

“The Holy Spirit In Our Worship”

Psalm 104:1-4 and I Corinthians 14:1-33

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+104:1-4

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+14:1-33

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“Take a deep breath. It calms the mind.”

With a deep breath of the Spirit comes Fire and Love

There is an old story about an angel who returns to earth and gets very upset at seeing all the tragic errors and suffering of human beings. When the angel is once again in the presence of God, she asks why God doesn't intervene and solve the problems of the world. “Isn't there anything we can do?” she pleads. The answer comes back: “We have given them everything they need. We have given them fire and love. Now it's up to them.”

On this Pentecost Sunday we celebrate fire and love. Early on a Sunday morning the first Christians gathered to celebrate Jesus Christ's resurrection. As they worshipped, the Holy Spirit came upon them in a great fiery wind and they immediately went into the streets proclaiming the great and marvelous love of God given through Christ our Lord. They were able to preach God's good news in the multiple languages of the cosmopolitan crowd that gathered around them. **(Acts 2: 1-4)** www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=acts+2:1-4 They took a deep breath and found the breath of God moving among them as a fire spreading the love of God.

- In the beginning of planet Earth the Spirit of God moved across the formless and deep waters ready to do a creative work. Light generated by the fire of the Spirit began to create earth. The breath of the Spirit created all life including human beings. Love and fire created the world in the first place. **(Genesis 1:1ff)** www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=genesis+1:1ff
- The Psalmist **(104:1-4)** www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+104:1-4 captures the power of the Holy Spirit in earth's continuing creation saying:

*Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
Wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
You set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
You make the clouds your chariot,
You ride on the wings of the wind,
You make the winds your messengers,
Fire and flame your ministers.*

Pentecost is not just another day. Pentecost is not just a reenactment of something long ago and almost forgotten. Pentecost is a celebration of the Holy Spirit's coming into our midst with fire and love. The Spirit is free as the wind, unpredictable as a fire, and totally consuming with Christ-like love.

Biblical Worship acknowledges the priority of Christ like love.

During the last 300 years the Mainline Protestant churches have sought to ignore the Holy Spirit and keep everything in order. Beginning in the early part of the Twentieth Century the Charismatic churches started to grow by defining a true Christian as a person who speaks in tongues and is emotionally expressive in worship. I hope that you are able to see the deficiencies in each of these approaches. Biblical Worship involves order and emotion. Biblical Worship acknowledges that Christ like love is the greatest spiritual gift for a church, a family, a marriage, and every individual. All the other spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of building up Christ's New Community of extravagant love. All the other spiritual gifts are equal in value and purpose. The Holy Spirit is actively alive in Christian churches of all types! Fire and love are necessary for every Christian community. But the balance of the two is difficult.

The Corinthian Church had a problem.

The Corinthian church loved things that were flashy and exciting. They wanted the latest upbeat and up to date fix of emotion. The Apostle Paul challenges them to focus upon Christ like love. You see these Christians in Corinth were far more in love with the power of the new and exciting experience than they were involved in living and sharing the power of Christ like love. The continuing sin of the Corinthian church was self-righteousness. The supporting role of their sin was speaking in tongues. If you could speak in tongues, then you were better than those who could not. The Corinthian church had misunderstood the nature of Worship and living under the influence of the fire and love of the Holy Spirit.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit the Apostle Paul seeks to clarify for the Corinthian Christians and for all Christians in succeeding generations that Worship must be focused upon God and understandable to everyone who comes. Speaking in a spiritual language is to be a private affair unless the Spirit moves one or two people in public Worship to speak in tongues and the Spirit also moves someone to interpret for the congregation the meaning of the words. (Vs. 27) The Apostle Paul's primary emphasis is not upon the exciting, emotional experience; rather it is upon strengthening the church through a total focus upon the worship of God.

Let us be very honest, we can run from a real experience of the Holy Spirit through cold reason or through exciting emotion. We can have a nice personal individualized feeling of God's presence whether through a rational or emotional experience. Denial of the power and the mission of the Holy Spirit can come in many forms. True Biblical Worship invites the Holy Spirit to come into our midst and challenge us, change us, burn within us, purify us, and ultimately be so present in us that we will glow with the fire of God's unconditional, no-strings attached love. The ultimate fruit of the Holy Spirit's presence is burning, Christ like love!

The Holy Spirit comes with fire and love in true Worship.

Jesus told us that a time would come when we would worship God in spirit and in truth. **(John 4:23)** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+4:23) Jesus said that neither the form nor the place would really matter. What would matter is our openness to the unpredictable, uncontrollable, unimaginable movement of the Holy Spirit among God's people.

I am talking about a spiritual fire in our very bones that cannot be quenched. The prophet Jeremiah said that the Holy Spirit was so strong within him that when he tried not to speak God's Words "*then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones.*" **(Jeremiah 20:9)** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=jeremiah+20:9) John the Baptist said that he was baptizing with water but when God's Messiah came then, "*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*" **(Matthew 3:11)** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+3:11)

In our worship, let us take care not to quench the fire of the Spirit. Any evil action that we hold onto can extinguish the fire of the Spirit. Self-righteousness, self-pity, self-loathing, slander, gossip, negative addictions, arrogant pride, and much more can throw water upon the Spirit. The nature of fire is such that everything foreign to it destroys it. Hence, water can snuff out fire.

