



THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ashley Cooper

ASHLEY COOPER CONSIDERS HOW A FRESH ENCOUNTER WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN MAKE THE GOOD NEWS SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE.

The former Cliff College principal Samuel Chadwick once wrote, 'The gift of the Holy Spirit is the distinguishing feature of the Christian faith. It is the very heart of our faith. In the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is the secret of all Christian experience, and in the abiding energy of his power is the dynamic of all Christian service.' In other words, the very thing that makes Christianity unique, and the fuel that propels faithful followers into service, is the Holy Spirit's indwelling, active power within the life of God's people and church. That is indeed God's promise - that the divine God chooses to abide with us and activate us for ministry and service through the Holy Spirit.

Promises flow from us relatively easily. We promise things so as to not upset people; our work ethic causes us to overcommit, or perhaps we promise something that is entirely unachievable in an effort to keep our ego or image intact. Politicians and figures of authority promise help, growth and support, but these promises often become lost in their own agenda. The promise of marketing campaigns for perfect outer beauty and fairy-tale love leave us with a sense of hollowness. The world promises people the potential for unlimited wealth, health

and happiness, but the reality is far removed. Promises are cheap, and the world is full of cheap promises.

GOD PROMISES THE HOLY SPIRIT

We can't let the world's promises become confused with God's promises. Joshua 23:14 tells us, 'Now I am about to go the way of all the Earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed.' God's promises are made out of divine powerful love and not simply because God doesn't want to upset us. God's promises are made because he is committed to his creation and he is committed to making us whole and to reconciling us with himself. God's promises aren't cheap. In fact, they cost the life of his only Son. Most importantly, God's promises are kept. So, when God promises the Holy Spirit to us, it is because he loves us and wants to perfect us, that one day we may be present with him in eternity.

SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCHES

The opening quote from Samuel Chadwick was written in the early 1900s, a time long forgotten. Yet, his reason for writing it is no less relevant for us today. Chadwick saw a church concerned with committees over prayer, a Spiritless church labouring in vain. He saw an enterprising church full of energy and enthusiasm but lacking the soul-changing dependence on the power of the Spirit. (For further reading on Samuel

Chadwick: 'The Way to Pentecost,' CrossReach Publications, 2017). How does this read for us today? Do we look around and see our church human-managed instead of God-governed? When I look around, I see a church full of potential. Methodism has an abundance of mechanisms and functions that are waiting to be infused with the power of the Spirit. However, the Spirit abides in people not mechanisms. We, therefore, need not just a movement of the Spirit, but a movement of people's hearts. We need Methodists in all shapes and sizes to encounter the Spirit in a new way. We need, above all, to prioritise the work of the Spirit over all organisational structures, future plans, mechanisms, committees, buildings, styles of worship, disagreements and disputes. As we look for better ways of doing church, God is looking for hearts eager to encounter his Spirit.

HEARTS ABLAZE

As the new principal of Cliff College, I resonate with my early predecessor. I too seek a revival amongst Methodists that would see God glorified in the Spirit-led service and evangelism of his people. Revival is born out of places where God's people meet his Spirit. For Cliff Festival 2018, we have set the theme as 'Ablaze'. The term 'ablaze' is a borrowed word from Samuel Chadwick, that he used to describe Methodists who were alive in the Spirit. We have been prayerful that Cliff Festival this year might act as a spark for those in attendance to encounter the Holy Spirit



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for either the first time or in a new and impactful way, and to be set ablaze with the radical love and motivating power of the Spirit. I believe that if encounters with the Spirit happen in pockets all across the Connexion, and people are truly set ablaze, the work and power of the Holy Spirit will be as an unstoppable wildfire; it will free people from the bondage of sin and reconcile them with God.

God promises us the gift of the Holy Spirit and daily he makes good on that promise. The only question for us is what

we do with that promise. Do we choose to trust and build our faith and church on the principles of the world, or do we surrender to the power of the Spirit to see where God might take us? The latter can be a daunting option, but unless we trust in his promise, all of our efforts and energy will be in vain. We must trust, therefore, that the Holy Spirit will set us ablaze and spread like an awakening wildfire of perfect love.

The Revd Ashley Cooper currently serves as minister of Swan Bank in Stoke-on-Trent, as well as Principal of Cliff College.



QUESTIONS
FOR
REFLECTION
/ GROUP
DISCUSSION

1. Do you trust God to fulfil his promises?
2. Consider our church. Is it Holy Spirit led or concerned with committees?
3. Are we alive in the Holy Spirit? What does this mean for us?
4. Do we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us?

Methodist
Evangelicals
Together

met

WORD 2018

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