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# GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

The Holy Spirit gave the early church the power to turn the world upside down.

## POWER OF THE SPIRIT

*By Desmond Ford*

**O**urs is a post-Christian world. Every 40 years, the proportion of professing Christians around the globe is 10 percent less. Yet, Christ predicted that in the last generation *“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come”* (Matthew 24:14).

How can this be? How will the weakness of the present church become strength, its whisper a clarion call, the apathy of the world stirred into conscious, clamoring need? One entire book of Scripture is devoted to the answer. In the slim volume called the Acts of the Apostles lies the dynamite which will yet blast the doddering inefficiency of the church and shake the spiritual languor of the world.

The book begins with a promise and a program: *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Samaria and to the end of the earth”* (Acts 1:8, R.S.V.). This verse not only comprehends a table of contents for the book of Acts, it is also the evangelistic charter for the Christian church. The book of Acts is the only unfinished book of Scripture. The task discussed in its pages is not yet completed. The real conclusion to the book of Acts will be written in our day in letters of fire—the fire of the Holy Spirit igniting again the gospel flame he lighted at Pentecost.

The introduction to Luke’s earlier book, the Gospel had spoken of *“all that Jesus began both to do and teach”* (Acts 1:1). In Acts, the chronicle is continued, and we are told of all that Jesus *continued* to do by the operation of his Spirit in the first believers.

This book (Acts) describes the conversion and missionary labors of Paul. By showing that it was the Spirit of Christ that directed the acts of the early leaders of the church, the book prepares us to acknowledge the guidance of that same Spirit in the subsequent teaching that these same men wrote in the epistles that follow Acts.

Both the message and the method by which the early church turned the whole world upside down in a single generation, are presented clearly by Luke in Acts. The message is repeatedly said to be **the gospel of Jesus Christ**. Not psychology, not politics, not ethics, not good advice, but the good news that God conquered sin through the ministry and death of his Son Jesus. This is the theme that set the world alight. The apostles *“ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ”* (Acts 5:42).

But what was this preaching of Christ? Did the apostles proclaim merely the demands of the Sermon on the Mount? Did they present only Christ’s holy character and

matchless life? If this had been the case then Christ himself in

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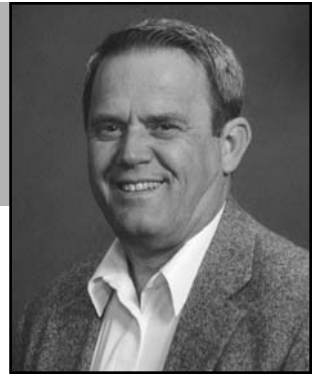


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# EDITORIAL . . .



Pastor Ron Allen

*“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32).*

Christians often feel that the gospel, the Living Water that has centered their lives and quenched their thirst for meaning and hope, does not having much success in the world these days. Material satisfactions, urged and supplied with such tempting variety, are hard to ignore, let alone resist. The voice of the Spirit is silenced by the clamor of the senses.

The message of Jesus seems such a frail voice in the presence of a thunderous array of alternatives. It has ever had to fight its way against weight of numbers, against the tide of popular opinion, with weapons that no one else would ever think of using. Yet, despite such poor odds; despite appearances, Christ continues to win adherents. True, there have been times in history when faith's candle appeared to flicker. But when darkness was ready to conquer, Christ burned brightly and again, millions turned to him.

What is Christ's secret? Wherein lies his power? Will we see it break forth in our time? The answer was suggested by the Lord himself: *“But I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself.”* He was speaking of his execution which would be carried out by his enemies, but which he could have avoided if he had not been so committed to the will of God. It was his voluntary self-offering; love willing to be hurt; the suffering love of God.


The world marshaled its forces against Jesus and crucified him. The key movers and planners in that crime felt some sense of closure when they had finished. “It's nasty work, but someone had to do it,” they may have said. “At least it's done with now.” But it wasn't ended. Within days, their deed was overturned. Their power over Christ was undone by his resurrection.

