

## A HOLY SPIRIT TESTIMONY

I had a very powerful conversion experience under the ministry of Billy Graham way back in 1959. I knew that God was real, and that my whole life had been changed, but I always hungered for more; more understanding, more enlightenment, more power, and more reality. This led me to examine the claims of the healing ministry that was just emerging in the traditional church. Agnes Sanford visited us in Auckland and spoke not only about God's power to heal, but also about the 'person' of the Holy Spirit. Up until then, the Holy Spirit was merely something of an 'oblong blur' as Catherine Marshall expressed it.

I determined to discover just who this Holy Spirit was, so I prayed and asked God 'if the Holy Spirit is a person, I want to know.' Almost immediately I had the most amazing experience of the Holy Spirit. There was a tremendous burning in my chest, almost frightening, as the Holy Spirit manifested Himself to me. The thoughts that went through my mind were not only that the Holy Spirit was real, but that this must have been what John Wesley meant when he recorded in his diary, 'I did feel my heart strangely warmed.' I had thought that just meant he was happy, but now I had had my own 'heart strangely warmed' experience. From that time, the scriptures took on a whole new meaning, and so did the Methodist hymn book. Charles Wesley really knew what it was all about and had written it down. Praise God for those wonderful hymns!

But there was still something missing. I told God that if that was all there was to the Christian life then quite frankly, I was disappointed (there's nothing like being honest with God!). Then I started hearing people talk about their experience of the 'baptism' in the Holy Spirit and their entry into a whole new level of Christian experience. Immediately I began to pray for this experience and after some months of earnest searching, it happened. I was in the theological college chapel and had told the Lord I would not leave the place until I was 'filled' with the Spirit and had spoken in tongues (I even closed the windows in case I couldn't control the volume. I mean, I knew nothing!). God, in His mercy, heard my cry, and very soon I began praying out loud in these strange words and syllables. To prove it wasn't just me I made myself read the pulpit Bible while still praying in this 'language'. I didn't really know what to think, as in reality I felt nothing. Fortunately, Father Dennis Bennett had shared his very similar experience, so I persisted. The next day, as I continued to ponder my experience, I heard the Lord say 'unless you confess with your mouth' (Romans 10:9) and I realised

He was saying that until I accept this by faith and not by feeling it will not be established in my experience. I proceeded to 'witness' to my experience, and almost immediately the emotional side hit me. I was so filled with joy and love and assurance and confidence. I knew that I knew that I knew that God was real and that He loved me with an everlasting love. It truly was 'joy unspeakable and full of glory!'

As I pondered my experience I realised that what had happened to me was really a 'releasing' of the Holy Spirit who was already within, as a result of my earlier experiences. Tongues was for me a releasing of the Spirit and an entry into all the rest of the 'gifts' of the Spirit.' I do believe that a release in tongues is important for those who would desire to enter into the other gifts of the Spirit. It is an 'insult to our intelligence' (intellect) as I told the Lord, but necessary if we are to 'enter into all righteousness.' Paul thanked God that he spoke in tongues 'more than you all' and look where it got him!

Of course the baptism in the Holy Spirit is not the final end to all our problems. The real challenge is to 'walk in the Spirit' continually as Paul challenged us. But believe me, the baptism or fullness of the Holy Spirit sure makes it a lot easier, and fills the Christian life with joy and purpose and power!

May God bless you as you seek Him for all that He has for you through the person and work of the Holy Spirit!