



The Gift of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:1-6)

I. INTRO

A. "Rag-Tag Army" by Martin Bell¹: "I think God must be very old and very tired. Maybe he used to look splendid and fine in his general's uniform, but no more. He's been on the march a long time, you know. And look at his rag-tag little army! All he has for soldiers are you and me. Dumb little army. Listen! The drumbeat isn't even regular. Everyone is out of step. And there! You see? God keeps stopping along the way to pick up one of his tinier soldiers who decided to wander off and play with a frog, or run in a field, or whose foot got tangled in the underbrush. He'll never get anywhere that way. And yet, the march goes on.

Do you see how the marchers have broken up into little groups? Look at that group up near the front. Now, there's a snappy outfit. They all look pretty much alike – at least they're in step with each other. That's something! Only they're not wearing their shoes. They're carrying them in their hands. Silly little band. They won't get far before God will have to stop again.

Or how about that other group over there? They're all holding hands as they march. The only trouble with this is the folks on each end of the line. Pretty soon they realize that one of their hands isn't holding onto anything – one hand is reaching, empty, alone. And so they hold hands with each other, and everybody marches around in circles. The more people holding hands, the bigger the circle. And, of course, a bigger circle is deceptive because as we march along it looks like we're going someplace, but we're not. And so God must stop again. You see what I mean? He'll never get anywhere that way!

If God were more sensible he'd take his little army and shape them up. Why, whoever heard of a soldier stopping to romp in a field? It's ridiculous. But even more absurd is a general who will stop the march of eternity to go and bring him back. But that's God for you. His is no endless, empty marching.

¹ Martin Bell. *The Way of the Wolf: The Gospel in New Images*, Ballantine 1983: 89. [His most famous short story is "Barrington Bunny."]

He is going somewhere. His steps are deliberate and with purpose. He may be old, and he may be tired. But he knows where he's going. And he means to take every last one of his tiny soldiers with him. Only there aren't going to be any forced marches. And, after all, there are frogs and flowers, and thorns and underbrush along the way. And even though our foreheads have been signed with the sign of the cross, we are only human. And most of us are afraid and lonely and would like to hold hands or cry or run away. And we don't know where we are going, and we can't seem to trust God – especially when it's dark out and we can't see him! And he won't go on without us. And that's why it's taking so long.

B. What do you hear Martin Bell saying in the Rag-Tag Army?

1. I hear him saying that while God is surely up to something and has a specific destination in mind AND He's being extremely patient with us all.
2. I thought of the "Rag-Tag Army" as I was studying 1 John because it reminds me of how John might be viewing the Christians he was writing to.
 - a. John was now a very old man who knew Jesus personally as a teenager and young adult and grew into a faith filled apostle and pastor.
 - b. I imagine him thinking: "Little children, you are SO out of step with what God is doing and you've let some very strange teaching creep into the church – but we're dealing with that and I want you to know that God loves you deeply and He is in control. And you can know Him as a loving Father because of what Jesus Christ has done."
 - c. I really want you to hear Grandpa Pastor John's heart for you – and I want you to hear God's focused and intentional yet patient heart for you (inexorable). We are, much of the time, such a "silly little band." [As Martin Bell would say.]
3. One of my early mentors used to say: "God could have done better but He had help 😊!" [God's plan to defeat the evil in the world is the Church!]

C. As we move into 1 John 4 we will be talking more about the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. This was controversial in John's day and continues

to be a controversial subject – and it has been throughout the history of the Church.