No one can fight against God and win. There are things that look strong, feel strong, sound strong, but they are not as strong

as the love of God that revealed its full potency at the cross. Here is love that knocks but never breaks the door down; waits and waits, goes on loving, never tiring, never waning; chooses to suffer rather than crash through.

In laying on his followers the gospel task, Jesus was committing them to the same service of love enacted by him at Calvary. By the world's reckoning the church is weak and inconsequential. Christians must guard against seeking to empower themselves for witness by resorting to instruments and methods deemed powerful by the world. Christ has shown that his love is the greatest force in the universe. When Christians emulate the love of their Master, they look weak, yet men and women are *drawn*; the kingdom of God advances. When Christians look to evangelize using techniques and processes that do not embody the love modeled by Jesus, the kingdom languishes.

Before he went to the Father, Jesus promised his disciples power for witness, the Holy Spirit. That promise was fulfilled at Pentecost for that day, and for the church till the end of time. To turn in gratitude and penitence to Christ is to receive the gift of his Spirit; the same Spirit that impelled him to Calvary, where he willingly gave himself up for the life of the world.

The Good News Unlimited family, readers, and fellow believers: we want the gospel to triumph in our time. Our yearnings are large. As Editor of this journal, I invite you this month and the next to take extra time in your busy life to encounter Jesus Christ. This can be achieved through meeting with other believers, through private meditation, Bible reading and acts of service—and many other personally tested devices for spiritual sustenance. Let's ask Christ to show himself to us all over again. Let's ask him to make us courageous; brave enough to be vessels for his Spirit; brave enough to love. 

## GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

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Good News Unlimited magazine also seeks to keep readers up-to-date on all aspects of GNU's ministries. This includes news on national and international radio broadcasts; public seminars, congresses, and Bible schools within the USA (as well as

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the days of his Judean ministry should have gathered his followers by the thousands. His later preachers would have gathered only hundreds—inasmuch as the reality should have been more powerful than the mere report. But the opposite is true. The disciples won the thousands, not Jesus. Why? Because the apostles preached the significance of Jesus' life and death in a way that had not been possible before Calvary. They told of the forgiveness of sins, of the resurrection of the body and of the life everlasting—all made possible by the atoning death of God's Son.

Listen to their words, words which when proclaimed afresh will recover for the church her ancient power:

*“God exalted him... as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).*

*“Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38, 39).*

Man's salvation and acceptance with God is not something we *attain* but something we *obtain*. It is a gift to be received because of the infinite sacrifice of God on our behalf. “One has died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:14). “When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Colossians 2:10).

This was the message of the conquering church in apostolic times: God *has* delivered man. What about the method by which the church spread the good news? The answer is given seventy-one times in this book, for that is the number of times the Holy Spirit is referred to. What someone has called “the irresistible might of weakness” is possible only through the ministry of God's Spirit. “*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of Hosts*” (Zechariah 4:6).

How did believers in the first century receive the Holy Spirit? What did they have to do...? The teaching of Acts echoes Jesus' teaching in the gospels. After Peter had preached Christ in the power of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, multitudes were convicted and cried out “*what shall we do?*” (2:37). It was the same emphasis on human works that tragically reverberates throughout Scripture. Peter's counsel rebuked the human tendency to earn righteousness. “*Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off’*” (2:38, 39).


Only perfect obedience to God's immutable law could earn the priceless treasure of the indwelling God, but such obedience is possible only to one in whom God already dwells. Thus Adam, made to be the temple of the Spirit, could fulfill the law so

long as he looked to God: but not so the sinner. He must receive the Spirit as a gift from Christ, who has kept the law perfectly on behalf of the guilty race. Those who believe (receive) the truth concerning Christ's atoning death are endued with the Spirit as they assent to the Word of God (see Acts 10:44).

An old legend tells of a boy who was assured by a supernatural visitor that if he would thereupon make one wish he should have it. The account relates that the lad responded, “My one wish is that all my later wishes might be granted.” A comparison

of Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13, shows that the gift of the Spirit is the richest treasure of heaven, bringing all other gifts in its train.

