

IV. The Church in Biblical Perspective  
*The Ekklesia: God's Church for the Ages*  
“His Promise—Our Power”

Acts 1:4-9

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February 6, 2010 – Morning Sermon

This is our fourth study on the Ekklesia. Please make your way to the book of Acts. We'll be looking at a couple of other passages so have your Bibles available. Now let's look at Acts. This is the fifteen and final witness of the resurrected Christ. Acts 1:4-9 says **4** *And while staying with them he (Jesus) ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” 6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.*

The grass withers, the flower fades and God's Word abides forever. By His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

It probably takes you as no surprise that I love biographies. I love to visit historical sites. A couple of years ago as a congregation we sent a team over to London to do Embers to a Flame on church revitalization for a marvelous group of churches called The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. While I was there I was able to secure a day to get around to some of the places where those people ministered who wrote the books that are in my library and I couldn't wait to get to places. One of the places I wanted to get to was the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Actually the church building that is there now is the third one but the front is pretty much the same.

By the way, there is a wonderful biography on Charles Spurgeon which is actually an autobiography that was superintended by his wife and finished by her after his death. It is two volumes and it is put out by Banner of Truth and I encourage you to go take a look at it. It is a wonderful book on this marvelous Baptist preacher of the Metropolitan Tabernacle with about ten thousand people apart of the church. Every Sunday his wife said this. They would come to the church and they would ascend the steps. There were thirteen steps leading up to the sanctuary at the Metropolitan Tabernacle and Charles Spurgeon would stop at each step and say “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” At the next step he would say “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Here is a man who is about to go to the pulpit to preach God's Word. “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” He is going to be preaching to people that come dead in their sins. “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” He is going to be preaching to people who are alive in Christ that have been caught in their trespasses and sins. “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” He is going to be speaking to a church that wants to take the Gospel to the ends of the world to the end of the age. “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” Each day, each step, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit filled Christ life is fostered and encouraged and nurtured in a Spirit filled church.

For those visiting, we're coming out of year of giving God thanks for having blessed Briarwood for fifty years. We call it our year of Jubilee. It's good to stop and see what God has done to give Him praise and encourage those through whom God worked but we don't want to live in the past and we don't want to be a museum of what God has done. We want to be a movement that moves into the future. As we began the next fifty years or until Jesus comes we want to go back and remind ourselves of the basics of what it means to be a church. There's a lot of ingenious things like the Sportsman's Banquet and various programs of outreach, ministries of mercy, evangelism and discipleship but what we want to do is make sure we have the basics in place that we are doing what God says His church is, what are message is, what are ministry is and what God's methods are. We want to be committed to that so this is our fourth study in it.

Our first study was this. We took a look at what it means to be God's church. In other words, the church is God's church and it's our home. We are here because He is our Father. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord. We have fathers and mothers in the faith. This is His church and our home.

The second thing we looked at was that this church is where Christ is preeminent and that Jesus Christ is preeminent in all things. He is preeminent as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer and that's our passion. His preeminence is our passion. Our passion is the exaltation of Christ knowing that if He is lifted up He will draw all men unto Himself.

The third study was His Gospel is our message. We have one message and that's it. It is one message we never go beyond. You go higher, deeper, wider and longer but you never go beyond it and that is the Gospel which is our proclamation. I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith to faith just as it written. The righteous man shall live by faith.

So now we come to this fourth study and I have come to this text of Scripture that kind of sums it all up. Let me back up just for a moment. We have a mission at Briarwood and that doesn't change. We have wordsmith the mission where we have taken Colossians 1, Ephesians 4, Matthew 28 and Acts 1 and we have put it in terms of a mission statement at Briarwood. Our mission statement is For God's glory, Briarwood is committed to **EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS** to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. Who are we? We are Briarwood. What do we do? We worship God and reach people. How do we do it? We equip Christians. Why do we do it? We do it for God's glory. Where do we do it? We do it from Briarwood, from Birmingham to all the world. That is what we are committed to do.

Now if God allows us to fulfill that mission what would it look like? That is what we call our vision. Our vision is, for Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled **EQUIPPING CENTER** where every member is a minister and a missionary. If we are to be equipping Christians we need to be an equipping church. We do this for coming generations which are the next generation of leaders, Christians, churches, missionaries, young people who know Christ and older people who are serving Christ. For coming generations we now desire to be a church that the coming generations of churches, leaders and Christians are being brought to Christ and being developed, where churches are planted and being revitalized and we want that to happen for the coming generations.