- D. We are a church that believes in the present and active ministry of the Holy Spirit. We also believe the nine “charismatic” gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 are for today.
1. We are continuationists not cessationists.
 2. Over 80% of those who recently took the online survey identified themselves as either “mostly” (38%) or “strongly” (45%) continuationist.²
- E. One of the commentaries that I have been reading in my own study of 1 John is by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who has become a literary mentor for me in the areas of biblical study as well as practice.
1. In a separate biography of Lloyd-Jones (by Iain Murray) we see that D. ML-J had some very deep spiritual experiences at about the same time he was preaching and writing about 1 John.
 2. I believe that D. ML-J will be helpful for us to consider the Person and ministry of the Holy Spirit because he has been referred to by many as the last of the great Calvinistic Methodist preachers -- because he combined [John] Calvin’s love for truth and sound reformed doctrine with the fire and passion of the eighteenth-century Methodist revival.³
 3. Lloyd-Jones was a medical doctor (a scientist) who was converted in his early twenties and became a pastor/preacher – and lived in the tension of pursuing a depth of sound Biblical doctrine and depth in vital spiritual experience. He referred to it as “light and heat,” “logic and fire,” “Word and Spirit.”⁴
 4. “Again and again he would be fighting on two fronts: on the one hand against dead, formal, institutional intellectualism, and on the other hand against superficial, glib, entertainment-oriented, man-centered emotionalism.”⁵

² A Christian theological belief that the gifts of the Holy Spirit have continued to the present age, specifically those sometimes called “sign gifts,” or “charismatic gifts” such as healing, faith, and prophecy. Continuationism is the opposite of cessationism.

³ Christopher Catherwood, *Five Evangelical Leaders*, Shaw 1985: 55.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones. *The Sovereign Spirit*, Shaw 1986: 55–57.

⁵ *Ibid.*

5. How did Lloyd-Jones live in the tension? He knew he was in a healthy tension when he was accused by some of being a Pentecostal and by others as being an intellectual.⁶ [If we're doing church well people shouldn't be able to pigeon-hole us.]
- F. So, with that introduction I would like to read our passage for today, pray, and see what we can learn about the Gift of the Holy Spirit: *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. ⁴ You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.⁵ They are from the world; therefore they speak as from the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error."* --1 John 4:1-6

II. BODY

- A. What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from this passage? Before we consider that, it is important to note that we are now four chapters into John's letter. Previously John has given us three "self-scoring" tests so that we can determine for ourselves if we are actually Christians...
1. The **moral test** – or ethical test -- Do you WANT to please, honor, and obey God out of a responsive adoration and joy for what Jesus Christ has done?
 2. The **relational test** – Are you so in awe of God forgiving you –that you are committed to forgiving others?
 3. The **doctrinal test** – An irreducible core of beliefs that define Christianity, which is commonly referred to as the gospel (a summary statement) – or good news. [We can see the doctrinal test repeated in our verses for today.]
- B. What we have in chap 4 is John building on the previous three chapters. (We want establish a context.)

⁶ *Life In Christ*: 403.

C. We learn (at least) two truths about the Holy Spirit:

1. **We can know the Holy Spirit:** v. 2: *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.*
2. **The Holy Spirit is inside us:** v. 4: *You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.*

D. We'll consider them one at a time:

1. **We can know the Holy Spirit:** v. 2: *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.*
 - a. The first thing we notice is that this is a continuation of John's **doctrinal test**. We don't get to define what a Christian is, the Bible defines the minimum requirements of Christianity. ["I think a Christian is someone who try's to be a good person." That's a perspective, but it is not biblical.]
 - 1) V. 2 is a very simple and straightforward presentation (summary) of the gospel. [Irreducible core of beliefs that define Christianity.]
 - 2) Notice the word "come." "*Jesus Christ has come in the flesh...*" The word "come" signifies preexistence. You and I were *born* but Jesus *came*. John is building a case for the Trinity in this letter.
 - b. Next let's consider the word *know*. "*By this you know the Spirit of God...*" The Greek word (*ginōsko*) carries the normal meanings of the word *know* as we typically use it in English. In the Greek language, however, it also carries the idea of intimate and experiential knowledge – like sexual intercourse.
 - c. Now let's look at the word *spirit* (*pneuma*) is small case here (and in v. 1) – except when John is speaking about the *Spirit of God*. [Upper case – proper noun]
 - 1) John instructs us to *test the spirits to see whether they are from God* (v. 1).
 - 2) Whether or not John is talking about literal spirit beings

we aren't positive (I strongly suspect he is). [John is a master of double meanings.]

