

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 238, 06-04-2017 & 06-09-2019 † Pentecost

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, I would see Jesus.”

***Galatians 3:2, “I just want to learn this from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the message that creates faith?”***



Children’s Message: Some time ago, a man scolded his 3 y.o. daughter for wasting a roll of gold wrapping paper. Money was tight, and he became angry when the child tried to decorate a box. Nevertheless, the little girl brought the gift to her father the next morning and said, “This is for you, Daddy.” The man became embarrassed by his overreaction the day before, but he was bothered again when he saw that the box was empty. He yelled at her, “Don’t you know when you give someone a present there is supposed to be something inside?” The little girl looked at him with tears in her eyes and cried, “Oh, Daddy, it’s not empty at all! I blew kisses into the box. They’re all for you, Daddy.” The father was crushed. He put his arms around his little girl and begged her for her forgiveness. Only a short time later, an accident took the life of the child. Her father kept the gold box by his bed for many years, and when he was discouraged he would take out an imaginary kiss and remember the love of the child who had put it there.

This is a day of great joy – Pentecost. We are joyful because of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our church. But the Holy Spirit is a gift much like that child’s golden box. You cannot see him, touch him, or feel him; but he does open us up, diminish our stubbornness, and bring us the love of God in many ways. He teaches us to have faith like a child, to have joy in sorrows, to have the peace of God in trials. He gives us patience, kindness, selflessness, gentleness, and self-control.

Sermon Introduction: **What good is the Holy Spirit?** Why do we need the Spirit of God to give us gifts? Isn’t Jesus enough? **Is the Holy Spirit needless?** Superfluous? Maybe in the work of redemption. Pentecost adds nothing to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was not sent to continue or complete redemption. The Holy Spirit was sent to appropriate Christ’s salvation to people; to persuade them to accept it.

Is that needful? Can’t we decide for ourselves whether we believe in Christ? Don’t we have free will, or the ability to choose for ourselves? Answer: If that were true, Pentecost would really be unnecessary. Free agency of human beings and the work of the Holy Spirit don’t fit together. We wouldn’t need the Holy Spirit. Why would God send the Holy Spirit if we were just that free?

Instead, we know that we are by nature in the dark and blinded in unbelief. Much like the father in the story of the golden box, hostile & angry at every turn, we don’t desire the simple love of the Spirit. *“No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit,”* 1 Corinthians 12:3. The unbeliever can say it with the tongue, but not from the heart. **In a word, by nature humans are prejudiced against Jesus Christ.**

So today the Holy Spirit liberates, persuades, and draws us to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit makes our hearts into a golden box, ready to share the love of the one who died for us. One question fits:

## How To Get The Spirit

Our subject today is not about what the Holy Spirit is, not his work in hearts of men, not what marks his indwelling. But it's about how the Holy Spirit is given and received.

I. **Let's follow God's train of thought.** Paul preached Christ and him crucified to the Galatians. He did it powerfully and in simple language. v1. "*Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.*" It was so clear they could see it, like a film at the theater. They followed with zeal, hearts on fire. He told them, "*You were running well*" (Galatians 5:7). Later, men came to teach that Christ alone wasn't sufficient for salvation. They must also keep the Law. Faith and works together seduced the Galatians and was destroying their souls. They were bewitched, captivated, and led away from the truth. Paul argues many times in the Bible with the righteousness of faith over against the righteousness of works. Here he appeals to their own experience. v2. "*Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the message that creates faith* (EHV) *believing what you heard* (NIV)?" I would like to offer you yet a better translation that shows a great contrast. The Greek really says, "*Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?*" Paul was saying, "You know by experience that you didn't get the Holy Spirit by the God's Law, but only and alone by the hearing of faith; why go back, voluntarily put on a blindfold, and again depend on the works of the Law?"

**The Holy Spirit comes not by works of the Law but by the hearing of faith.** In our time, some say "*here is Christ*" or "*there is Christ,*" just as Jesus predicted (Luke 17:23). Some say, "This is how to get the Spirit; do this." Others say, "No, that is the only way to catch him; do that." But this is important, a point of such consequence that we cannot afford to walk in uncertainty about it. We need divine certainty, divine proof. We need truth, not illusions. St. John said, "*Dear friends, 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*" (1 John 4:1).

What's the test? First, 1. **In the Bible there is only Law or Gospel.** The Law says, "*Do this and you will live*" (Luke 10:28), but the Gospel says, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*" (Acts 16:31). There is no third way. If there is, the Bible doesn't know it.

2. One gets the Spirit by only one of these two ways, not by both. Not at the same time or successively, not partly one or the other. Only one or the other brings the Spirit, since Paul asks this distinctly, exclusively, and alone: "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

3. The Holy Spirit is obtained by the hearing of faith, not the works of the Law. The Law doesn't contribute one jot to getting the Spirit. The Law with all its works, together with all contrivances and inventions of men, are all excluded.

**What good news that is! The Holy Spirit is free and cannot be worked for.**

II. **Let's apply it practically.** Here we must keep in view what the Law and Gospel are, what each one is. The Law's nature requires works people must do. The Gospel's nature is that it requires no works, but simply tells us about the Son of God, who died in our sins. And for his sake we will become heirs of heaven. So whenever it is taught that a person must do so many works, or one great work, or a series or a ladder of good works – in order to receive the Holy Spirit – this all belongs to the way of the Law.

