

Series: Come, Holy Spirit  
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Edgar King  
1 Corinthians 14  
Holy Spirit.

Let's stand for the reading of God's word

***Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.***

1 Corr 13 v8-v13

The book of Acts starts with the narrative of the day of Pentecost. After Pentecost, the church is born. It's new creation. A new community with people who have been made new who are living their lives like Jesus the second Adam. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and just like Jesus. They go around living their lives in raw power. There is prophecying when they gather, prison doors are opening, and dead people are coming back to life. Poisonous snakes are not harming them. Hundreds are joining them to follow Jesus or what we call getting saved. The sick are getting healed. I mean the book of Acts reads like a wonderful superman movie. Except it is not a work of fiction and it is by ordinary people. They suffer, they sin, they make mistakes, and have disagreements. Jesus had left his ministry to unprofessionals.

They never had sermon series for the Holy Spirit. They just laid hands on people to receive the Holy Spirit (we will). They just laid their hands on the sick and they got well. They did not even have the complete bible to help them make up good theological arguments about healing and prophecy. We do, in fact, we are reading the stories of how they lived figuring out.

In fact, before I jump into today's talk, I want us to realise that one of the differences between the early church and the church today is that they were people who went out and did the word of God. We are a people who prefer to talk about the word of

God. We then go home and say, “That was a great sermon, wasn’t it? Now let’s watch stranger things on Netflix.”

It is only a people without power that are more interested in debates. But we become a people of power when we receive the Holy Spirit and then do the works of Jesus. What did Jesus tell the disciples before Pentecost? Go wait in Jerusalem, and then you will receive power.

But did we not say the Holy Spirit is not a power to be heard but a person to be in a relationship with? Yes. The Holy Spirit is the unembodied presence of God. Yet where the presence of God is so is his power. When we receive the Holy Spirit we receive both power and authority to do the works of God.

When the 44th US president visited Kenya his chopper was parked in the college I was in. It was their way of causing as little traffic as possible. They did not do a great job at that. But just his presence came with so much power. Phones were being jammed. There were snippers in the school, with real guns and I am gonna guess real bullets too. Access to our own college was controlled. We were allowed to move close at a certain distance and as the *beast* drove by, you could feel the earth beneath you shake.

It is the very same thing. When God is present, His power is too. The difference is that the power of the president brought a lot of restrictions but the power of God brings freedom, healing, restoration and forgiveness. That is why we have spent a lot of time talking about how everyone can receive the Holy Spirit and that we all can then speak in God’s authority what is called to prophesy. Next week we will be talking about praying for the sick. Because where the Holy Spirit is, so is the power of God.

But I wanna press on the breaks a bit and talk to us about what is most important. The reason we have people thinking the Holy Spirit is a power to be harnessed instead of a person to be in a relationship with is the lack of this understanding. We have all seen people misusing spiritual gifts or even faking them to manipulate others, make money and a name for themselves. It is the lack of this one understanding. This is the key, it is all for love. We are invited to become love. Power serves love, not the other way round.

Let’s pray

So there is an apostle of Jesus called John. He was the last of the 12 to die. He wrote some letters to the church much later. It is thought that the story of Jesus he writes, called the gospel according to John was written probably 60 - 70 years after Jesus died. At this point, John is a much older person and he has had years to think about his encounter with Jesus, years to meditate on his teaching.

He starts his letter by describing Jesus as we have in this series. The one who fully had the glory and presence of God. He was God himself. And seeing all Jesus did and said, here is the conclusion he comes with

***God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.***

After seeing Jesus, the man filled with the Holy Spirit, the perfect container of God's glory and presence, he does not describe God as the miracle worker, yet God works miracles every day. He does not describe God as knowledge, yet God knows. After all the miracles, the teaching, and the prophecy while with Jesus and after, John can only describe God as one thing, Love. He does not describe God as power. He does not describe God as knowledge. He describes God as love. What John learns is that it is always about becoming love. It is all for love. That power serves love and not the other way round.

As we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the idea is not to make us the next coolest kid on the block. It is not about becoming the fullest church there. In fact, God could care less about that. It is not about the pictures on our social media of people in a prophecy meeting or stories of healing. While all these are good and happen because God is in the room and where he is so is his power, the Spirit fills us so that we become more like the father, and the father is love. Power serves love, not the other way round. It is all for love.

Another apostle that comes to this conclusion is Paul. Paul knows what it is to be filled by the Holy Spirit. He is moving so powerfully in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. His handkerchief would still carry power from him to heal just like Jesus' garment. He wrote a letter to one of his churches and said,

***Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.***

1 Cor 12

For Paul functioning in the gifts of the Holy Spirit was so important and crucial for the church. He later adds this

***Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy and do not forbid speaking in tongues.***

1 Cor 13

He is telling them to get excited, desire and even pray for power. After all, it is Jesus that told them to wait until they had received power.

