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The Holy Spirit in the New Testament *A Pentecostal Guide*

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With an ever-increasing number of Christians worldwide self-identifying as Pentecostal or charismatic, the church needs a Spirit-centered interpretation of Scripture informed by a Pentecostal lens. Each chapter in this accessible New Testament introduction explores the presence of the Spirit in a biblical book, then offers devotional applications to help readers respond to the text.

A Spirit-Centered Introduction to the New Testament

Mark is writing to a people who fully endorse hierarchical power structures. Beginning with the emperor at the top and descending to the lowliest enslaved person at the bottom, the Romans cultivated a highly stratified society. The whole arrangement was fueled by a patron/client system whereby the largess of one (the patron) was carefully meted out to those in need (the clients). The latter were beholden to the former, and so it went in a never-ending cycle of benevolence and indebtedness. Money, political power, and social standing defined what was honorable and anything less moved in the direction of shame. Everything was done to enhance honor and avoid shame.

Jesus' vision of the kingdom ran headlong into this imperial model of life and relationships. He promoted those qualities of the kingdom that, in time, would be described as "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23). If there is anything unlike the culture of Rome, it is the fruit of the Spirit.

Mark's challenge was to convey this radical message of the kingdom in terms that made sense to his audience. He does so by using the signs and symbols of Roman hierarchy even while subverting that hierarchy. He selects those words and deeds of Jesus that echo imperial hierarchical concepts yet move in the opposite direction. In so doing, he affects a transvaluation of values that is in accordance with the Spirit of God.

The greatest concentration of this kind of transvaluation is in Mark 10. Here Mark records three important teachings of Jesus that effectively undermine the values of this fallen world. The first is the childlike quality of the kingdom. In first-century Rome, women and children literally had no place in public life. Similarly, an onerous kind of patriarchy was present in Judaism. The disciples tacitly endorsed such views by speaking harshly to those who brought little children to Jesus. Jesus was outraged at their boorish behavior. In contrast to the bombast and bluster of the Roman Empire, the kingdom of God is like that of little children. For those who refuse to receive the kingdom with the simple, sincere, and unpretentious heart of a child, there is absolutely no chance for them to enter it (Mk 10:13-16; see also Mt 19:13-15; 18:1-9). Consequently, anyone who would wound the heart of a child is subject to the most severe judgment (Mk 9:42; see also Mt 18:6-7).

The second example is an expansion and application of the first. A wealthy man approaches Jesus and essentially demands a checklist for inheriting eternal life (Mk 10:17-22). His take on faith is achievement oriented, almost mechanical. If you do these things, then this result must follow. Jesus realizes that this person might be religious in practice, but he's a materialist at heart. His false sense of values is skewing his understanding of God, his relationship to neighbor, and even how he views himself. Jesus' remedy is threefold. First, he must sell all his material possessions. In this way, the man will deconstruct the false value system he has created. Then, he must express love for his neighbor by giving to the poor. Only then will he truly understand God's true purpose for material blessings. Finally, he must render total and unreserved devotion to God. In a spirit of supreme self-possession, Jesus frames devotion to God in terms of following him.

In the end, the man departs crestfallen. He has failed the childlike criterion of the kingdom as set forth earlier (see Mk 10:14-15). A child's heart allows for no conflicting values. In like manner, authentic faith, the kind that is at home in the kingdom, cannot simultaneously endorse the values of this world.



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In light of the uncompromising demands of the kingdom, the disciples are stunned. Their bewilderment opens the door for Jesus to address the heart of the issue. The greatest miracle of all is to escape the relentless, downward tug of this fallen age and to be born again. Salvation only comes from God (Mk 10:24-27).

Shockingly, Jesus raises the stakes even higher. Devotion to God does not only involve forsaking material possessions but also a willingness to leave one's family members. Also, to be counted worthy of the kingdom is to welcome persecution, a point not lost on the early church. The first in this age will be last in the kingdom and those considered least in the eyes of the world will be first in the kingdom (Mk 10:28-31). All of this reflects the heart of the Spirit. The Spirit serves others, graces others, empowers others.

The church is not immune from valuing the things of this age. Even as Jesus speaks of his impending betrayal and crucifixion, two of his disciples (James and John) seek to advance their personal fortunes just before he dies! Basically, they want to secure a coregency with Jesus when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus informs them that they are acting like unredeemed Gentiles. He then reiterates that the greatest in the kingdom will be the servant of all.

Perhaps most annoyingly, worldly power structures can surface in worship contexts as well. The religious leaders of the day made a grand display of their piety, all the while perpetrating injustices on the poor and powerless. Jesus counsels that those who appear to do the least in worship are in fact doing the most for God (Mk 12:38-45).

All these examples convey the same thing. The Spirit of the kingdom is radically opposed to the spirits of this world. All of this is supremely set forth in the paradigm-setting life and death of Jesus. As Mark explains, the stone that the builders rejected as worthless was in reality God's choice cornerstone for his whole plan of salvation (Mk 12:10-11).

—Taken from chapter two, "The Holy Spirit in Mark: Authority and Obedience"



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