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HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Mario Dučić,
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“And being assembled together with [them], He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, ‘which,’ [He said], ‘you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’” (Acts 1:4-5)

“The church on earth without the Holy Spirit is more of a curse than a blessing”

— C.H. Spurgeon (paraphrase)

It is as if churches, believers, and their leaders, who are without the Holy Spirit, are more and more lost and ineffective in these times of crisis that mark these last days. Many do not have an answer to these crises, whether spiritually or materially. Crisis is evident in families, relationships and in the area of evangelism. Many say that people are not interested in spiritual things; pas-

tors complain about believers and believers about their pastors. It seems that all our counseling and principles on effective leadership and communication are not giving the expected results. It seems that something is missing in the church. Among other things, I believe that today’s church is missing the Holy Spirit, regardless of denomination. The Holy Spirit is not only connected with

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Pentecostals or Charismatics, rather with the Bible. No one has the corner market on Him, for He is promised to every believer. The church that does not have the Holy Spirit cannot be blessed. What's more, she will be a stumbling block to those who are truly seeking God.

I believe that the church, in many aspects, is ineffective because she has simply set the Holy Spirit to the side. Sermons and teachings on the practical search for the Holy Spirit are neglected because they are considered to be too simple or those who seek for Him are considered foolish. Unfortunately, some do not even mention the Holy Spirit in order to avoid political or theological rejection; perhaps because they have had a bad experience connected with the "work of the Holy Spirit", which bordered more on folly than true supernatural things of God.

1. WE CANNOT BE EFFECTIVE DISCIPLES WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

We have spent much energy trying to convince people to evangelize; we use convincing materials, we pray, cry out, threaten, and beg, but we end up frustrating those who do not have a desire to witness or who do not care for those around them. If we dare them to witness for Christ in a certain way we become discouraged because we do not see results. On one hand it may be normal, because we will not always see

people get saved immediately when we tell them about Christ, but there is a great difference in witnessing for Christ when we are filled with the Holy Spirit, rather than simply sharing information and explaining biblical principles without an experience with Him.

Information can be good; an idea can be good, just as our desires and goals are good. However, when Jesus said that we would be His witnesses, He did not mean that we would simply give out information we have gleaned from books or that we have heard others share, rather that we would be true witnesses; that we would share out of our experience with Jesus Christ and about how He has changed our life. The gospel is not just interesting information, rather a living, breathing experience that we have had with a living person – Jesus Christ. Christianity is not just going to church on holidays, or participating in a religious activity, rather it is first and foremost a relationship with a living God.

Without reluctance we must say that the Holy Spirit is of great help when we witness for Christ. He is, in fact, here in order to glorify Christ. Jesus said, many times, that His disciples must wait until they are clothed in power from on high. In other words, that without the Holy Spirit they could not be effective witnesses, because they needed to wait for the "promise of the Father". Although they were with Him before, they heard His teachings and were baptized in water; they even cast out evil spirit in God's power and healed, however, they still needed one more special experience – the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, and when they were "all filled with the Holy Spirit" they began to preach, namely speak in "other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:4) Those who gathered together in Jerusalem heard the gospel, each one who was filled with the Holy Spirit spoke in difference languages about the "wonderful works of God" (Acts

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2:11b). The people around them were astonished. They did not know what was actually happening, while others tauntingly said that the disciples were drunk, “all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine.’” (Acts 2:12-13)

When we were filled with the Holy Spirit, no one had to encourage us to speak about God because the Holy Spirit compelled us to evangelize about the wonderful things of God. It must have been very interesting to listen to those disciples when then were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Today, we as believers try, in a matter-of-fact, apologetic, informative way without the Holy Spirit, to present the gospel in our own wisdom. There are churches that preach only theological doctrine and teach about other’s experiences without a fresh and personal experience with God.

We often hear stories from older believers about how it was many years ago; at times we speak about previous experiences of when we were saved; yet we do not have new and fresh things to share. The reason is simple; we are not longer filled with the Holy Spirit as before. We do not live and work in participation with Him; perhaps we have grieved Him by trying to create an atmosphere of His presence with loud voices and other similar actions that cause us to appear mad and incomprehensible to those around us.

When Peter preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, the results were equivalent to this. People did not just want to be a member of a certain group where they loved to fellowship when it suited them or with the desire for personal blessing, rather being deeply shaken they surrendered all and radically, in the power of the Holy Spirit, changed their lives. Peter did not preach on “The Four Spiritual Laws” rather about the crucifixion of Christ. He did not speak about their need to be healed, rather about repentance from their

disobedience and sin.

Void of the power and might of the Holy Spirit, we preach a watered-down gospel that brings no real or lasting change. Modern preaching, without the Holy Spirit, emphasizes humanism, programs, and charisma while the Holy Spirit always elevates Jesus Christ and His cross! What powerful words of the Apostle Peter, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” (Acts 2:40) The modern gospel does not save man from a perverse generation, rather it teaches him how to manage and enjoy himself in a perverse generation along with several technical adaptations, such as church membership.