How does that happen? There is a DNA in a church that is like that and the DNA is a threefold dynamic. Churches that make an impact in their generation for coming generations where it's an equipping church so that everybody is equipped to minister God centered worship to the praise of God, the Gospel to the lost, love to one another, and the Gospel of grace to grow deep in a relationship to each other, where every Christian is a missionary that is being equipped there and those three things have to be in place – Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled.

What does it mean to be Christ centered? It is that Jesus Christ is the center, the sum, the substance and the circumference of everything that we're about. We are not worship centered or evangelism centered or discipleship centered or mercy centered. We are Christ centered and that's the key to being a worshipping church, an evangelizing church, a discipling church, a merciful church. When Christ is the center, the sum, the substance and the circumference then God's people reach out with mercy because He has reached them with mercy. God's people reach out with the Gospel because He reached them with the Gospel. God's people will disciple others because they are being disciplined by Him. Christ is at the center and we are not Briarwood centered. It is absolutely right for us to stop and praise God for fifty years of blessing and to rejoice in what God has done. Let me tell you what is absolutely wrong. It is to take what God has done and make Briarwood the center of our existence. We are not here to keep Briarwood going. Briarwood is here to be Christ centered and that's actually what keeps it going. That's what makes it something that needs to keep going, when it is Christ centered.

That means if we are going to be Christ centered then we have to be Gospel driven where the Gospel is the foundation, formation, and motivation of the Christian life. Whose Gospel is it? It is the Gospel of Christ and therefore we are Christ centered. So we are Gospel driven because the Gospel drives us forward in our life. It drives us forward to come to Christ. It drives us to follow Christ and obey Christ. It drives us and empowers us to share Christ. It empowers us to minister Christ to others. It is driving every aspect of our lives. Our leaders want to be Gospel leaders. Our elders want to be Gospel elders. We want Gospel preaching, discipleship and evangelism. We want the Gospel to drive us forward in every aspect of Christian life. That means we have to be Spirit filled.

God doesn't give us a single thing to do in the Christian life that you can do on your own. The Christian life is impossible. Without Him I can do nothing but I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. How does He strengthen me? He strengthens me with His Holy Spirit. Now this DNA of an equipping church is put right in this text. Stop and think about this. Here is the book of Acts. What's going to happen? We're going to see 35 years of expansion. We're going to see the Gospel go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the utter most part of the world. We're going to see a church in Jerusalem and one in Antioch. We're going to see one in Ephesus and Colossae, Pergamum, Lystra, Iconium and Asia Minor. We're going to see the Gospel go until finally in Europe they are going to say "These people are turning the whole world upside down."

Where does that kind of a movement of the Gospel where generations, new preachers like Silas, Timothy, Luke and new missionaries, new churches, come from? It all came from the risen Christ and the risen Christ said "This is what I want you to do. I

want it to go to Judea, Samaria, and the utter most part of the world but don't go until this happens because you can't do it until this happens." Now what is it that has to happen for us to be able to do the mission God has called us to do? Let's look back in Acts 1. He doesn't want them to go until they have the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:4,5, 8,9 says **4** *And while staying with them he (Jesus) ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."* **8** *But you will receive power (Where does the power come from for this Christian life?) when the Holy Spirit (Greek word – dunamis, the dynamite) has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* **9** *And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.* When the Holy Spirit has come upon you then you can go out empowered by Him because you have His power. Do you see how this is all coming together?

What do we have here? We have the Gospel. Who is speaking? The risen Christ is the One who is speaking. He is the One who died for our sins and rose again. Here is the Gospel in Jesus Christ, the risen Christ, who is about to ascend, who gives us this Gospel message and then He says you can't be Gospel driven unless you have the Holy Spirit. So wait for the Holy Spirit and I'm going to send the Holy Spirit upon you. So here are these twelve and they are going to become 120 and then 3,000 and then they'll have another 5,000. Then they will reach Antioch, then Asia Minor and it will keep going. Why? It is because back here the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. The Gospel was given to them so that they would Christ centered, My witnesses. When the Holy Spirit has come upon you He didn't come upon you for you to be a Holy Spirit witness but to be a Spirit filled witness of Christ. You will be Christ centered, Gospel driven, and Spirit filled.

