



The Classroom *of the* **Holy Spirit**

Facilitating the Spirit's Presence
in the Classroom

Paul B. York



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Contents

Introduction.	1
Chapter 1: Leaving the Holy Spirit Out of the Classroom	3
Theological Misconception	3
Spiritual Disobedience	4
Ministry Dynamics Disaster	5
Making a Tool Useful	6
Chapter 2: Facilitating the Classroom of the Spirit.	8
Developing a Classroom of the Spirit	8
Practicing Pentecostal Communication:	
God in the Gaps.	11
Constantly Asking the Application Question	13
Actively Recognizing the Educational Domain	
Where the Spirit Is Focusing.	14
Conclusion.	18

Introduction

One day in a Bible College class in Addis Ababa, a student raised his hand to ask me a question. “Do you know what the people in our churches say about those who have Advanced Theological Education?”

I confessed I did not know, but would like to learn.

“They say that those with Theological Education are like Cooked Grain. It looks just the same as any other grain, but when you plant it in the ground, it doesn’t grow!”

Cooked Grain! How painful that analogy was to me! I felt like I had been caught by one of the parables of Jesus. I wanted to defend all Bible College training everywhere—but sadly, I knew that what the people were saying was sometimes true. How often have people called to serve Christ come away to a Bible College, full of vibrancy in their salvation and hungry to experience the powerful move of the Holy Spirit in ministry, only to be “cooked” by an atmosphere of lifeless intellectualism, career-building maneuvers, and emphasis on achievement by personal effort?

On the other hand, Pentecostal Bible training has often been the place where life was imparted and the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit made more real. Many students and teachers can testify to the sovereign move of God in classes, chapels and campus life. For these students and colleges, the very act of learning about Christ is blessed and leads to enlarged harvest. The grain is still germinating and growing to the glory of God.

Why is there such a difference between classrooms? How can a sincere, Christ-called teacher advance the life in the grain, and avoid “cooking” it?

Introduction

The sad truth is that many ministers see the Holy Spirit's role in Evangelism and Church ministries, but leave Him no room in the college classroom. This article will explore the nature of the problem of leaving the Holy Spirit out of the arena of theological instruction, and will then suggest principles for including the Holy Spirit in the classroom.

Chapter 1:

Leaving the Holy Spirit Out of the Classroom

The Holy Spirit is entreated in prayer, worshiped in the Church, and declared in evangelism, but often ignored in the classroom. This condition is dangerous. Theologically, it is a misconception. Spiritually it is disobedience. In Ministry Dynamics, it is disaster.

Theological Misconception

Biblical theology instructs us clearly that the Holy Spirit is one member of that most sacred mystery, the Holy Trinity. The Spirit is God Himself. The Spirit is a person, not a force. As a person, He communicates with us and His presence can be either cultivated or ignored by us. The choice of whether to recognize the personal presence of the Holy Spirit is always with us. The Spirit's manifest presence is meant to transform every arena of our lives—church, marriage, home, prayer, community, work, leisure, church...and yes, even the academic classroom.

We know from studying pneumatology that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent. However, we have not always pondered what this means to our lives. For the God-called teacher, the doctrine of the Omnipresence of God is a powerful component of their ministry—both in their classroom ministry and in their

out-of-class mentoring relationships with students.

As classroom attendance is being checked, the professor will find that sometimes even the most avid student is not present. The Holy Spirit, however, has perfect attendance! He is on seat for every lecture in Bible, Missions, Theology, English...even Science and Psychology. There is no subject which escapes his interest; no truth of which He is not the Author, and no student whom He is not currently attempting to transform. Are we assisting His work, or impeding it? Have we even noticed that He is there? Perhaps we should leave a space on the class roster for His name, and check it off every day before class begins as a personal reminder.

Spiritual Disobedience

The Apostle Paul was clearly frustrated. Here was one of his precious churches, planted at great sacrifice by the dynamic of the Spirit's power—yet now the Galatians were subsiding into a life of serving God and advancing his kingdom by their own effort. You can almost hear the Apostle's voice rising: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Gal. 3:3)

Make no mistake, to exclude the Holy Spirit in practical ways from the task of training ministers is an act of spiritual disobedience. When we were saved, it was the power of the Spirit who brought us in. When our disciples plant churches, it is the power of the Spirit that will make them grow. How can we bridge the training gap between our past testimony and our future success using any method that leaves the Holy Spirit out? Impossible! Remember, the Pentecostal church does not come bowing to the Temple of Higher Education for regularization and acceptance. Rather, the tool of education must bow down as it humbly comes into service of the Kingdom of God.

