

FOREWORD

Perhaps no other Christian teaching is more misunderstood today than that of the Holy Spirit. Who is He? What does He do? How does He work? Probably no better indication of the confusion that reigns on this topic exists than simply the size of the recently published *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*.¹ At nearly 1300 pages (!), this one work on the topic dwarfs the size of many standard works which treat all of Christian doctrine! Why the apparent explosion of interest in the workings of the Holy Spirit? It may not have to do as much with Christian curiosity as with a more secular Enlightenment ideal of freedom of expression. As political systems throughout the world have become more open to individualistic expression in a variety of arenas of life, the institutionalized Christian church throughout the world has been forced to do the same. Thus Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit can be found to vary not only from denomination to denomination, but from congregation to congregation, pastor to pastor, and Christian to Christian.

Secondarily, this state of affairs has occasioned somewhat of a begrudging acceptance within mainstream Christianity

¹ Revised and Expanded Edition, Ed. By Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

of teachings concerning the Holy Spirit that traditionally have been the fodder of fringe movements. Pastors of even the most traditional of Christian denominations therefore no longer are startled by the claims of a parishioner to be able to speak in tongues or to have received direct revelations from God. The pastor may still not believe the parishioner, but is no longer surprised by such claims as would pastors of generations past have been.

Of what help, then, is this book? Does Martin Luther bring anything new to the table? Well, yes. Instead of explaining the Holy Spirit via his outpouring (Acts 2), his gifts in general (1 Corinthians 12) and specific (1 Corinthians 14), or his fruit (Galatians 5) Luther instead, using John 16, explains the overarching purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit of which such specific manifestations are only a part. In John 16 one finds the words of Christ himself who outlines, if we can put it that way, the program of the Holy Spirit, and that is, that he would be sent to the disciples in order that the world in these End Times would be convicted of sin, and righteousness, and judgment.

Still even more startling to the modern Christian: The role of the Holy Spirit in matters that trouble the conscience. So common has become the idea that the work of the Holy Spirit is revealed only in pleasant or pleasing ways, it may be hard for the contemporary Christian to accept the Holy Spirit's work in pointing out sin by means of the law of God. What Christian has every enjoyed a negative reaction to the sharing of the Word of God? Yet as Luther demonstrates, the convicting which causes such reactions is also part of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps most intriguing, however, is the apocalyptic environment in which Luther views the work of the Holy Spirit. His work does not occur in a vacuum, but in these End Times, between the ascension of Christ into heaven and his return on the Last Day. That being the case, it is a work which continues the preaching of Christ himself until he returns visible in power and great glory. Here there is no distinction made between first century Judea and the rest of time. Instead, there is a continuum of proclamation up unto the present day and certainly until the end of the world. In short, the work of the Holy Spirit is to prepare mankind for that day.

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