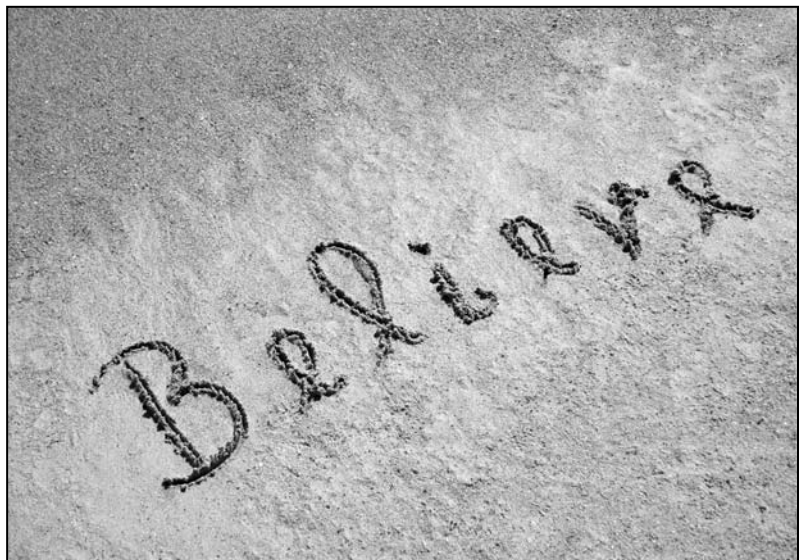
All of us who accept Christ have the Son of God as our righteousness in heaven, and the Spirit as the continual presence of God beside us on earth, sufficient for every situation we find ourselves in. Since Pentecost, the Spirit has been as truly present on earth in every believer as Christ was physically present in the days of his earthly ministry. When the church awakens to this glorious truth, the conquest of the world for Christ will be speedily accomplished.

Blessed is that Christian, and that church that learns from the book of Acts: the only effectual message and method for evangelizing the world. 

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# WHO'S USING WHO?

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...” (Acts 1:8).*

**T**his verse contains a lesson for our day that we dare not miss. The power of the Holy Spirit is given for a definite task: the mission of the church. God does not give the Spirit for the selfish glory or ease of a church or an individual. The power of the Spirit is no magic which we may control for our own purposes. It is a power which controls us. In answer to our prayers for a new outpouring of the Spirit's power, God may well respond: **“What do you intend to do with it?”**  
-Albert C. Winn. ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, p. 22.




*In answer to our prayers for a new outpouring of the Spirit's power, God may well respond: “What do you intend to do with it?”*

*“When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostle's hands, he offered them money and said, ‘Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 8:18, 19).*

The apostles prayed, they laid their hands the Samaritans, the Samaritans began to speak with tongues. Simon was amazed. In his interpretation the Spirit was a magic genie, a power that could be controlled by the men who were his masters. Here was a chance to obtain real magical powers... so he offered the apostles money in exchange for the power to manipulate the Holy Spirit. Peter's rebuke was swift and severe....

The Holy Spirit is not a power to be manipulated but a power to be obeyed. He is not a genie whom we command. He is Lord and commands us. **Simon thought that the Spirit came to Samaria in obedience to the apostles.** On the contrary, the apostles went to Samaria and received the despised Samaritans into the church in obedience to the Spirit.

-Albert C. Winn. ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, pp. 64, 65. 

# HOLY SPIRIT PRAYERS

**We are invited to pray:**

## **For Peace in our Nation and World**

*Come Holy Spirit of Life*

Brood over our precious planet;  
Inspire us to live in peace  
and harmony with one another.

## **For Justice and all Who Suffer**

*Come Holy Spirit of Love*

Inscribe compassion on our hearts;  
open our eyes, ears, and hearts  
to the cries of those who suffer.

## **For Fruitfulness in Our Work**

*Come Holy Spirit of Creativity*

Nurture our talents, gifts and potential;  
Affirm in us the work we do each day;  
Show us how we do make a difference.

## **For Families and Our Own Needs**

*Come Holy Spirit of Joy*

Fill our lives with renewed hope;  
Give us generous and courageous hearts;  
Encourage us to care for one another. 