

THE RESIDENT

How To Spot The Spirit Living In You

Text: John 20:19-23; Acts 2:1-13; 42-47

No Longer I But Christ

Some time ago, a letter came to the church with one of those computer generated mailing labels we've all seen. The mailing house, however, had somehow truncated the name of the church in the first line of the address. The label read: To "Christ or Current Resident." At first I just laughed at the mistake; and then I got to thinking, maybe this is God's sneaky way of provoking some self-examination: Who actually IS in residence here?

A group of missionaries once entered an African village and began describing the person of Jesus Christ to the people there. They spoke of him as a man of great joy and wisdom, a person with the compassion and strength of God himself. "Oh, yes, we know the man you are talking about," the chieftain said. "You do?" replied the missionaries. "Yes, of course. He's been living here with us," the chieftain exclaimed. Upon further query, it became clear that the man to whom the locals were referring was David Livingstone, the missionary doctor, who'd worked among that tribe for years.

I wonder again: Would my life or yours ever create that kind of confusion of identities? This, after all, is the goal of the Christian life – to get to the point where, with the Apostle Paul, we say: **"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"** (Gal 2:20).

It is easy to lose sight of that goal, isn't it? We can come to think of the Christian life as primarily about becoming better managers of our households or more ethical in our workplace. We can think of the spiritual journey as mainly about downloading more data or polishing our personality. But the proper goal is so much greater than that. It is the hope that there will come a day when it is no longer our old selves lumbering and grumbling about the house of our body but rather Jesus, who so fully indwells us, that those who look on are moved to conclude that **Somebody new is now living there.**

Onetime atheist, Lee Strobel, describes such a moment in his life: "My daughter Allison was 5 years old when I became a follower of Jesus, and all she had known in those five years was a dad who was profane and angry. I remember I came home one night and kicked a hole in the living room wall just out of anger with life. I am ashamed to think of the times Allison hid in her room to get away from me. [But] five months after I gave my life to Jesus Christ, my little girl went to my wife and said, 'Mommy, I want God to do for me what He's done for Daddy.' She'd never studied the archeological evidence

[regarding the truth of the Bible]." She'd never had a course in Christian doctrine. "All she knew was her dad used to be... [very] hard to live with. But more and more her dad is becoming [someone else]. If that is what God does to people [she thought], then sign her up." Strobel concludes: "God changed my family. He changed my world. He changed my eternity."

Is this your hope too? "Lord God, change me. Bring on the day when my family and my friends, my co-workers and my neighbors, will hear someone describing Jesus Christ and naturally say, 'Oh, yes, we know the person you are talking about. Why Jesus has been living right here with us in her or him.'"

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Here's the really great news: God wants to see us reach that goal. In chapters 14, 15, 16, and 20 of John's Gospel, Jesus tells us that this is why He sends the Holy Spirit = the "paraklete" to us. Depending on how you translate that Greek word, the Holy Spirit can be thought of as the Comforter, the Counselor, the Advocate, or the Helper we all need. The truth is that the Holy Spirit is all these things, so let me touch on each one.

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter who enfolds and encourages you with God's arms when you hurt or fear so much that you don't see how you can possibly go forward on your own – and because He is here, you don't have to go alone. The Holy Spirit is the Counselor who teaches God's truth to you in such deepening ways that He can give you the breakthrough insight you need at age 5 and still be teaching you something awesome and new at age 95. The Holy Spirit is also the Advocate of God's case through you. He is the One who speaks of God through your life to others, even when you are deeply conscious of your inadequacy to be His witness.

And the Holy Spirit is also the Helper. He is the One who pours God's power into you when your strength just isn't enough to accomplish what matters most. When the New Testament writers describe this helping power, they use two Greek words -- "exousia" (meaning "authority") and "dunamis" (meaning "dynamic energy"). In other words, the Holy Spirit provides believers with "authority" over what might otherwise drag them down. The Spirit's authority gives you the ability to say "I will not be destroyed by this sin, I will not succumb to this temptation, I will not be turned from my calling because God is my Helper." The Holy Spirit is also God's "dynamic energy." He is the One in whom the Apostle Paul was trusting when he said that **"God is able to accomplish immeasurably more than we could ask or imagine by the power at work within us"** (Eph 3:20). It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the power to get up when we've fallen flat on our face, and to change our course in life, and who fills us with supernatural ability to build up others with our gifts.

You will hear people talk sometimes as if the Spirit is simply some well-spring of personal resource everyone has within them and just needs to let rise up. But that's not true; the Spirit comes from beyond us. You will hear others speak of the Spirit as if He were some impersonal, external power source we plug into, then unplug when we are through. But that's not true either; the Spirit won't be used, nor grant His power to those whose desire is anything but to be used by God. Here is the truth: The Holy Spirit is nothing less than Jesus moving from the outside into us. He is God making His home within us. He is Christ progressively renovating the house that is us -- until we are filled with a whole new life and light... until it is no longer our old selves that live but Him who lives in us.

