

EASTER COURAGE

letter to M.

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Looking at the book you loaned me, *The Normal Christian Life* by Watchman Nee. A fellow who died in a Chinese prison deserves a lot of respect and he is obviously a very spiritual man and a very intelligent one. But I have to argue with what he says in Chapter Eight about THE HOLY SPIRIT.

On page 88 he says: *Upon what basis, then, was the spirit first given to the Lord Jesus to be poured out upon His people ? It was the fact of His exaltation to heaven.* The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the assembly described in Acts chapter 2 did come after Jesus had ascended to heaven. But Nee is ignoring John 20.21-22, the Easter Sunday text which describes how Jesus *breathed* upon the apostles gathered in the room and said: *Receive the Holy Spirit.* Just before that He says: *As my Father sent me, even so I send you.* WOW ! What can that mean ?

Taken as it stands, it shows that Jesus passed on to them his **mission**, and that he made them spiritual clones of himself to enable them to do it. In John 18.37 Jesus says his **mission** is to ***Bear Witness to the Truth***. Not long afterwards, as we are told in Acts, Stephen, in the power of the Holy Spirit, confronts the Jewish religious establishment, taking up where Jesus left off as it were, and getting killed because of it, just like Jesus. He did behave like a clone of Jesus and he did carry on the **mission**, didn't he ? And *Saul*, who became Saint Paul, was a witness of his martyrdom.

On page 91, Nee says that we know we have the Spirit just as we know our sins are forgiven. *the whole question is one of faith. As soon as we see the Lord Jesus on the Throne, we know the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us. . . . Christ has been crucified, therefore we have been endued with power from on high.* But living the Christian life requires more than a conviction in your head. And I don't think we can take the Holy Spirit for granted unless we are actually living the Christian life.

Courage is the primary gift of the Holy Spirit. As soon as the apostles received the Spirit, they stopped hiding in that room and went out and confronted the Jerusalem crowd.

It appears to me that most nominal Christians do not have the Spirit of Courage--do not have the **Courage to *Bear Witness to the Truth*** as Jesus did. [John 18.37] Most of them are afraid to confront abortion. Most of them went along with racial discrimination for a very long time, mainly because of moral cowardice. They were afraid to oppose it until that became a popular cause, as eventually it did. Most of the Christians of Germany went along with Hitler. By contrast, Franz Jaggerstatter was executed in 1943 for refusing to join the German army. He had the Courage of those early Christians in the Roman Empire who did the same.

It has been my personal experience and my observation of others, that, if you get out there and do something which requires Courage, you find that you do have the Spirit of Courage. Even if you had it before according to some theological theory, it has been activated as it was not when you were still hiding out. When the 5 of you went to the high school last week to ***Bear Witness to the Truth*** about abortion and almost got mobbed for your trouble, you were acting in the Spirit which those first Christians displayed.

You would suppose that John 20.21-22 would be the headline New Testament verse. But you can go to church on Easter Sunday your whole life and never hear a sermon based upon it. A lot of nominal Christians are not up to the challenge of responding to what it says.

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