

We need a story for the journey today, and the New Testament gives us the story we need. Acts chapter 2:1-4: **When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit enabled them.**

No one has seen the Holy Spirit at any time; but we can see evidence of the Spirit's presence. He leaves His calling card. His calling card that day in Jerusalem was the ability of uneducated Jewish apostles to speak languages they had never spoken, and people understood them. Look at verses 5–8: **Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"** Peter gave them an answer and a good one.

But God had an answer to their question that stunned even Peter. God's answer takes us to Acts 10. The Apostle Peter found himself doing something that was wrong for a good Jew to do: he was in the room with a Gentile, Roman centurion named Cornelius and a roomful of his Gentile friends. Verse 28: **He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for Jews to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"**

Their answer is in the last line of verse 33. **"Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."** That was good enough for Peter, and he proceeded to tell the story of Jesus Christ, culminating in the story of His death on Good Friday and his resurrection from the dead. Then came the last thing Peter and any Jew on the face of the earth expected. Verses 44-46: **while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came upon all who heard the message.** How did they know the Holy Spirit had come upon them? Keep reading. **The circumcised believers (the Jews) who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.** Unclean Gentiles were doing what Jewish apostles had done on the Day of Pentecost.

Peter went back to Jerusalem and told the story of what had happened in Cornelius's house, and people gave him nothing but grief for visiting with Gentiles. Let me show you how Peter changed the minds of his critics. Acts 11:17: **"So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could oppose God!"** Verse 18 gives the decision of the Church about Gentiles. **When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has even granted the Gentiles repentance unto life."**

Speaking in tongues was the evidence that the Holy Spirit had put His seal of approval on Gentiles forevermore. The whole church, Jew and Gentile, now became aware that the Holy Spirit was present and active in its life without respect of persons. They could no more control Him than they could control the wind. Now, I want you to read some verses in Ephesians with new eyes.

### The Spirit in Ephesians

In Ephesians 1:13–14 the apostle wrote this to the new Gentile converts in the church of Ephesus: **you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with the seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.** The apostle called the Spirit **the seal**, as in the seal of approval, and the deposit, as a down payment the guarantees the remainder is coming later. Paul had in mind the events we just read about.

In Ephesians 3:16 Paul prayed that God would **strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.** The Holy Spirit is present and active in this congregation, as He is present and active in all congregations throughout the world. And He can and does act in surprising and powerful ways. We can no more control the Holy Spirit than we can control the wind. But we can hinder His work. We will see that dramatically in our Ephesians passage for today.

A quick reminder about the structure of Ephesians 4-6! Paul organized these last three chapters around three governing ideas: 1) the unity of the Church, 2) the new attitude and lifestyle of the Church, and 3) the spiritual warfare of the Church. The new attitude and lifestyle of the Church emerges as the whole Church follows the grand pattern of Christian living.

**Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.** Christ's vision of the good life involves renunciations, saying No to anything that pushes you away from Christ and His Church. Then, **be made new in the attitude of your minds.** The key to the new attitude is our motivation for change. You'll see that in the rest of Ephesians. The final part of the pattern is **to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.** We don't just say No to evil; we also say Yes to Christ and His kingdom. It's time to get specific.

### Unwelcome Realities

The next 15 verses get very specific. I find them disturbing. Paul was not speaking to the general public. He was talking to the church. You can see what I'm talking about in verse 25: **each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor.** Would Christians not tell each other the truth? Paul thought that was a possibility. He was a realist about human nature, and he knew that being baptized did not automatically eliminate bad behavior. There is a grocery list of bad behavior in Ephesians 4:25-5:7. It would not have surprised the apostle to find any and all of that behavior in the Ephesian church, and it should not surprise us to find any and all of it in BVBC.

Don't let people intimidate you, when they say that the church is full of hypocrites. You should reply by saying, "Of course it is! What did you expect?" and wait for their answer. Does anyone really expect Christians to be flawless? I know, I know! People will point out that we preach with great passion that we ought to live one way, and then we walk out and contradict it by the way we actually live.

I want to say, "How do you want me to preach? Am I to say to you, 'Tell each other the truth Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and lie with a good conscience on Tuesday and Thursday?'" Come on! We have to be consistent in what we say, even when we are inconsistent the way we live. Otherwise, confusion reigns, and we will do great damage.

When I come to worship with you each Sunday, I don't come rejoicing in what a good man I am. I come as a sinner. I need the infinite mercy and patience of our Savior. I want to hear that mercy celebrated in music, read in Scripture, praised in prayer, lifted up in sermons, and reinforced by you, my flawed, fellow believers in Jesus. Yes, God calls us to live a life worthy of our calling by means of a new attitude and a new lifestyle. But that is always a work in progress. We can never forget that.

So, my short answer to the charge of hypocrisy is this: "You are right. We Christians are not always consistent the way we live. I'm sorry for that, but I can't imagine what my life would be without Christ?"

### **The Renewal of Our Minds**

The flaws of Christians are unavoidable, and they are the least interesting things about the church. Paul acknowledges the possibility of bad behavior among Christians, and he charges us to pursue better ways of living. But what takes your breath away are the motives Paul gives us to pursue better ways of living.

You can see what I'm talking about in verse 25: **each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.** Don't treat BVBC as if it were a religious mall. It is a body. Each of us is a member of that body, depending on each other, helping each other, all for one, and one for all. Lying in the Church is like tearing your ACL or having osteo-arthritis in your back.

How about verses 26-27? **"In your anger do not in."** **Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.** Verse 28 continues to inspire us to come at life with a more Godlike way of looking at the world. **He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.** Verse 29 continues to drive us out of ourselves and away from evil: **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.**

And then verse 30 makes its voice heard like thunder from another dimension: **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.** The Holy Spirit, who descended on the Day of Pentecost and put His seal of approval on Gentiles forevermore in the house of Cornelius, is present and active in all congregations throughout the world. He can and does act in surprising and powerful ways. We can no more control the Holy Spirit than we can control the wind. But we can grieve Him. We distress the Spirit, when we contradict what He is at work to build in the Church throughout the world.

Lying to each other, unresolved anger, stealing, and unwholesome talk grieve the Spirit. And what shall we say of verse 31? **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.** Isn't our world full of that? Let it all be far away from every congregation of Christ! Let it be far away from Brandywine Valley Baptist Church! Put all such violence far away from yourself! Make room for the life giving Holy Spirit of God!

Verse 32 and the first 2 verses of chapter 5 reveal what the Spirit is at work to build in the Church throughout the world. Verse 32 draws its power from the heart of the Gospel. **Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** To the people offended by the church is hypocrisy we might

also say, “Our inconsistencies not only offend you, but also hurt us. We offend each other. But we are learning is to forgive each other, because forgiving is the essence of what we believe God has done for us.”

Ephesians 5:1-2 would fit right into the Sermon on the Mount. **Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.** Remember Ephesians 4:24: **put on the new self, created to be like God.**

The work of the Holy Spirit in the Church is an act of creation. He is creating a new humanity that will be like God. And Christ reveals to us all we need to know about the God we have never yet seen. Sacrificial love is His nature. We are never nearer to God when we are kind, compassionate, and forgiving toward each other.