According to some Christians [Rome]: A person must do so many works in order to be found worthy. The idea is that we people do our part first, then God does his part and bestows his Holy Spirit.

According to some Christians [Quakers]: No preaching or singing, but sitting in silence, waiting for the

Holy Spirit. According to some Revivalist Christians: Struggle, groan, and cry at the mourner's bench until they "get through" to God. Then the shouting starts. Some Christians [non-denominationals] warm you up with music you like until you get the courage to approach the microphone. Some Christians [community churches] believe that the Spirit promises to be where the most popular crowd is or wherever we might discover the most emotional response to the Gospel. One wants to get the Spirit by sitting still, the other by way of struggling, yet both belong to the same category, the way of the Law. As long as someone thinks they can get the Holy Spirit by what someone does or can do is walking in the way of works. It's all in vain.

The way of works is hard, shallow, and crowded, and chasing after the way of works is sneakier and more common than we imagine. **The Spirit isn't caught by our doing.** He's not a butterfly for us to catch with a net; he's not a firefly to trap with a jar; he's not a house pet to tame by clever training.

We had family visit us one weekend, and one of our nephews found a children's message where I used to keep them (I always kept them on a shelf in my church office). He put it on – a paper headband with fake ears (not my best children's message ever) – and I was told later that some family members saw him try to break it. But he wasn't using his hands. He was clenching his fists and scrunching his face and trying to burst the paper headband with all his might. It was adorable and fun at the same time, because it would never happen. That's a good picture how people try to get God the Holy Spirit. Some kind of preparation, some kind of enabling, or some kind of trying, clenching our fists and our hands and flexing our head muscles – it's useless. Not by working, but alone by hearing of faith, are believers justified. That's not to say there aren't Christians in those groups, but ... each of these Christian groups only has Christians only by the hearing of faith. Again, that is the wonderful promise in our lesson. People only get the Spirit by the hearing of faith. We thank God that wherever Christ is preached there may be the hearing of faith.

III. **Now what is good about the Holy Spirit coming by the hearing of faith?** A.1. True God is set apart from all other religions. We know where to find the true God. He is the only One who does it all. He is the only one who saves A to Z. The true God doesn't require things first. The true God came when we least deserved it. Our emotions and popularity contests don't affect the true God. He is changelessly gracious, and he is set apart as the only God who is changelessly gracious. He pours out his underserved favor on us unwilling souls.

Even in the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, it may seem as if we are doing something for the Holy Spirit. But as much as the power of these sacred acts are in the Word of Jesus, so much is the Holy Spirit the true actor on our hearts.

2. We can see the enemy coming. How do we know if the devil, the world, or our flesh is going to get the better of us? It happens when we haven't heard the Word in a while. "*Faith comes from hearing the message,*" and "*the Spirit comes by the hearing of faith.*" What's going to happen if you don't hear God's Word through these ears and into this heart? The prowling lion is going to look for you to devour you! The devil wants your soul. Your best defense is returning to God's Word, because only by the hearing of faith comes the Holy Spirit.

3. There are no hoops. No maze, no strings attached, no levels, no boasting, no favoritism, no ego. If you are an introvert, this is good news. Introverts seem to get a bad rap in this individualistic world. We like to follow. But we are told to lead. But we like to follow. Then we feel like failures, because we aren't always great at leading, we aren't always individualistic, and we're bad with words. So the Spirit of God tells us instead, just listen. Hear. Believe. External processors too, slow down, hear, believe. That's a relaxing point of view. It's God's point of view. "Be saved" requires no action on our part. There are no hoops. No maze, no levels, no boasting, no favoritism, no ego.

B.1. **What do I do based on this sermon?** Sometimes I hear this: “Pastor, you didn’t tell us to do anything. Thanks for the message, but... What do I do?” That’s good, God wants us to conform after his will and pattern our lives. But, first of all, here’s what to do: Don’t always expect a DO! sermon. The Spirit does. What a joy! We don’t contribute. We don’t have to. We can’t. He can, he has, he does. So don’t be frustrated if the sermon ends with Gospel. That is a blessing.

2. If you are going to do anything, close your ears to this world. There are so many messages. We get taken up with politics, celebrities, great news, bad news, frustrations, activities, contests, but it’s all crowding our ears, taking up Spirit space. Sometimes we envy other churches because of their popularity or their emotional outcome or their hype. These are great, and we always pray for and work for big, but the Spirit never promises to be among the biggest crowds, the strongest feelings, or the greatest hype. He comes in ordinary packages like the Word alongside water, bread, and wine. He comes in little, insignificant, and unpopular people. God was pleased through the foolish things of this world to shame the wise. So close your ears to the crowds. (“Leave room for the Holy Spirit.”)

Conclusion: 3. Last, if you are going to do anything, open your ears to this Word. Treat every Word from the mouth of God like gold. Treat God’s Word like the father treated that golden box. In the Word, the Spirit of God gives you the love of a child who was sacrificed, the Son of God on a cross of death. Your sins are forgiven. Your name is written in perfect letters in heaven. Take out of the Word invisible gifts and know that God’s Spirit has got your heart – God’s Spirit has got you.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.