

the same day, I received overwhelming baptisms of the Holy Ghost that went through me, as it seemed to me, body and soul. I immediately found myself endued with such power from on high that a few words dropped here and there to individuals were the means of their immediate conversion. My words seemed to fasten like barbed arrows in the souls of men. They cut like a sword. They broke the heart like a hammer. Multitudes can attest to this. Often, a word dropped without my remembering it would fasten conviction and result in an almost immediate conversion. Sometimes I would find myself, in a great measure, empty of this power. I would go and visit and see that I made no saving impression. I would urge and pray with the same result. I would then set apart a day for private fasting and prayer, fearing that this power had departed from me, and would inquire anxiously after the reason for this apparent emptiness. After humbling myself and crying out for help, the power would return upon me with all its freshness. This has been the experience of my life.

This power is a great marvel. I have many times seen people unable to endure the Word. The most straightforward and ordinary statements would cut men off their seats like a sword, would take away their strength, and render them almost helpless as dead men. Several times it has been true in my experience that I could not raise my voice or say anything in prayer or exhortation, except in the mildest manner, without overcoming them. This power sometimes seems to permeate the atmosphere of the one who is highly charged with it. Many times, vast numbers of persons in a community will be clothed with this power when the very atmosphere of the whole place seems to be charged with the life of God. Strangers coming into it and passing through the area will be instantly smitten with a conviction of sin and, in many instances, converted to Christ. When Christians humble themselves and consecrate their all afresh to Christ and ask for this power, they will often receive such a baptism that they will be instrumental in converting more souls in one day than in all their lifetime before. While Christians remain humble enough to retain this power, the work of conversion will continue until whole communities and regions of the country are converted to Christ. The same is true of the ministry.¹

Our choices affect our ability to approach the throne of grace boldly. It is a paradox that, when we need grace to help us in our time of need, we are sometimes the most reluctant to come to the Lord to meet our needs. The enemy of our souls knows this, and he plays upon this fact by making us feel unworthy or by accusing us and causing us to draw back from the Father rather than coming boldly to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

Have you ever hit a low point in your Christian life when you needed a fresh revelation of the grace of God? Did God use this low point in your life to teach you something? Briefly share the outcome of this experience.

When Jesus stood up on the last Day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He made this promise: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Christ said that the only qualification is being thirsty: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). Are you thirsty for more of Jesus?

¹ Charles Finney, Tract, Words of Life – Extra Edition, Nov. 1921

The Holy Spirit has also been likened to a river. When we choose to go against the flow of the Holy Spirit by grieving Him, we do not experience the flow of this Living Water. Any Christian who is a disciple of Jesus can attest that we all go through seasons of learning where we sense the Spirit of God more than at other times. It is part of our learning experience. The writer, R.T. Kendall, says something about this experience:

Many years ago, I started on a pilgrimage to recover that old sense of the ungrieved Spirit powerfully inside me. His close presence has returned in slow stages. I believe it has been a slow process because the way back must be a return to the anointing, not a return of the anointing. One must move on and be willing not to have everything exactly as we once knew it. Someone once put it this way: You can step out of a flowing stream, but you can never step back in at the same place. Seldom is everything precisely as it once was. We must adjust to what God has for us now.

It takes the Holy Spirit in us to do the work of the Father, but it is up to us to place ourselves in the way for Him to accomplish this. We do this by our choices, whether we choose daily to follow Christ or to follow the direction of this world. In so many little decisions, we set the spiritual temperature of our daily lives. We choose whether to abide in Christ and let His words abide in us or to follow the way of this world and the wisdom of the world, which will often lead us contrary to Christ. We make daily choices that can take us down one road or another. Can you think of any changes you believe the Holy Spirit may want you to make? Are there any areas of bitterness, anger, or rejection that may be affecting your relationship with the Lord? The good news is that the Father wants you to experience this Living water flowing out from your innermost being. That is His plan for you. He wants to remove anything that would stop you from experiencing the joy of your salvation and for the Holy Spirit's presence to rest upon you powerfully.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for your grace and mercy to me. Come again to every part of my inner life. Let there be no doors barred to you. Have your way in me. Amen.

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