

## God the Holy Spirit

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Scripture Reading: Acts 2:1-4, 43-47

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, we thank you for watching over us, even while we were formed in our mother's womb to this very moment as we pray this prayer. We thank you for being with us and promising to be with us for all eternity. Move in us through your word to be empowered to love you and others more as you call us to in every way throughout the days you grant us here on earth. Bless this message for us to draw closer to you, Jesus, as we seek to draw others closer to you too. In your name we pray. Amen.

What if you had the abilities to do what you cannot right now? What abilities would they be?

If you ask a child what kind of powers they'd like to have, you may be surprised on what they'd say they wanted. Some would immediately say they'd want the power to fly. And if you listed more of them, they'd probably include such powers as invisibility, telepathy, ability to talk to animals, control the weather, time travel, have superhuman speed, the power to mimic/copy anyone you wanted, superhuman strength, healing, superhuman endurance, breathe underwater, night vision, the ability to understand any language, and last but not least immortality.

Adults definitely may want some of the same super powers also. However, being a bit more practical, some adults may wish they had the powers and abilities to sleep anytime and anywhere, to not worry about things or have thoughts consume their minds, have a short memory when wanting to forget something, a better memory when wanting to not forget something, to not care so much about what others think when it's not helpful or beneficial, to keep your coffee eternally hot, and I'm sure you could add to that list such as stop children from whining so that they can use that energy instead to do something productive about it or let it go.

Though on Pentecost the disciples were able to speak in various languages, there are many more incredible gifts and spiritual powers that God gives us through the Holy Spirit.

Thousands came to know the Lord on that day when God the Holy Spirit entered each of them. The results were amazing. and about 3,000 came to faith in Christ that very day. And each day the numbers of believers grew. We know this to be true since it spread throughout the world and throughout hundreds and thousands of years. It reached us and continues to be shared, including through you and through me.

What made this even more incredible was that in light of being persecuted, arrested for their faith, and many killed for being followers of Jesus, they did not stop. They knew that the salvation of souls was worth their very lives, by living fully for God as well as dying for Christ too.

They were following in the footsteps of Jesus. For Christ, in the face hatred, in the face of curses, abuse and threat of death, the God of love and life faced it as God the Son, Jesus Christ. And Christ faced it with peace, love, grace, forgiveness, and without speaking curses back, attacking back, retaliating, or fighting. Jesus showed what God's love looked like through him and his life.

The very Spirit of God that enabled God the Son to do all that he did lives in every follower of Jesus Christ. And on that first Pentecost, the apostles were able to speak in the languages of all Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem, as well as all who lived in Jerusalem from other nations, including Egyptians, Cretans, Arabs and many more, all living together peaceably.

Peter told the crowds of people standing and wondering what was going on that they had in fact were part of the crowds that cried out for Jesus to be killed by crucifixion. Of course, these were not people who saw Jesus after he rose from the dead, appearing to many before ascending to heaven.

The crowds of people asked Peter what they should do. To me it's amazing how the crowds were moved by the gospel shared that day and moved to place their faith and lives in Christ.

They were moved by the kind of love that Jesus showed and offered to them and to all. It's a godly love that sacrificed not only for family or friend, but also a love for enemies in order to save them.

God puts in very believer the Holy Spirit, giving them godly powers so they can live and love as Christ did.

We are told in our Scripture reading today that disciples who lived by God's Spirit shared from what they had so no one would go without...this is not natural for people to understand or to do.

People will fight such sharing since it does what seems unfair, to give to those who don't seem to deserve it or have earned it.

If God used our human tendencies and typically selfish approach to life, then we would all die in our sin and spend eternity in hell. For we did not deserve, earn, or could ever be good or righteous enough. Thank God for the love that gives what we need, even when hatred is returned. Just as Chris was being crucified on the cross, he asked that God the Father forgive the Roman soldiers since they did not know what they were doing. Sure they knew they were killing a man through a most torturous way. But they did not know they were killing an innocent person who was more than a person, but the Son of God.

Think about how different our world would be if all followers of Jesus allowed for God's Holy Spirit to truly lived in and move in them. Think about how different each life would be, how relationships would be in families, in communities, in our country and our world.

It's really incredible to think and know that God lives in us by the Holy Spirit. We know the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God living in us! That is what happened on Pentecost. God the Holy Spirit entered the disciples and every believer from then on.

We know quite a bit about God the Father and of course God the Son. How about God the Holy Spirit? Well, here are a few verses to help us now God the Holy Spirit a bit more.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 God tells us "Do not quench the Spirit." As followers of Jesus, we still can ignore God, refuse to follow God, and choose live in opposition to God. That was a struggle of early Christians. And it is still one Christians struggle with today.

The Holy Spirit of God does not force us to follow, to obey, to listen, and to do as Christ taught us to do. Just because you were taught by your parents, teachers, Sunday School teachers, and others does not mean you will necessarily do as you have the knowledge, education, skills, wisdom, and abilities to do. So it is with God's Holy Spirit and the power of God the Holy Spirit in you gives. Just as we daily chose to follow Jesus, we daily listen for and follow the guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

God tells us in Ephesians 4:25-32 this: "So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

Remember, the Holy Spirit is God. And among the things we can do as disciples of Christ is by not following or obeying, especially in not loving God and not loving others by, as I repeat what was said in the verses I just read, speaking lies, sinning in our anger, stealing, speaking evil and words that tear down rather than build up, being filled with bitterness, wrath, anger, quarreling, slander, and malice. That's a mouthful indeed. However, it's incredibly sad to God when it was Christ who died for us in order that we could be forgiven but then we do not in turn forgive others. Along with the other acts that oppose and grieve God the Holy Spirit reveal much about us and our relationship with God.

