

Acts 4:1-37

Spirit filled confidence

(The confidence of the Apostles can be ours as we learn to walk in the power of the Spirit.)

See theology files #602, #806

Introduction

1. Some critiques of the Christian faith have described it as a fear motivated religion. It pictures God as a harsh judge who sends everyone to hell who does not believe and do the right thing as defined by the church.
2. They note that many Christian churches use guilt and fear to motivate members to give, serve, obey, and not question their faith or religious authority.
3. Solomon noted that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. Paul tells us that the fear of death has kept us in bondage. Jesus said "fear not". Paul added that perfect love casts out fear.
4. How are we to escape a life of fear?

Context

1. The rapid growth of the early church summarized in Acts 2 is explained in more details in ch. 3-4.
2. Here we see the Apostles experiencing the confidence of Christ's Spirit through His filling.
3. We can look at this chapter as a portrait of what the filling of the Spirit looks like even for us today.

A. The manifestation of the Spirit's power will bring a mixed response.

Rejection

"¹ And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple {guard,} and the Sadducees, came upon them, ² being **greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.** ³ And they laid hands on them, and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.

1. The Sadducees were characterized by:
 - They rejected the resurrection doctrine.
 - They were loyal to the Roman government.
 - They associated with the wealthy and wanted to maintain peace to protect their place in society.
 - They followed only the Pentateuch.
2. The Gospel message is a stumbling block today as well.

Reception

4 But many of those who had heard the message **believed**; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”

1. The Apostles could be put in prison but the message and movement would continue.
2. The hearing of the message was a vital part of this new faith. It was not just a demonstration of grace but the declaration of truth that constitutes the good news.

B. Spirit filled witness is not afraid of what men will think.

“5 And it came about on the next day, that their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; 6 and Annas the high priest {was there,} and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high-priestly descent. 7 And when they had placed them in the center, they {began to} inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, **filled with the Holy Spirit**, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by this {name} this man stands here before you in good health. 11 "He is the *stone which was rejected* by you, *the builders*, {but} *which became the very corner* {stone.} 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."

1. Peter realized the controversial nature of what had happened (he was put in prison) and now he was put on the spot.
 - a. He was challenged to give an explanation to those who were “greatly disturbed” by the message that Jesus was raised from the dead.
 - b. Peter’s response was bold, straight forward, and unapologetic.
2. Fear of people’s response to us is a major factor in most folk’s behavior. We develop defensive strategies that are designed to protect us from unfavorable reactions by others.
3. Fear comes from a basic sense of feeling alone. This is the most basic psychological effect of the Fall in the Garden of Eden.
 - a. We all fear that we are or will be alone with no one who understands or cares.
 - b. Other people are the most common candidates for satisfying our need for love so we are courting caring relationships with others through our posture in life.
4. The “filling of the Spirit” brings a sense of not being alone. This liberates us from our fear of isolation and enables us to act as though we are afraid of nothing.

C. Spirit filled witness is not afraid of human authority.

“13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and {began} to recognize them as having been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply. 15 But when they had ordered them to go aside out of the Council, they {began} to confer with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and

we cannot deny it. 17 "But in order that it may not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name." 18 And when they had summoned them, **they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.** 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard. " 21 And **when they had threatened them further**, they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; 22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed."

1. The resistance that Peter experiences comes from fear in the lives of the leaders (rulers, elders, scribes) of the people. It was "on account of the people" that more dramatic measures were not used.
2. Peter feels the tension between competing authorities (Human government & God) and appeals to the human leader's common sense in defending his allegiance to God above human government.
3. It is significant to note that the fears of the leaders trump the expression of glory to God.
4. When governing authorities challenge us we can too quickly yield without asking the question, Is there a higher authority to which I am accountable?

D. The manifestation of the Spirit's power will be reinforced through community.

"23 And when they had been released, they went to their own {companions,} and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard {this,} they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is Thou who *didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them,* 25 who by the Holy Spirit, {through} the mouth of our father David Thy servant, didst say, '*Why did the Gentiles rage, And the peoples devise futile things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord, and against His Christ.*' 27 "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur. 29 "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and **grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence**, 30 while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. " 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and {began} to speak the word of God with boldness.

1. There are two things that we can do to increase our confidence.
 - a. The Apostles pray for confidence in their preaching. Confidence is something that happens to us it is not something we can manufacture.
 - b. The Apostles gather strength and reassurance as they share their war stories with others who share their faith and calling.
2. The importance of community in providing encouragement in ministry is very important. We need to assemble often for a number of reasons.

- a. Teaching and guidance
- b. Worship and prayer
- c. Encouragement in ministry
- d. Support at times of weakness and need
- e. Demonstrations of love

E. The manifestation of the Spirit's power will liberate people to radical displays of caring.

32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and **not one {of them} claimed that anything belonging to him was his own**; but all things were common property to them. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, 35 and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. 36 And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), 37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

1. The filling of the Spirit creates a freedom to live in a connected community where everyone is treated as family.
2. It is important to note that this behavior is not commanded but is expected when the filling of the Spirit is present.
3. We do not bring the filling of the Spirit by holding all things in common. When we are filled with the Spirit we are not afraid to let go of our stuff.

Summary lessons

1. In summary we can note the following characterizations of a spirit of fear. Do you have a spirit of fear? See how much of this characterizes your life.
 - a. There will be a tendency to avoid conflict. I will need constant reassurance that I am right.
 - b. There will be an unhealthy anxiety about how I come across to those around me who I need to love me. I will have a tendency to manipulate their attitude with my actions.
 - c. There will be a desire to find security through alliances with systems of power or authority figures. I will have a tendency to attach myself in an unhealthy way to strong confident leaders.
 - d. There will be a tendency to surround myself with people who reinforce my values and ideas. I will be reluctant to put myself in environments that might challenge my values and ideas.
 - e. There will be a tendency to equate security with possessions. I will have a tendency to hold on to things (money) in an unhealthy way.

2. The filling of the Spirit described here is the charismatic filling that we saw at Pentecost. It is not the kind of filling that can be equated with spiritual maturity of character but rather is the word used to describe the special anointing that only God controls. It can come upon any believer from the young to the old in the faith.

Spirit filling
(PIMPLEMI or charismatic filling)

Flesh
FEAR

- Avoid conflict
- Manipulate others
- Slave to authority
- Codependent relationships
- Clutching things

Spirit
Confidence

- Not afraid of conflict
- Not afraid of men
- Questions authority
- Interdependent relationships
- Loose hold on things

In Ephesians 1:18-19 Paul prays that “the eyes of our heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.”

What does this suggest about how we come to participate in the power of Christ’s Spirit?