I want to give you five observations on what it means to be a Spirit filled Christian and a Spirit filled church. The first one is you have to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. I can't go any further with this until I make an observation for you and we need to clear some decks because there are some errors here. Most of us have heard the phrase "Baptism of the Holy Spirit." That is not Biblical. The Holy Spirit doesn't baptize you with power. The Holy Spirit is not a baptizer. Jesus is the baptizer. Jesus says, "I will baptize you with My Spirit" and the result is power. The consequence is that you will be His witnesses in the Gospel. So what we need to understand is that there is not a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The second thing we need to understand is that baptism with the Spirit is not a second blessing but it's the saving blessing. It's not I get saved and then I get baptized with the Spirit. It's you can't be saved without being baptized with the Spirit and in fact that's how you know who is saved. If you haven't read it read the book of Acts and get to chapter 19. The Apostle Paul is at a place called Ephesus and he meets some people who claim to be disciples who claim to be believers and what is the question he asks them? He doesn't ask them "Have you been baptized with water?" He asks them "Have you received the Holy Spirit?" They said, "Who?" Then Paul preached the Gospel to them and they became Christians. What is he telling you? He is telling you that baptism with the Spirit is not a second blessing for some Christians but it's the affirmation that you are a Christian because you can't become one without it.

Why would he ask them if they had the Holy Spirit if it's just a second blessing of Christianity? He is asking them if they have the Holy Spirit to find out if they are a Christian because if you don't have the Holy Spirit, if He has not been poured out upon you then you are still dead in your sins and you can't come to Christ. He is the One that brings you to life so that you can come to Christ and then you're baptized with the Spirit and sealed into Christ. Let me show you the passage that Jesus refers to in Acts 1 when He talks about John saying "I baptize you with water but One is coming after you who I am not worthy to untie His sandals. He will baptize you *with* (not of) the Holy Spirit."

Let's look at Matthew 3. By the way we have to do one more. There is not a baptism of the Spirit, it's baptism of Jesus with the Spirit. Secondly, it is not a second blessing but it's a saving blessing that initiates your Christian life. Do you remember what they said, "Look these who have received the Spirit, how can we refuse water to them in baptism?" In other words, let's baptize them. Why? It is because they have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. What's the mark of Christianity? It is not baptism with water. It is baptism with the Spirit. We can't deny baptism with water. Why? It is because they have received the Holy Spirit. That is how you become a Christian. God pours forth His Spirit, brings you from death to life and then seals you into your relationship with Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 3 these people have come to John to kind of be seen baptized by John and he is saying to them "Who commanded you to come here? You didn't come here and repent. I'm here to baptize those who are penitent. I'm here to clear the way for the One who is coming after me, Jesus. Now let me tell you about Him." Now this is what Matthew 3:11 says **11** "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he (Jesus) who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Notice it's not the Holy Spirit baptizing. It is Jesus. He is speaking to believers and unbelievers. Someone came to me and said "Pastor I think you have the second blessing. I think you have had the baptism with fire. When did you get that?" I said, "I haven't and I don't want it." "Why?" The baptism with fire is not a blessing. It's judgment. It's hell.

In other words, Jesus is the baptizer and He will baptize every son of Adam. He will either baptize you with the Spirit to save you or if you are apart from Him, one day He will baptize you with fire. The text goes on to explain it in the next verse. Matthew 3:12 says **12** *His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat (wheat – are those who are saved that will be gathered into eternity to be with Him, those baptized with the Spirit) into the barn, but the chaff (those who don't know Him) he will burn with unquenchable fire.* The fire He is speaking of there is not a fire of blessing but a fire of judgment. It's hell. So Jesus is the baptizer and so if you don't mind I'm going to stop here for a moment.

Jesus is going to baptize every one of you, either with the Spirit and you come to Christ being sealed into Him or one day with fire, an everlasting judgment. I call you today to Him by His Spirit who says "Come to Him who will give you everlasting life." Baptism with the Spirit is the act of God that gives you life and seals you into your relationship with Christ. What happens next?

You now have the Holy Spirit and He leads you. You are being led by the Spirit which is our second observation. In fact, that is the mark of your Christianity. Let's look at Romans 8:12-14 which says **12** *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to*

*live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh (being self reliant) you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* It's very clear that the gift and baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a second blessing because He just told you that you're not saved if you don't have the Holy Spirit.