Without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to have real church growth. Without Him it is only possible to have a certain number of members, where believers, in the name of growth, roam from one church to another seeking for a better program and a place where they can feel better. Some call that “church growth”, but it seems to me that it is more like church fallacy. If we want to see real results we must allow the Holy Spirit to work among us.

The church today holds to it’s own traditions and beliefs, not recognizing that the early church actually advanced and grew. The Word

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tells us that immediately after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit "...fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles." (Acts 2:43) People today are amazed by apparitions and all manner of alternative doctors and phenomena. Believe it or not, people look to so-called doctors and priests with fear and in some way with regard because there is a certain "power" about them, that is not from God that brings about certain results. But what is happening to the true church of Jesus Christ? We have our own theology that explains how things were in that time and in some ways denies the power and might of the Holy Spirit. We throw out certain passages from the New Testament that speak about the working of the Spirit and wonder why people live in fear, why they do not appreciate us, and why we do not see signs and wonders in our midst. It is very simple – we have thrown out the Holy Spirit! The Word says that the "...Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved". It is very powerful when we have the Holy Spirit and God's work on our side!

Imagine that on the way to the church we meet with a man lame from birth, sitting on Main Street at the peak of rush-hour, and we say to him, "Look at us – we do not have one cent, but what we have we will give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth get up and walk!" (Paraphrased from Acts 3:6) What would

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happen? It is not enough for them to declare a formula of faith; they expect that by experience we know Jesus and that we are filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is He who gives us faith, courage, and perseverance. Jesus did not leave us alone to carry out these things in our own strength. After a conflict with the council (religious people), Peter and John did not go before them downcast thinking of what to say so as not to anger the council, rather they boldly said that they must obey God rather than men. They sought from God even greater strength for their forbidden preaching, "'Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.' And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:29-31)

They didn't need a lesson in courage and preaching, rather the power and might of the Holy Spirit! Let us not cast aside the Holy Spirit, because without Him we will not have quality results, just religion and churches filled with religious people who have not truly changed. The Holy Spirit is the One who gives us perseverance to preach. The Holy Spirit did not operate only in "seminars" and "conferences" in those days. It is interesting that some who claim to have the power and might to heal always wish to display this in churches and in Christian circles, but rarely in hospitals and at cemeteries; while Jesus Christ almost always disturbed funerals in that time – often people were raised from the dead.

It is interesting that people who have a "special anointing" do not heal on the streets and in hospitals, I believe it is because they do not have the true power and might of the Holy Spirit, only religious clichés while they manifest in church

circles in front of television cameras. Religious people love outward show and glory of man, but those filled with the Holy Spirit love God's glory and the streets. The Word tells us that the ministry of the apostle was outside of the Jewish synagogues, "And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch... so that they brought the sick out into the streets and laid [them] on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them. Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed." (Acts 5:12, 15-16)

Without the power and strength of the Holy Spirit our witnessing and evangelizing will simply be a dry and lifeless religion. We might gather church members, but we will never be able to have radical disciples and followers of Jesus Christ. Christianity without the Holy Spirit is a dangerous illness because it will gradually turn into a religion that will, in ignorance and sin, crucify Jesus Christ and all those who truly follow Him.

2. WITHOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO HAVE QUALITY BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP.

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common... they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." (Acts 2:42, 44, 46b)

"Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." (Acts 4:32)

When believers read these verses they immediately think of socialism and a utopia; or simply

with a wave of their hand say that this was for that time and that things are different today. The reason is that they have never experienced this type of fellowship in their churches and do not practice this kind of lifestyle. Do they need a teaching on how to love their brother or sister, or "how to co-exist with others"? This may be so in measure, but the real reason why this lifestyle is missing in our churches is because Christians have become selfish and unfeeling concerning the needs of those around them. The greatest cause, among others, is because they are not filled with the Holy Spirit. The problem is that we want to operate in our own strength, which is simply impossible for us. How could a man sell property and possessions for the needs of others or God's Kingdom if he is not filled with the Holy Spirit, or God Himself? However, there are those who will do this by encouraging others with wrong motives and a desire for human glory, but true biblical fellowship is possibly only for those who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Believers are more and more skeptical. Unbelievers flee further and further from the church because they do not find what they need, which is grace, true mutual love, compassion, and support. Today it looks like this: every believer, in the

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name of faith, is left alone to care for himself; if help is needed he is often directed to the State or a helping hands ministry. It is difficult to speak about giving to the kingdom of God; people hardly give their tithes, much less something significant. In that time selfishness was characterized by lying to the Holy Spirit. People fell dead because of selfishness and lying, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things." (Acts 5:3-5) today we are immune to everything. The Holy Spirit has been pushed aside while we suppose that no one will be able to find us out. Maybe we do not fall down dead (although we appear to be dead), but one day all of our secret works will be revealed before God and all, when it will be too late to correct them. Rather than coming up with new, modern ways or methods to help people learn how to give I think it is much better that people become filled with the Holy Spirit because then every dead deed will be touched by correct motives and an open heart.