When Jesus Moves In

So how do you know if this is happening? How do you know if Christ has truly moved into you, or if He's just an occasional houseguest or Someone we simply visit at church? When we look at the believers into whose house the Spirit moved at Pentecost two VITAL SIGNS OF HIS RESIDENCE stand out.

The first was a passion for community. Listen to the words of Acts chapter 2: **"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house... They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit."**

In other words, it was to the community of believers that the Spirit came. It was in the community that the Spirit's power was first seen. It was to a community of people that the Spirit gave His gifts. And a short while later – in Acts 2:42 and following -- we're given a video clip of the ongoing life of the Spirit-filled believers: **"All the believers were together and had everything in common... [giving] to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts"** (Acts 2:42-47). Like the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who had taken up residence within them, these people became passionate about Community.

And the SECOND sign of the Spirit? It was a passion for outreach. No sooner had the Spirit come upon them in that house in which they were sitting... no sooner had the Spirit's fire lit the hearth of a new community... than the Spirit's wind blew open the doors and windows of the house they were in and sent those believers out to begin reaching the world. God gave them the capacity to speak the good news of His truth and grace to people of every kind – **"Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,"** "Hinsdaleans, Elmhurstians, and Downers Grovites" and so on. And in the days that followed, the latter part of Acts 2 tells

us, this outreach became a way of life. They kept telling God's story and meeting the practical needs of people. They kept **"praising God and gaining the favor of many people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"** (Acts 2:47).

Signs of the Christ Who Lives In You

So let's land this conversation and get personal. How do you spot the Spirit in you? There are two reliable signs. First, you too will have a growing passion for community. You will want to be in regular relationship with one or two or a small group of other believers to study God's Word, pray and worship, and practice those other commitments we sometimes call the biblical "one anothers." I repeat this: If Christ's Spirit is at work within you, you won't have to be arm-twisted into this; you will want to do these things. The drive to be in authentic community with other believers will progressively overcome the power of all the individualism and the insane schedules, and the diversions that pull on us all.

And, secondly, you too will have a growing passion for outreach. Some time back, Richard Roeper's column in the Chicago Sun-Times, reported the story of Daniel Crespo, an honor student at Gordon Tech high school. Daniel is the child of a family of modest means with five children, two with disabilities. His mom and dad, however, had scraped up enough money to send Daniel to a school that could tap his potential. The boy soared in every way. That was until his father lost his job and, after months of searching, couldn't even find factory work. \$4000 dollars short on the tuition tab, Daniel was told that he wouldn't be able to walk with his classmates at graduation, nor receive a diploma.

The following day, the cover of the Sun-Times reported the wonderful news that an anonymous donor had suddenly stepped forward and made a contribution sufficient to pay off Daniel's bill. What the paper did not report, appropriately enough, was the story behind that story. With permission, I can tell it to you. Following the shattering events of September 11, a young businessman found himself hungering for community and, by God's grace, found it in this congregation. "My life was all about climbing the ladder and making all the money I could," he told me. "But since coming here, God has shown me that He has something so much more wonderful in mind. When I read the story of that high school kid, something stirred in me. I've never done anything like this before, but I just knew God wanted to work through me. And so I went down to that school and wrote out that check. And I feel so happy about it."

In one way or another, in deeds large or small, public or private, this is how the Holy Spirit will affect you too. Being involved in God's mission to reach and redeem people's lives will become less like a burden and more like a blessing to you. You will find yourself increasingly drawn by compassion to the needs of others, eager to meet them as you can. You will pray for God to give you and

our church the ability to speak of His grace and truth in a language that non-Christian people can hear. You will long for more of the people out there to find a place in the lifeboat here, a seat around the table, a place around the fire of God's new community. You'll reach out naturally, for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Good Shepherd who loves lost sheep, will be living in and reaching out through you (John 20:21-22).

At Pentecost long ago, an ordinary group of men and women sat together in one place, as we are doing today. They came to that place out of obedience, for Jesus had told them to go there and wait, and obedience almost always precedes God's greatest actions. As far along in the spiritual journey as they were, they wanted more of God to fill more of them, and dared to believe that God could do it.

The question is: What do you and I believe and what do we want? Do we want more of the Current Resident or more of Christ? Then let's dare to ASK: "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me."

PAGE

PAGE 1

© Daniel D Meyer | Christ Church of Oak Brook

Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ.
John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-16; 20:21-22
Chicago Sun-Times, May 22, 2003, p.11.