Who are the sons of God? It is those being led by the Holy Spirit. How do you get the Holy Spirit? The Father promised Him and the Son delivered Him. You have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and now you're being led by the Holy Spirit. Some words for 'led' are 'guided', 'tutored', 'counseled', 'directed'. This is for all who are being directed by the Holy Spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit, taught by the Holy Spirit, and guided by the Holy Spirit for these are the sons of God. Here are those who are saved. They are being led by the Spirit and therefore they put to death the deeds of the flesh. They hate the deeds of the flesh. Why? It is because the Spirit of God is bearing witness of Christ and the Spirit of God is making the Gospel alive to them so they are saying 'no' to the flesh and 'yes' to Jesus Christ in following Him. This is not with perfection by any means because this is a growing process but the Holy Spirit is striving, moving, empowering, convicting, enlightening, comforting, consoling, challenging, and reproving doing all of those things in our life. He is leading us and that brings me to the third observation.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit you have to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. You have to be led by the Holy Spirit and thirdly, is the witness of the Spirit. Let's look at the next few verses in Romans 8. Romans 8:15-17 say *15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.* The Holy Spirit is bearing witness with our Spirit. He is at work within you. You get assurance by looking to God's Word. I'm in Christ and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I am forgiven. I am pardoned. I am cleansed. I am clothed with His righteousness. Thank God for that assurance but then that's objective assurance.

Subjective assurance is the Holy Spirit is within me bearing witness. The good that I would do oh how I want to follow Jesus. And the evil that I find myself doing oh how I hate it. Oh Holy Spirit deliver me so that I can follow Jesus. Oh Holy Spirit help me to put to death the old man that I might walk in the newness of life. Help me to put off that I might put on and all the time He is consoling, counseling, teaching, enlightening, comforting, and reproving me all the while He is bearing witness. You belong to Jesus. You didn't get here on your own. Jesus says, "I brought you here by the power of the Holy Spirit. I've done this work in you." That's why David said, "I look to the rock I was hewn from and the pit that I was dug from, praise God He did it in my life. So the Holy Spirit is bearing witness with our Spirit.

The fourth observation is the gifts of the Spirit. Let's look at I Corinthians 12. Every Christian has been baptized with the Holy Spirit and that's not a second blessing that's a saving blessing. Every Christian therefore is led by the Spirit and He is striving with us, teaching us and convicting us. Therefore every Christian has the witness of the Spirit that we belong to Christ and we also have a gift from the Spirit. I Corinthians

12:4-11 says **4** *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

So here we are united in the Spirit yet each one of us has a manifestation of the Spirit and you are uniquely gifted to function within the body Christ. Please say 'no' to being a lone ranger Christian. You have to come to Christ personally but you don't live your Christian life privately. You live it in relationships with God's people and God has given you a gift that is extremely important that there is no other one that is like it. You are unique and you can't say "I don't need another part of the Body." I need the other part of the Body that the Holy Spirit has gifted and they need me. Some are probably thinking, "Pastor, my gift isn't all that important." Did you know that some of the gifts that are least acknowledged are the most important in the Body. Some of the things that are the least visible and invisible are more important.

An example of this is I got up this morning and I combed my hairs before I came here. There were about 48 hairs last night and there were about 42 this morning. My hair is falling out. I look at the mirror and take time to comb it even though it doesn't take long. I put it where it is, what is left of it. My hair fell out last night and I looked at the mirror. I gave it all kinds of attention. Even though my hair fell out bodily I'm still able to function. What would have happened if my liver had fallen out? Yet I don't give it much thought, do I? But what is more important, what's internal or what's external? So folks, there are not little people in the Kingdom of God. God has given you a gift. He baptized you with the Spirit to save you. He leads you with the Spirit to make you more like Jesus. He bears witness to give you assurance and He's gifted you to be a part of the Body of Christ. Show up and serve your Savior.