But in the middle of his teaching on the gifts of the Spirit, Paul stops and says this

***And yet I will show you the most excellent way.***

1 Cor 13

Wait, Paul, you mean there is something better than healing the sick? Raising the dead? Casting our demons? Doing miracles? Prophesying? Words of knowledge? Gift of wisdom and faith?

Here is his answer

***If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.***

1 Cor 14

If there is anything Paul has learned from Jesus after being used powerfully by God, after walking with Jesus and in all his suffering and mistakes is that it is all for love because God is love. Power serves love and not the other way round. I think he is even sarcastic as he says even if I speak the tongues of angels or even if I'm so generous I give my body to be burnt and I do not love I am nothing.

Where could they have gotten this idea? From Jesus. One day Jesus was teaching and he used an illustration of 2 groups of people coming before judgement at the end of time. One said, "Lord, we healed the sick, we raised the dead and we cast out demons." In other words, they had power. And Jesus said to them, go away, I do not know you.

Then there is the other group that does not have such an impressive resume in terms of power or at least that is not what they are flaunting. Jesus welcomes them instead. Why? Jesus says,

“When I was hungry you fed me. When I was naked you clothed me. When I was sick you cared for me. When I was in prison you visited me.” He is saying, when you actively moved close to and served others and especially those who could not give it back to you, you loved him. You met him. You became like him.

Jesus knows that it is always all for love because God is love. Power serves love and not the other way round. This is why Jesus actively moved close to and served humanity.

But it is one thing to be taught it is another to experience. I think after walking with Jesus, they realise how He loved them deeply and it was always more about receiving love, and becoming love themselves.

So after walking with Jesus, here is how Paul described love and his experience and the command to love one another ...

***Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.***

Love is more than a sentiment. Love is action. Jesus commands us to love, but you cannot command a feeling. Love is what you become when you move beyond the sentiment. We have so misused the word love that we no longer know what it looks like. We love our spouses or dates but we also love the show on Netflix. We love our siblings and we also love Italian ice cream. We are so used to love meaning sentiment we feel love but never become love.

But what Paul describes shows that love will cost you. It will cost you time, money and space. Love has room for interruptions that is what it did with Jesus. Most of his miracles were around interruptions. Love cannot stick to a budget because it will make you empty your bank account. It bankrupted heaven when Jesus came. Love is not convenient because it will cause you to leave your comfort zone just like it did Jesus. Love might just cost your life. That is exactly what it was about for Jesus.

So Paul says it this way...

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.

These are things you can't love without proximity. Do you know to be patient with someone, you need to be close enough to them that they could delay you or annoy you? To be kind to someone even when you don't want to requires proximity. To not envy requires they are in your eyes and you see what God has given them.

You cannot love from a distance. When we claim we will love from a distance it is usually our way of saying we do not want the inconvenience of love. We do not want to deal with the difficulties of our hearts being formed as they break like God's. It is our way of saying, we want the feeling of love but not to become love itself.

And I think sometimes this is why our lives lack power. Because if we do not love, God is not in us. Yet God is in us through the Spirit. If the Spirit is not us, the power of God is not with us.

You see, everything Jesus did was because he was moved by compassion not because he was powerful. Yet that he was. Jesus healed the sick because he loved them. Jesus raised the dead because he was moved by compassion. Jesus cast out demons because he had compassion. It's all for love because God is love. Power serves love and not the other way round.

We pray for the sick because we love them and we are becoming love. We cast out evil spirits because we are like Jesus, moved by compassion. We share the good news with the poor because God is love.

There are 5 groups of people the Bible calls us to love

1. The church... our brothers and sister. Look to your left, now to your right. Now across the room to the place you never seat at because those people sit there.
2. Our enemy... those who openly come against us or even persecute us. They just do not like you.
3. The stranger... the person who is not like us. They are strange to us. Their skin colour is different, and their politics is weird. Their tribe is all wrong.
4. The least of these...that person who is in a lesser state than you. Economically, socially, politically etc. The poor, the orphan, the homeless, the immigrant, and the unborn. Those who one cannot speak for themselves and could not pay you back if you called them for dinner.
5. The lost... that person who does not yet know Jesus.

And the only way to learn to love is to be in proximity and service. We have to move towards these people. Be around them, eat with them, see them, talk to them. And even more, serve them.

And one of the best ways to break barriers and bring proximity is by eating together. Do you want to move in the power of the Holy Spirit? Do you want to see the sick

healed and demons cast out? Eat and serve the people to your left and right and across the room. Eat with and serve the people who persecute you. Eat with and serve the person who is not like you even if it makes you uncomfortable. Eat with and serve the poorest you know. Eat with and serve the neighbour who does not yet know Jesus.

*Let's Pray*