- 3) The essence of what John is saying in these verses is that we are to evaluate (*test* -- Gk: to put on trial) the underlying message of everything we hear against the backdrop of the gospel. Does it line up? If it doesn't, John says it's an "*antichrist spirit*."
- 4) The act of continually evaluating (or testing) the underlying message of everything we hear through the filter of the gospel will grow a rich intimacy with God in our soul.

d. Illus: Our current political rhetoric. Both sides of the political isle tend to twist their "Bible talk" to suit their message.

2. **The Holy Spirit is inside us:** v 4: *You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.*

- a. What's the "*them*"? The "*them*" is the false prophets and the antichrist spirits (spirit beings or the underlying central message).
- b. Next we see how we overcome: *because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.*
 - 1) The Holy Spirit has come to live – to dwell inside of the Christian. (Here is more of John's double meaning: he's referring to both the individual Christian AND to the Church.) Two weeks ago I pointed out Rev 3:20: "*Behold I stand at the door and knock...*"
 - 2) OT: "*I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.*" --Ezekiel 36:27
 - 3) NT: "*But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*" --Romans 8:11

E. Here's a **summary statement:** Jesus Christ came from God to secure access to God for those whose hearts have been awakened by grace to God's

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Fatherly love. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to indwell, teach, and empower both the Christian and the Church – and we can know God intimately through God’s Word AND the Holy Spirit’s presence inside of us.

- F. This is THE central, metanarrative,⁷ objective truth of all time. This is the gospel – the good news – not just good advice.

III. CONCLUSION

- A. We all face stubborn and difficult issues in our lives – personal, physical, generational, familial, professional, church-wide, etc.
1. Ask the Holy Spirit for His presence and power in our lives.
 2. Make the big ask! Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane prayed:
“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.” --Luke 22:42
- B. I would like to close our time today by providing three biblical perspectives that will help you to experience the presence of God: [and then I’d like to pray for you...]

1. The Holy Spirit is God’s experienced presence.

- a. We need Scripture, good doctrine – and we also need experience. We need to know and feel. The Holy Spirit is meant to be experienced.
 - 1) God wants us to grow in a deep experience and intimacy with Him: *“By this you know the Spirit of God...”* --1 John 4:2 [deep intimate and experiential knowledge]
 - 2) *“For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”* --Romans 8:15-16
- b. We need both sound doctrine and experience. The Word without the Spirit and we dry up, the Spirit without the Word and we blow up, but the Spirit and the Word and we grow up.

⁷ “Metanarrative” or “grand narrative” are terms developed by Jean-François Lyotard to mean a theory that seeks to provide a totalizing, comprehensive account to various historical events, experiences, and social, cultural phenomena based upon the appeal to universal truth or universal values.

- c. God wants to move in love and in power more than we want Him to. (Were are we in the way?)
- d. The Holy Spirit desires to move upon us to empower us to respond in gratitude with love and adoration.
 - 1) Judges: the Spirit of the Lord moved upon Gideon (weak, afraid, hiding...) [He was the least of the least]
 - 2) The Spirit of the Lord came upon Sampson in power
 - 3) *"And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them..."* --Acts 19:6
- e. God wants to bring healing, empowering, mercy, and equipping... ("gracelets")

2. The Holy Spirit is God's transforming power.

- a. The Holy Spirit changes and transforms people: Samuel said to Saul: *"Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man."* --1Samuel 10:6
- b. As believers we are to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit: *"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit."* --Ephesians 5:18 [The grammar denotes continuous ongoing action] [Do you believe in a second experience? No, a second, third, forth, fifth...]
- c. We carry His presence – and God's presence is His power. And His power is transforming. God's power changes everything.
- d. Scoliosis healing...
- e. Wimber: *"At least they will have been loved..."* The responsibility for acts of power is up to God.

3. The Holy Spirit will remind us of God's clear instructions.

- a. We have marching orders. The Holy Spirit's presence is not for us to "party." Here are the last recorded words of Jesus in the Bible before His ascension: *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."* --Acts 1:8

- b. The goal is to go.
- c. We are a people of the Holy Spirit, we do not identify as Pentecostals but we are people of Pentecost.
- d. Seven words: “Can I pray for you right now?”
- e. We are a “Rag-Tag Army” but fortunately, God has promised to use us anyway!

Ask people to stand who would like to be prayed for...