The fifth observation is that means the fruit of the Spirit will be born in our life. Let's look at Galatians 5. Here is this matter of the fruit of the Spirit. This wonderful text of Scripture declares the majesty of our salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and then the glorious work of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:16-26 says **16** *But I say, walk by the Spirit* (Intentionally walk, rest, and rely on the Spirit), *and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and*

*desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*

Addictions don't have to control me. Appetites don't have to control me. I can eat and drink not for eating and drinking but I don't have to live to eat and drink. I can eat and drink to the glory of God. I don't live to eat and drink but I can live for Christ. What do I do with eating and drinking? I don't live to eat and drink. That's not my life. I eat and drink to live for Christ. Whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. God's Holy Spirit can say bring all the appetites to true enjoyment not in idolatry but in how God made us to enjoy them as we live for Him and glorify Him. Sex, food, drink, work, and all of those things that God has given us to do that we love to do can be done for His glory. What's the manifestation? It is the fruit of the Spirit. It is love manifested in joy, peace, patient, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. The appetites of life are brought under control under the lordship of Christ so that we're Christ centered in our life, filled up with the love and power of the Gospel.

By the way, notice the singular. It is the fruit of the Spirit and not fruits of the Spirit. That's not an a la carte menu. Okay I'll take love and joy. Cindy you take patience. George you take kindness and goodness. No, no they are all together. It's one cluster. It is the fruit, singular, of the Spirit and the changed life that is walking by the Spirit.

If I'm Spirit filled, how do I know that? I want to give you three affirmations of the Spirit filled life. How do you know that someone has been baptized with the Spirit, they are led by the Spirit, they have the witness of the Spirit, they are using the gifts of the Spirit and they are bearing the fruit of the Spirit? There are three things and the first is they will have a love for Jesus. They will have a love for Christ. They will be Christ centered. When the Holy Spirit comes He'll give you power so that you'll be His witnesses. Let me just make this as clear as I can. Spirit filled Christians will teach about the Holy Spirit, will honor the Holy Spirit but they aren't centered on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the shy Spirit. He didn't come to draw attention to Him and His gifts, He came to gift you and empower you that Christ is revealed. How do you know someone is Spirit filled? They are all about Jesus. Now that makes the work of the Spirit evident and that is the purpose of the Spirit. There is a love for Christ.

The second affirmation is there is a love for the Gospel. We are saved by grace, praise the Lord. All that Christ has done is through faith. I love the Gospel blessings. The Gospel call is the walk in a manner worthy of the Gospel, not worthy to be saved but worthy of the Savior. There is that love of the Gospel, its blessings and its commands. There is that love of Christ and that leads to the third affirmation.

The third affirmation is a love for obedience. Give me the Word of God that I might be obedient unto Him. Spirit filled Christians aren't talking about the gifts of the Spirit. They are using them. They are not even talking about the Holy Spirit although we have to teach just like we are doing today so that everybody understands. We want to honor Him because He is the third Person of the Trinity. He is the glory of God. He is not an 'it', a 'thing', but it is Him. We want to honor Him. We want to teach about Him but when we have taught right and He is working in our lives, Christ is being exalted all around us, gloriously and powerfully. A love for Christ, a love for the Gospel and a love for obedience are the three affirmations.



So here is the takeaway. It is one simple phrase. The promised gift of the Holy Spirit provides both the presence of God and the power of God which produces the Biblically affirmed mark of the authentic Christian. How do you know an authentic Christian? They have been saved to Christ with the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. They are Spirit filled, Christ centered and Gospel driven. You know that they are because all who are led by the Spirit, there is the mark. Being led by the Spirit marks them out authentically as those who belong to Jesus Christ.

So my dear friends don't grieve the Holy Spirit. Don't quench the Holy Spirit but surrender. How do I surrender? Here is one idea. Get into God's Word. The Holy Spirit gave you the Word. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God"...Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the author of that. One might say "Harry I thought Paul wrote that." Yes, he wrote it by the Holy Spirit. "I thought that was in the book of Romans." Yes, by the Holy Spirit. If you don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit or quench the Holy Spirit then get into God's Word. There your love for the Holy Spirit is fulfilled.

The other day my wife and I were cleaning out a closet and we happened to find a shoe box. The shoe box contained a large number of letters that she had written to me while we were courting and engaged, before I delivered her from the bondage of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I opened up the box and saw that stack of letters and I took the rubber band off. This was a moment! What do I mean that it was moment? This was a crucial moment because we went through each letter. Every time we went to a letter I prayed "Oh God please let this envelope be opened." I didn't want to get to one that was unopened and hear "Why didn't you read that one?" "Please Lord, let every one of these love letters be opened."

