

## Classic Christian Writings:

"Choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom....They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:3,5).

Spiritual leadership requires Spirit-filled people. Other qualities are important; to be Spirit-filled is indispensable.

The book of Acts is the story of people who established the Church and led the missionary enterprise. It is of more than passing significance that the central qualification of those who were to occupy even subordinate positions of responsibility in the early Church was that they be persons "full of the Holy Spirit." These officers were to be known for integrity and judgment, but preeminently for their spirituality. A person can have a brilliant mind and possess artful administrative skill. But without spirituality he is incapable of giving truly spiritual leadership.

Behind all the busyness of the apostles was the executive activity of the Spirit. As supreme administrator of the Church and chief strategist of the missionary enterprise He is everywhere prominent. The Spirit will not delegate authority into secular or carnal hands, even when a particular job has no direct spiritual teaching involved; all workers must be Spirit-led and filled. Selection of kingdom leaders must not be influenced by worldly wisdom, wealth, or social status. The prime consideration is spirituality. When a church or missions organization follows a different set of criteria, it essentially removes the Spirit from leadership. As a consequence, the Spirit is grieved and quenched, and the result is spiritual dearth and death for that place.

Selecting leaders apart from spiritual qualifications leads always to unspiritual administration. A. T. Pierson compared such a situation to a large corporation that wants to oust its Chief Executive Officer. Slowly, in the board and among the directors and vice-presidents, people are placed who are opposed to the chief's methods and spirit. They quietly antagonize his measures, obstruct his plans, thwart his policy. Where the chief once enjoyed cooperation and support, he now meets inertia and indifference, until at last he resigns from sheer inability to carry out policy. In the same way, appointing leaders with a secular or materialistic outlook prevents the Holy Spirit from making spiritual progress in that place.

The Holy Spirit does not take control of anyone against his or her will. When people who lack spiritual fitness to cooperate with Him are elected to leadership positions, He quietly withdraws and leaves them to implement their own policies according to their own standards, but without His aid. The inevitable result is an unspiritual administration.

The church at Jerusalem listened to the apostles' preaching and selected seven men who possessed the one necessary qualification. As a result of their Spirit-filled work, the church was blessed: the men selected to distribute food and earthly care were soon seen as the Spirit's agents in dispensing heavenly blessings. Stephen became the first martyr for Christ, and his death played a large role in the conversion of Paul. Philip became an evangelist and was used by the Spirit to lead the great revival in Samaria. Leaders who are faithful in the exercise of their gifts prepare the way for promotion to greater responsibilities and usefulness.

The book of Acts clearly demonstrates that leaders who significantly influenced the Christian movement were Spirit-filled. It is reported of Him who commanded His disciples to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high that He was Himself "anointed...with the Holy Spirit and power" (Acts 10:38). Those 120 in the upper room were all filled with the Spirit (2:4). Peter was filled with the Spirit when he addressed the Sanhedrin (4:8). Stephen, filled with the Spirit bore witness to Christ and died a radiant martyr (6:3-5; 7:55). In the Spirit's fullness Paul began and completed his unique ministry (9:17; 13:9). Paul's missionary companion Barnabas was filled with the Spirit (11:24). We would be strangely blind not to see this obvious requirement for spiritual leadership.

These early leaders of the Church were sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Because they had surrendered their own wills to the Spirit's control, they were delighted to obey His promptings and leadings. Philip left the flourishing revival in Samaria to go to the desert, but what a convert he found there (8:29-39)! The Spirit led Peter to overcome his bias and meet with Cornelius, which led to blessings for the Gentile world (10:19-23; 11:1-18). The Spirit called and sent out Paul and Barnabas as the first missionaries of the Church (13:1-4). Throughout his busy life, Paul obeyed the Spirit's restraints and constraints (16:6-8; 19:21; 20:22). The leaders of the church at Jerusalem submitted to the Spirit. "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" was how the council articulated their judgments (15:28).

The Spirit intervened to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. The Spirit's great purpose is missions. Should that not be ours, too?

Just now as I write the Spirit is moving among Asian churches, giving them a new missionary vision and passion. For instance, Japanese churches have sent missionaries from Taiwan to Brazil. At a time when the number of North American and European missionaries remains static, the heavenly Strategist is awakening the Asian Church to her missionary obligations. Just now more than three thousand Third World Christians have obeyed the call of God to missions.

Paul counseled leaders in the church at Ephesus on how to understand their office. "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers" (Acts 20:28). Those leaders did not hold office by apostolic selection or popular election, but by divine appointment. They were accountable not only to the Church, but also to the Holy Spirit. What a sense of assurance and responsibility, what a spiritual authority this teaching brought them, and brings to us!

Without this filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, how could the apostles have faced the superhuman task ahead? They needed superhuman power for their truceless warfare against the devil and hell (Luke 24:49; Ephesians 6:10-18).

To be filled with the Spirit means simply that the Christian voluntarily surrenders life and will to the Spirit. Through faith, the believer's personality is filled, mastered, and controlled by the Spirit. The meaning of "filled" is not "to pour into a passive container" but "to take possession of the mind." That's the meaning found in Luke 5:26: "They were filled with awe." When we invite the Spirit to fill us, the Spirit's power grips our lives with this kind of strength and passion.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit. The Christian leader's mind, emotions, will, and physical strength all become available for the Spirit to guide and use. Under the Spirit's control, natural gifts of leadership are lifted to their highest power, sanctified for holy purpose. Through the work of the now ungrieved and unhindered Spirit, all the fruits of the Spirit start to grow in the leader's life. His witness is more winsome, service more steady, and testimony more powerful. All real Christian service is but the expression of the Spirit's power through believers yielded to Him (John 7:37-39).

If we pretend to be filled, or hold back on our willingness to let the Spirit control us, we create the kind of trouble A. W. Tozer warns against: "No one whose senses have been exercised to know good or evil can but grieve over the sight of zealous souls seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit while they are living in a state of moral carelessness and borderline sin. Whoever would be indwelt by the Spirit must judge his life for any hidden iniquities. He must expel from his heart everything that is out of accord with the character of God as revealed by the Holy Scriptures...There can be no tolerance of evil, no laughing off the things that God hates."

The filling of the Holy Spirit is essential for spiritual leadership. And each of us is as full of the Spirit as we really want to be.

### Spiritual Gifts

Christians everywhere have undiscovered and unused spiritual gifts. The leader must help bring those gifts into the service of the kingdom, to develop them, to marshal their power. Spirituality alone does not make a leader; natural gifts and those given by God must be there, too.

In our warfare against evil, we need the supernatural equipment God has provided in the spiritual gifts given to the Church. To be used effectively, those gifts must be enriched by spiritual grace.

Often, though not always, the Holy Spirit imparts gifts that naturally fit the character and personality of the Christian leader. And the Spirit raises those gifts to a new level of effectiveness. Samuel Chadwick, the noted Methodist preacher, once said that when he was filled with the Spirit, he did not receive a new brain, but a new mentality; not a new tongue, but new speaking effectiveness; not a new language, but a new Bible. Chadwick's natural qualities were given a new vitality, a new energy.

The coming of spiritual gifts in the life of the Christian does not eliminate natural gifts, but enhances and stimulates them. New birth in Christ does not change natural qualities, but when they are placed under the control of the Holy Spirit, they are raised to new effectiveness. Hidden abilities are often released.

## Above All Else By Oswald Sanders

**The one called by God to spiritual leadership can be confident that the Holy Spirit has given him or her all necessary gifts for the service at hand.**