However, everything that is akin to fire gives it further strength. Through our honest evaluation of our failures, through repentance, through a request for forgiveness, and through a decision for walking in faith, the fire of the Spirit is fed and will burn within the soul.

The fire of the Spirit is the burning enthusiasm of an individual and a community of Christ followers to grow and glow in Christ-like love. The fire takes on different qualities in different people. The Spirit can lead a person into the fiery life of doing works of charity, another person can be guided to devote his or her life to organizing a Christian mission project, another can be guided to sharing God's Good News through preaching or teaching, or another person might be led to have a passion for Biblical hospitality. There are so many ways that the Spirit empowers us to do God's work when we are willing to be dry tinder ready to be consumed by the fire of the Holy Spirit.

Are you familiar with the word enthusiasm? That word when taken back to the original Greek language means "in God." En Theos is the root expression for enthusiasm. If we as a church can be "in God" then we can be filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Our worship can be fiery. Our service in the world can be fiery. We can be known as one of God's New Community of Christ like, radical love. For us Pentecost can be alive and growing. For us, Pentecost can be a fiery explosion of God's incredible love for the world.

Pentecost brings us the challenge to live filled up with the Holy Spirit's Fiery Love

Biblical Worship is clearly defined in I Corinthians. "When you gather for worship, each one of you be prepared with something that will be useful for all: sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight." (Vs. 26) The Holy Spirit's fire will prepare you for worship through providing a cleansing fire, a warm fire, and fiery light by which to see your way clear in the darkness.

- **A Cleansing Fire:** John Maxwell talks about a conversation he had with a silversmith. The smith said, "I must sit with my eyes steadily fixed on the furnace; for if the time necessary for refining be exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver will be injured. I never take my eye off the silver in the furnace. If I take it out too early, it won't be purified. If I leave it in too late, it will be injured. When the silver is in the fire, I focus. I don't let anything distract me. I watch that the silver, carefully waiting for the right moment to take it out." "When is the right moment?" Maxwell asked. The silversmith said, "I know the silver is pure when I can see my face reflected there." There are refining fires in all of our lives. When we find ourselves in the midst of the fire, our first response is, "Okay, God, bail me out! Find me! Rescue me! Heal me! Sometimes God doesn't pull us out. God just doesn't come with the tongs and lift us out. But, God is the great silversmith. While I am in the furnace God focuses and watches. God's job isn't quite a rescue mission. God's job is to purify. God holds me until the right moment, and then God comes. When I am a little more like the person God created me to be, God comes---never too early, never too late---just always right on time! There may be something that is hindering the coming of the Holy Spirit into your life. There may be some stone wall blockade, some pool of stagnant water, some past sin, some past hurt, some past unresolved event that you do not want to deal with but continues to deal with you. You know you need to be refined. You know you need the refiner's fire in your life. You cannot control the fire. You cannot decide what will happen after you ask the Holy Spirit into your life. You can only trust that what happens in the end will be better, more exciting, more loving than anything you have ever experienced before. Will you today ask the Holy Spirit to come into your life like a refiner's fire?
- **A Warm Fire:** The focus of the Holy Spirit's work within a congregation and within an individual person is clearly stated in **I Corinthians 14: 33** (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=i+corinthians+14:33). "*God doesn't stir us up into confusion; God brings us into harmony.*" Harmony is warm fire. When you sing in harmony you experience the warmth of a spirit of friendship and love. Harmony is different notes blending together to make music that is more exciting and more creative than any one single note. The warm fire of the Holy Spirit comes when we gather as followers of Jesus Christ. There is warmth of the spirit among us whether we are shouting praise or quietly praying an intercessory prayer. The warmth of the spirit comes as we gather in Lifegroups to worship and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. The warmth of the Holy Spirit is like an open fire on a cold and dreary night. We love to be near and experience the warmth of that fire!
- **A Fiery Light by which to see our way clear:** We live in a dark world. Denial can be a path of choice without our even knowing it. We can be deluded and deceived without ever having an awareness of our sin. When I grew up in South Carolina I assumed people of darker skin color were inferior and dangerous. I thought this way because everyone, church, school, government, and business taught me this way of seeing the world. I thought I was living in God's light, but I was deluded and in darkness.

We need the light of Christ held high above us to guide us on our way. We need the Christ light held before us to keep us traveling upon God's path. We need the torch of the Christ light examining our values, challenging our assumptions and moving us on up to God's higher ground. We need to continue to pray for God's light, God's incredible clear light without any shadows to point the way for us out of darkness into the beautiful light of God's New World. A blessing from Canterbury House is a prayer for the enlightening of our hearts and souls. Freeing us from delusion, deception, and denial! Freeing us for service to the world in the name of Christ Jesus!

May God bless us with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and
Superficial relationships, so that
We will live deep in our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at
Injustice, oppression, and exploitation
Of people and the earth, so that we
Will work for justice, equity, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to
Shed for those who suffer so we
Will reach out our hands to comfort
Them and change their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with foolishness
To think that we can make a difference in the
World, so we will do the things which others
Say cannot be done.

Pentecost is a day that reminds us that what we think cannot be done can be done with the help of the Holy Spirit. Our challenge is to let the fire and love of the Spirit move within us. The best way we can open up to the Spirit of God is to take a deep breath. In the Hebrew language, Spirit and breath are related words. When you breathe a prayer, you open yourself to the Spirit of God which will make all the difference in your life. So....

“Take a deep breath. It calms the mind.”

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