Moreover, let us not forget that the world will recognize us by our love for one another, not by our hate and fighting – love and koinonia (fellow-

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ship) are signs of true Christianity. If we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, we will come to hate, envy and slander one another. The church in the last days desperately needs to be filled with the Spirit in order to change. Technology, teachings, and methods can help some, but without the Holy Spirit we will never achieve the maximum and beauty of the true, biblical, authentic fellowship described in the Word. This is not a utopia, rather reality that gives us hope and strength.

Love, compassion, acceptance, and support are general elements for which every man yearns. If this is not present in God's church then she is nothing more than a religion - lifeless, loveless, and powerless. Without love and surrender to God and one another there is no true gospel. We will become people of hate, envy, selfishness, void of grace and compassion with closed and hard hearts. These kinds of believers cannot be blessed by God.

Without the Holy Spirit it is impossible to have quality biblical fellowship; which is greater than mere "hanging out". It requires sacrificing for those around us - daily devotion. The Apostle John was clear in his descriptions of practical, devoted love when he said in his letter, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him." (1 John 3:16-19)

3. IF WE WISH TO LIVE THIS KIND OF LIFE, IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO HAVE JUST ONE EXPERIENCE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT; WE MUST EXPERIENCE HIM EVERYDAY!

"Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you

light.' See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord [is]. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:14-18)

"Ephesians 5:18 is not just an experience we need for enjoyment, it is a command that we must obey. If we do not daily open ourselves to the Holy Spirit, then we can factually conclude that we are disobedient Christians."

— Dwight L. Moody (paraphrased)

Christians who have been in church for a long time and who have been filled with the Holy Spirit from the beginning of their walk with God often speak only of those moments long ago: how they were zealous, how they sacrificed, evangelized and were radical. But God's intention is not that we have a radical experience in intimate fellowship with Jesus and the filling of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of our Christian life while the rest of our life is led in religion and void of fellowship.

Paul understood that some believers find themselves in dangerous situations and must be wakened because they are sleeping. When he said they were sleeping he did not exactly mean physically sleeping, although many Christians struggle with that, rather while looking about and beholding the world around they are spiritually asleep. They possibly go to church and participate in Christian activities but are sleeping spiritually. It is very easy to fall asleep when we are not filled with the Holy Spirit. If we are filled with Him everyday surely our life will not be dull and religious, rather filled with life and strength; we surely will not fall asleep.

There is far more strength in Christ than in wine, Paul says (although some modern believers love to find comfort in wine; while using the term "moderation"). In these evil days we have greater and lasting joy in Christ and in the Holy Spirit than delight in this life. If we wish to be healed

from our depression, monotony, or stress, we must submit to the Holy Spirit everyday in order to continually have His strength. Here is the problem and the solution – although we attend church we still ride the fence because we have no fellowship with the Lord and the Holy Spirit. If we are not filled with the Holy Spirit, who gives us strength, we attempt to apply various principles without Jesus Christ, who will not be able to assist us. This is why Christianity grows dull, impractical, and difficult; we try to live and work without Him and His strength. We need to rouse ourselves from sleep, redeem the time, and be filled with the Holy Spirit to be revived in order for the gospel to become real in our lives. Religion cannot give life. Spiritual discipline without the Holy Spirit creates an unnecessary burden that does not give life.

Furthermore, Paul gives several practical directives on how to be daily filled with the Holy Spirit. He does not say that we become filled with the Holy Spirit at seminars on the Holy Spirit once or twice a year, while on vacation, or in front of the television; rather every day in fellowship with God. This way we are not dependent on church services every day in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit, for He does not dwell

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in church buildings – he is God. He is omnipresent. He can be with us wherever we are: at home, in the car, at work, in the park, wherever we go and in whatever we do. Paul confirmed this when he said that being filled with the Holy Spirit is not connected with our religious weekly church activities, "...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:19-20)

In other words, Paul was saying that the Ephesians did not have to spend money on travel in order to go to some place where special people have a special anointing and where the Holy Spirit was working. For what kind of Holy Spirit would He be if He were so limited that we would have to spend money to be filled with Him? Did Jesus Christ not say that he who is thirsty could freely drink of His living water, meaning the Holy Spirit?

Let us sing songs while we are on our lunch break, before we lie down at night, while we are jogging or driving - singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, because when we do that in addition to those things that fill us with the Holy Spirit, such as reading, meditating, and fellowshiping with believers, this will lift us up and

also fill us with His Spirit. When we worship the Lord and sing to Him our spirit is filled with His and we gain new strength and a desire for Him.

Without the power and strength of the Holy Spirit we cannot do much other than create our own religion that crucifies Jesus. Let us not waste time, let us move forward today and continue on every day. Let us not wait for a special day, moment or touch for we could go weeks and months without God's presence and strength. Let us not expect that one day we will be roused from sleep and begin a daily relationship with Him, for it may be too late! Awaken from sleep, cry out the Lord, and sing to him, begin walking in His strength His way, which will bring lasting and quality results for Him in glory and praise! Open your life to the Holy Spirit.

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