

When the Spirit leads the way

Clues that show a church that the Spirit is at work in them

Has our own journey as a church been a work of the Holy Spirit or are we just another man-made religion? Because when Paul visited Athens his comment to them was, “[I see that in every way you are very religious,](#)” **Acts 17:22**. Religious, yes, but no clue about God or his plan yet.

So how do you tell the difference between “being religious” and a genuine work of the Spirit? By looking back at the time in **Acts 2:4** when “[All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit,](#)” and seeing what happened next.

The Spirit immediately zeroed in on Christ’s death and resurrection (verses 22-36), the result of which was, “[All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people,](#)” **verses 44-47**.

Two things happened, then, that identified this as a work of the Spirit. First, the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached, and secondly, a group of strangers found themselves in wonderful fellowship together.

The same two things happened in Ephesus too. The gospel of “[the riches of God’s grace](#)” in Christ was preached, **Ephesians 1:7**, and an amazing fellowship followed, this time between Jews and Gentiles who’d **never** been in fellowship together before. They despised each other normally, but in the church the “[dividing wall of hostility](#)” between them completely disappeared, **chapter 2:14**. It was remarkable - but that’s because they were “[being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit,](#)” **verse 22**.

So this was fellowship beyond that of friends, relatives and people with common interests. This was fellowship caused by God himself living in a group of people, the likes of which had never happened before.

But it happened all over again in the Colossian church too. First, they heard the gospel of “[God’s grace in all its truth,](#)” **Colossians 1:6**, then reports soon followed “[of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints,](#)” **verse 4**. Amazing; everybody loved everybody! But that’s because it was “[love in the Spirit,](#)” **verse 8**, a completely new type of love that enabled people to love each other no matter how different they were.

Imagine Paul's delight, then, on hearing that "All over the world this gospel is producing fruit and growing, just as it has been among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth," **verse 6**. It was thrilling. All they had to do was preach God's staggering grace in Jesus Christ and this extraordinary fellowship among Christians sprang up next.

But why was the Spirit creating all this wonderful fellowship? Because he was answering what Jesus prayed for in **John 17:22**, "that they may be one as we are one." It was Jesus' great wish to share the same type of fellowship he has with his Father with us. That's why he asked the Father to send the Spirit to come and live with us, because through the Spirit, **John 14:23**, "we will come to him and make our home with him." Through the Spirit, the Father and Son would live what they enjoy and share together in us.

The church in turn, then, would become a wonderful reflection of God and a visible witness to God's plan for humanity, just as Jesus prayed for in **John 17:21**: "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The world would see the fellowship of the Father and Son through the fellowship we have in the church. So the reason the Spirit creates all this wonderful fellowship in the church is to help people realize, first of all, that God himself is a fellowship, and secondly, that it's his great masterplan for humanity to live his fellowship in us.

But God did say, "Let us make man in our image," so right from the beginning he made it clear that he wanted to share what he is with us, or as Peter put it, enable us to "participate in the divine nature," **2 Peter 1:4**. And for what purpose? That we humans will be "filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy," **1 Peter 1:8**.

It's easy, then, knowing whether our journey is a work of the Spirit or just another man-made religion. When the Spirit wind fills the sails, it's with love, fellowship and joy like nothing we've experienced before. And how the Spirit creates that is so simple....

First, he has the gospel of "grace in all its truth" preached, and then "love in the Spirit" follows. That's how he did it in the book of Acts, and in the Ephesian and Colossian churches - and in the Galatian church, as well. The Galatians, just like the others, got to hear of Christ's amazing grace, **Galatians 3:1**, the result of which was, "the Spirit working miracles among you," **verse 5**. What miracles? All those lovely fruits of the Spirit in chapter 5:22-23, that gave them wonderful fellowship together.

So that's **four** churches now in which the same thing happened. "Grace in all its truth" was preached first, and lovely things then happened in the church.

Well for years now our own journey as a church has been taking us into "grace in all its truth" too, so can we expect the same lovely things to happen to us?

It was certainly what Paul expected in the Galatian church, as this brand new fellowship from the Spirit filled their local congregation. Paul could say with confidence in **Galatians 6:1**, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently,” because **of course** those who are spiritual would do that with someone in the congregation who was struggling and a bit lost. All they’d want to do is restore the person and get him back into the thick of their fellowship again.

And then in **verse 2** Paul says, “Carry each other’s burdens,” because **of course** they’d do that with love in the Spirit. They could bare their souls, confess their faults and admit their worries, because that was all part of the magical fellowship the Spirit was creating in the church to help them understand and reflect the wonderful fellowship of God.

And after you’ve experienced something like that personally, wouldn’t you love to say to a friend or relative, “Come with me to church, you’ll love it”? - knowing that the Spirit will meet their needs too, and may even be bringing that person to meet some of our needs as well, because the Spirit makes sure everyone in the church has something to give (1 Corinthians 12:7).

So now that we as a church have got grace sorted out, we know where the Spirit is leading us next, because from the time that Christians were first filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit has been creating a totally new type of love and fellowship in the church that beautifully and practically reflects the love and fellowship that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit enjoy together.

And when a church is like that, there is joy, as we saw back in Acts 2, where not only were they enjoying an amazing new fellowship together, they were also “enjoying the favour of all the people,” **Acts 2:47**. People in the surrounding neighbourhood saw what was happening in the church, and they supported it!

Oh. So when a church is led by the Spirit It also becomes an **attractive** place to others. Well, that’s a nice surprise. But that’s the Holy Spirit for you. He likes attractive. He likes joy. I imagine he gets the hugest pleasure, therefore, when someone staggers out of a Christian church muttering to himself, “Where have I been all my life? I never knew such lovely people existed.”

But it’s bound to happen, because when the Spirit lives God’s fellowship in the church it creates an infectious joy. So first, it’s “grace in all its truth,” then “love in the Spirit,” and then “glorious joy.” It’s quite the journey we’re on, then, when the Spirit leads the way.