

## Not what we expect

1 Corinthians 12:7

June 3, 2007

*The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all ...*

How is the Spirit's presence shown?

*In some way ...*

In whom?

*In each person ...*

For what purpose?

*For the good of all ...*

The Holy Spirit is symbolized in scripture by wind and fire. Now wind and fire alike may be harnessed or channeled, used to advantage. But wind and fire alike are also unpredictable and often beyond our control. Fire does what it wants! Wind blows where it will! And that is what the Holy Spirit is like. The Spirit's energy in us and among us may be channeled and put to good use, but the Spirit does what it wants, which is not always what we might expect!

Acts 2 begins with the believers all gathered in one place on the day of Pentecost. Have you ever wondered why the believers were all gathered in one place that day? Because it was a festival day and they were all gathered to celebrate?

Perhaps they had planned a special worship service, songs and readings and speakers chosen in advance, everything in order and ready to go. And then the Spirit breaks in and takes over their worship!

Or perhaps they were gathered for a congregational meeting, a planning session. Perhaps they were all gathered in one place to vote on a set of proposed five-year vision statements! After all, Jesus had been raised and that changes everything! They will need a new direction for their ministry, a new strategy for their evangelism. And then the Spirit breaks in and takes over their meeting! The Spirit breaks in and takes them by surprise! I do not think the believers gathered on that day of Pentecost expecting a visit from the Holy Spirit!

It is most interesting when you read the story of that day in Acts 2, it is only the reaction and feelings of the onlookers that is described, not the feelings and reactions of the believers themselves. A sound like the wind blows through their gathering place and something like tongues of fire touches each person in the room, but Luke says nothing about what they are feeling. Because that is not the point. It's not about them. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not just for them, for their benefit. It is *for the good of all!*

The Spirit comes to us in ways we do not expect, not just for our benefit, but for the benefit of all, to accomplish what God intends. 1 Corinthians 12:7 tells how the Spirit does it.

The Spirit does not operate systematically. The presence of the Spirit is shown "in some way," not in "one of the following eight prescribed ways!" There is no prescribed "route" for the Holy Spirit. We discern the authenticity of the Spirit's presence not by method but by content, not by how the Spirit is shown, but by what the Spirit does. Paul says: *No one can confess "Jesus is Lord," without being guided by the Holy Spirit.* If Jesus is honored, if hungry and thirsty people are served, then indeed the Holy Spirit is present!

The Spirit's presence is shown in some way ... in many ways. What are some of the ways the Spirit's presence is shown?

The Spirit does not operate democratically. Many of our churches are run democratically, and that's a problem! How does democracy work? Whose will is done? The will of the majority. Democracy is not about listening to the Spirit or paying attention to the presence of the Spirit in each person, but about following the wishes of the majority of the people.

But the Spirit's presence is shown in each person -- in each person -- not just in some people or in the will of the majority. The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person. It's not that "everybody has a right to their own opinion." It's not that each person has an opinion to contribute, but that each person has something valuable given by the Spirit to contribute for the good of all.

The Spirit does not operate privately. It's not about me and my salvation or about you and your salvation. It's about us and our salvation. The presence of the Spirit is shown for the good of all.

This is contrary to the "consumer mentality" rampant among contemporary churchgoers. We try to find a church that "meets my needs." But that attitude is upside down! It's not about meeting my needs, but about putting the gifts the Spirit has given me to good use in serving other people's needs.

*The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all ...*

It's not under our control! It's under God's control! We just have to pay attention ... and harness the energy!