You have 66 love letters from your God given by the Holy Spirit. Do you love Him? Open His letters. Don't grieve Him. Don't quench Him. Listen to Him. Surrender to Him. Absorb Him and then some astounding things will happen in your life. You who are baptized with the Spirit, led by the Spirit, with the witness of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit in work, and the fruit of the Spirit in a changed life, some astounding things will take place. In the unbelievable pressing moments of life there will be astounding responses that you make and you will sit and say "Oh my goodness where did that come from?"

A great Presbyterian preacher, the great Henry Thornwell, had this marvelous Godly 19 year old daughter. This was his only daughter, his only child whom he loved dearly. In 1858, 1859 he was away at the General Assembly while they were making preparations for her wedding. The invitations had gone throughout all of the region. People were travelling for days and weeks to come to that wedding there in Columbia, South Carolina. While they were on their way and her father was at the General Assembly she got a severe case of typhoid fever. Her father made it back just in time to get to her death bed. All the wedding guests were coming and it wasn't going to be a wedding but it was going to be a funeral. He knelt beside her in utter despair and said "Oh my dear child." She said, "Father, don't weep. I soon will be in glory." He said, "But it was your wedding! All of your life was before you. Why would God do this?" She said, "Father, don't weep. I am going to a greater Bridegroom." The Holy Spirit showed up right there. In the life of this 19 year old girl the Holy Spirit, in a glorious way, ministered to her great preacher father. If you go to Elmwood Cemetery you can go

see where she is buried. She was buried in her bridal gown and the inscription is “I have arisen to a greater Groom prepared for Him.” The Holy Spirit showed up.

Maybe it was Donald Gray Barnhouse who was preaching at this marvelous conference and the conference was held at this nice little church. They had a pastor and a youth pastor. The youth pastor was married and they were receiving a child, about to give birth. They went back and forth during this whole week giving him a hard time because his wife was pretty close to delivery. Toward the end of the conference they looked and he wasn't there that night and they all kind of joked “Well, we know where he is. The baby has come.” At the end of the service they say that he had come in and sat on the back row weeping uncontrollably. Dr. Barnhouse immediately went back there and he said “My son, has your child been born?” He said, “Yes” and then he proceeded to explain the “birth defect” and its severity. Weeping uncontrollably he looked at Donald Gray Barnhouse and said “Why?” Barnhouse put his arm around him and said “My son you and your wife must be special. Look at whom God has entrusted to you. It is someone that He has especially designed for He makes the dumb. He makes the eye that can't see and the tongue that stammers. This special design of God has been given to you.”

The young man's eyes were lit, afresh and anew. He went home immediately and called his wife. That's the Holy Spirit. While he was talking to his wife, listening in was a nurse who was not a believer, who despised Christians and despised that church and secretly was enjoying the agony that this youth pastor and his wife were going through. That was back in the day when we could listen in on party lines. You can explain that to your children if they don't know what that was. As this nurse listened he called wife up and said “Honey I'm on my way back I just talked to Donald Gray Barnhouse. Did you know that God made our child specially” and then he read the passage from Exodus. When he finished reading the passage he said “Isn't God gracious to allow us to raise this child for Him?” His wife began to weep and he began to weep with joy and he immediately put down the phone and raced to the hospital. She immediately put down the phone and started telling every doctor and nurse and the next Sunday the church was full of doctors and nurses, many of which came to Christ. The Holy Spirit showed up.

Praise His Name. Are there 13 steps? No, no, in every step of life walk in the Spirit. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together this morning. Thank You for Your Word and the privilege to study it, the privilege to embrace it and the privilege to acknowledge Christ His Lord. Dear friend if you don't know Him and the Spirit of God has said “Come to Christ” that's what He is here to do. He is here to invite you to Christ. Would you come and say “Jesus I put my trust in You alone as my Lord and Savior”? Dear Father, would You allow us who desire to send forth Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled Christians in the DNA of this church, to be Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled for Christ's sake, Amen.

### **The Briarwood Mission**

“Our Purpose”

For God’s glory, Briarwood is committed to **EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS** to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

### **The Briarwood Vision**

“Our Passion”

For Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled **EQUIPPING CENTER** where every member is a minister and a missionary.

### **The Briarwood Strategy**

“Our Ministry”

For Coming Generations, Briarwood will prayerfully seek to  
Implement the Biblical strategy of:

1. Gospel Evangelism and Disciple-making
2. Gospel Church Planting and Church Revitalization
3. Gospel Deeds of Love, Mercy and Justice
4. Gospel Leaders Developed and Deployed