We are told that we are to be kind to one another, including those who we may feel are against us or even our enemies. We are told to be tenderhearted, to forgive one another, just as Jesus forgave us. Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:43-45 in saying, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

Jesus taught about the power of forgiveness, such as with the parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke 15:11-32. Jesus also taught about how critical forgiveness is in Gospel of Matthew 18:21-35 with the unforgiving servant who refused to forgive a friend even though his own and much greater debt was forgiven by his master. Jesus did shy from saying how important understanding the power of forgiveness as well as not forgiving is.

I felt led to begin with those verses about God the Holy Spirit. And I discovered it was because unfortunately our world is filled with lies, anger, evil words, malice, the verbal tearing down rather than building up, stealing, bitterness, wrath, anger, quarreling, slander, malice, and the tendency to stray from the ways of Christ's love, forgiveness and grace.

It seems as time goes by, along with how news and media allow for more voices to be heard, which at times are both beneficial as well as unbeneficial, and I am even more aware of what people say and do around me, in our country and our world. And I am more and more shocked when those who are praising God one moment are cursing the next about people around them as well as people they don't even know, rather than following in the ways God the Spirit would have them go.

It breaks my heart when we give into more of what divides rather than what bring us together, especially during times when we need to be unified as well as when we need each other the most.

Ephesians 6:10-11 tells us, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

And 1 Peter 5:8-9, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

In times when we feel like it's a losing battle and seemingly hopeless in light of less love, less unity, less care for one another, and all that seems the very opposite of what Christ taught, we must not be so discouraged as to give in to the ways that seem to be more powerful.

When hate seems to be more powerful than love, remember what Jesus did on the cross. Even death seemed to have won and even the Son of God seemed to have lost. Thank God for an everlasting, eternal, and victorious love.

So we must also remember God the Holy Spirit living in us in light of the following verses:

God tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

Thank God we are freed from the power of sin. Though we know we can still sin, we have the help and power of God to resist temptation and the ways that Satan would have us go which leads away from God's love, the love of neighbor and even enemy, and all the ways in which we can lead others to a saving and freeing relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are freed with power of God's Holy Spirit from the bondages of guilt, fear, insecurity, hatred, inability and/or unwillingness to forgive, anger, judgment, seeking retaliation or revenge, and all that hurts and divides us.

Our witness for Jesus Christ is no doubt connected to how we treat others. We are also told by Jesus that our witness as ambassadors of Jesus is also accomplished in how we treat and love one another as the Body of Christ, the Church. Our unity in love is one of the ways in which we show the world God's love.

Jesus said in John 14:26, "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

Once we have heard and/or read the words of Jesus, God the Spirit reminds us and also teaches us through those very words. Again, it is up to us to listen to them, obey them and daily apply Jesus' words and teachings in our lives. And when we do what Jesus says, it's like each of us are building our spiritual houses. And we either building on the rock, which is done by doing what Jesus said, or not which is likened to building on sand as Jesus described it in Matthew 7:24-27.

God tells us in Acts 1:8, “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.”

You do not have to worry about being a faithful and effective witness of Jesus Christ. What you need to do is to trust in and rely on God the Holy Spirit to give you the power to be Christ’s witnesses in all places and to all people, whether at home or anywhere else, through your words that come from your mouth or through some other form of media or social media. You’re always a witness of Jesus Christ, whether with family and friends or total strangers, and whether it’s with someone in your neighborhood or someone across the country or even the world.

Among the given gifts and powers of God’s Holy Spirit, we have been granted spiritual immortality because of what Jesus did in his death and resurrection. For we are told in Ephesians 1:13-14, “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”

Here is one more set of verses to tell us of the wonderful gift of God’s Holy Spirit on Pentecost given to every follower of Jesus Christ. We are told in Galatians 5:22-23, “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.”

Do you need more of one of those in your life, maybe more love, more joy, more peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Do you need more spiritual power in your life?

Though we may not be able to obtain superpowers such as flying, controlling the weather, breathing underwater, super speed, mind reading, stop a whining child or keep your coffee just the perfect temperature all the time, we actually have more practical, essential and life-giving spiritual powers from God the Holy Spirit.

Again, they are all spiritual powers for us so that we can live with all the gifts and graces that God has for us. They are also for the benefit of others who are in need of God’s grace, love, forgiveness, salvation, and purpose through us!

The Holy Spirit of God helps us ultimately fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in every aspect of our lives so that others will come to hear, know and be able to choose to place their faith in Jesus as followers. And as followers of Jesus they are also able to draw more and more people to also know and follow Jesus.

So we do not only remember that it is God the Holy Spirit who lives in us, but we also remember the power of God within us to:

overcome hate with love;  
overcome fear with faith;  
overcome sins and trespasses with grace and forgiveness;  
overcome hurtful words with words that build up and heal;  
overcome lies and gossip with truth and blessings;  
and overcome the slavery to the bondages of guilt, fear, insecurity, hatred, inability and/or unwillingness to forgive, anger, judgment, seeking retaliation or revenge, and all that hurts and divides us...overcoming such bondages and evils with the love and ways of Christ that bring us together in God's love.

The power of God the Holy Spirit has not diminished one bit since the day of Pentecost some 2000 years ago. God the Holy Spirit, who lives in us, is just as powerful. The only thing that either gets in the way or allows the power to flow in and through us is ourselves! As Jesus said, is such a simple yet incredibly powerful truth is to not only hear the words, but live by them. May you live in fellowship with God the Holy Spirit so that you may know God and God's power living in you more and more for the love of God and others. I pray you will each and every day. Amen.