

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

TRUST AND OBEY ?

Remember our illustration, how the ministry of the Holy Spirit is like a box of glazed filled donuts? Like the glaze, the Spirit baptizes when you become a believer, engulfing you with God's saving grace. And like the filling, the Spirit expands into every nook and cranny, to empower all you think, say and do.

Jesus said in Luke 11:9-13 "*ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened; how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.*" Receiving the Holy Spirit is a one-time event at the moment of conversion, the baptism of regeneration. The filling of the Spirit is ongoing, as you trust and obey God's Word and live it out by His power within.

Being saved is "*by grace through faith, the gift of God, not of works*" as in Ephesians 2:8-9. Next comes being sanctified, verse 10 "*created in Christ for good works, that we should walk in them.*" Just like eating a donut results in growth, so does the work of the Spirit. The Bible describes it as growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and bearing His fruit. How does this happen? Here are three main ideas.

1- LET GO AND LET GOD. This approach is called "quietism." Philippians 1:6 says "*God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion*" and verse 10 adds "*filled with the fruit of righteousness.*" Taken to an extreme, quietism says the way to become holy is to stop trying, which is fleshly and sinful. Then you'll experience a higher or deeper life. Just contemplate. Rest in God, and He will do the rest.

But quietism can be a heresy, obsession with experience, what God does "to" you. Quietism confuses being saved with being sanctified. To be saved, born again, you let go of everything else and trust only in Jesus. To be sanctified, you proactively grow up into Christ by His power within. John 15 says "*abide in Me and bear much fruit*" and that's active, not passive, as the fruit draws its life force from the root.

Some people complacently take the passive approach. They just go through the motions. Sometimes they participate in church services or Bible studies. But they don't actively nourish their souls with God's word, or actively engage in worship or witness or service to others. They sit and soak and sour. They're not growing in Christ nor helping grow the Body of Christ. It's futility and complacency.

2- GO FIGHT WIN. The opposite of quietism is "activism." This extreme emphasizes action. The apostle Paul uses Olympian language to describe the Christian life. Philippians 1:27 talks about "*striving side by side for the faith*" and in 3:13 he says "*straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God.*" Activism is like a coach ordering, "Go, fight, win!"

Activism says nothing will happen in your Christian life unless you make it happen. Keep busy for God. But theologians say this can be distortion in the other direction. It becomes obsession with performance, or what God does "through" you. It becomes a heresy when it amounts to self-righteousness, trying to obtain holiness through your own efforts. Paul describes this in Philippians 3:7 as rubbish.

Overt obsession with a so-called victorious Christian life or warrior personality can leave you frustrated and impatient. Don't mistake lack of action for obedience, and don't mistake lots of action for obedience. You won't learn to play piano by simply sitting by the keyboard, or simply banging on the keys. So, how?

3- TRUST & OBEY. The Biblical approach merges the best of both extremes. Sanctification is about God changing you. You must stop depending on your flesh, and let go and let God. And stop being a slacker. Trying to do God's work with either no work or just lots of frantic activity won't make you holy.

Philippians 2:12 says "*work out your salvation, for God is at work in you both to will and to work*" and 4:13 says "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" God gives both the want to and the how to. That box of donuts you wanted? You had to go get it. But mis-interpreting scriptures about sanctification leads to frustration or futility. Do nothing and you get nothing, then you come to expect nothing.

In one sense, all believers have all of the Spirit, but He doesn't always have all of you. God says "trust" and "obey." Believe what His Word says. Live it out. All by the power of His Spirit within. The good news - even if your theology is faulty, His inward work in your soul comes outward as He bears His fruit in your life. Intentionally depend on Him and do His Word - by His power. Then you grow, from root to fruit!