Ministry Dynamics Disaster

Our Teacher Jesus Christ ministered on earth for just three and a half short years. He built no buildings, founded no academy, left no constitution and bylaws. Yet his disciples were so transformed by his teaching ministry that they transformed the cultures of the day in one generation. The Sanhedrin, ineffectively trying to silence the Peter and John, were stunned by their courage and biblical preaching. Scripture says “they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

Any model of Christian ministry training based on something other than “being with” Almighty God is a disaster. What the disciples knew about Jesus and the Scripture was important. Their theological truths were tools for God to use. But the power was in the Presence. Their sermon’s intellectual content alone could not save the sinner nor silence the Sanhedrin. It was the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that brought their words to life and gave them moral and spiritual power.

What does this mean for the Bible College? Are we to cancel classes and embark on non-stop prayer meetings? No, we realize that the content of a biblical education is a crucial tool for God to use. However, we must be able to tell the difference between the tool God uses and the dynamic of power by which that tool is used. Let me explain with a metaphor.

A hammer is a tool of value. However, until a mind conceives of a project and a hand grasps the hammer, that valuable hammer is useless in practical matters. In the same way, a biblical education is valuable; but until the Person of the Holy Spirit conceives of a use for the educated person, and until the hand of God takes the life of the educated minister up in his Divine grip, that valuable education is useless in practical

matters as well.

All this means that an intellectual education may be potentially valuable but actually useless until God enters the educational model. We need to let the Holy Spirit come in.

Making a Tool Useful

In my house I have a tool box with many valuable tools. Most of them lie unused day after day. However, there is a screwdriver that I often find useful. It has a strong blade and its handle fits well in my hand. It usually is out in some working location, because I like to take it up and use it. Some of the tools in my box cost more, but none are more valuable than the one I choose to use.

The job of a Pentecostal teacher is not just the job of making *valuable* tools; it is also the job of making those valuable tools *useful* to the Master. A teacher who wants to be effective in spiritual dynamics will come humbly to this understanding. Such a teacher intentionally and earnestly facilitates the access of the Holy Spirit into their classroom and the lives of their students.

Paul was such a teacher: “I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,” (the name ‘*Onesimus*’ means ‘*Useful*’), “who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was *Useless* to you, but now he has become *Useful* both to you and to me.” (Philemon 10-11) Imagine the satisfaction Paul experienced as he watched the Holy Spirit transform the former “Mr. Useless” into “Brother Useful!”

A teacher who is like Paul wants not only to prepare the tool, but also to see the sovereign hand of God reach down, test the quality of the blade, and see if the handle is smooth and pleasing in His grip. Like the blade, the intellect and understanding of the student must be sound. Like the handle, the

character and attitude of the student must be smooth and pleasing to the hand of a personal God.

Much time may go into preparing the handle and the blade. The great event, however, is when God's hand takes up the lives of those we are teaching. What a thrill and fulfillment to see your own student become "Onesimus" to God! What a challenge to help make certain that this divine connection takes place in their lives! We urgently need the help of the omnipresent Holy Spirit to fulfill this powerful calling.

Chapter 2;

Facilitating a Classroom Of the Holy Spirit

All of this may seem true to you as a teacher, and yet you may feel powerless to cause the personal transformation of your students to take place. If this is your frustration, let me salute you! You have come to the important realization that your job is bigger than you are. You need God's help. This is the moment when you can begin to learn how to facilitate the presence of the Holy Spirit in your classroom.

He will have to do the work, but you are the teacher who has the ability to open the door to His presence. I believe that you can make the Holy Spirit welcome to do the impossible, even inside the class and during classroom hours. Some of the steps you will find useful in this pursuit are

- Developing a Classroom of the Spirit,
- Practicing Pentecostal communication theory
- Constantly asking the application question, and
- Actively recognizing the educational domain where the Spirit is focusing.

Developing a Classroom of the Spirit

If everything that happens in my classroom is something

that I can achieve myself, I am not a Pentecostal teacher. I may be a Pentecostal, and I may be teaching, but I am missing the crucial element of Spirit-filled educational ministry. Something must be happening that only God can do. We must have the supernatural in Pentecostal Bible college classrooms!

One of my teaching mentors, Dr. Denny Miller, helped me with this when I was a beginning teacher. Brother Miller took me on a tour of the Bible College where he serves and used the opportunity to pass on his philosophy of the Spirit-filled classroom, a lesson I never forgot!

Every class has a teacher and students interacting on a horizontal level. A good teacher strives to be interesting, and a good student strives to be attentive. If the subject is relevant, useful learning can occur.

For the Pentecostal teacher, however, there is more. A Third Personality is in the classroom, and He is also communicating.

The Holy Spirit can be invited to preside over your classroom affairs. He knows everything the teacher knows, and everything you have not yet learned. He knows everything the students know, and what they do not understand. He knows the best way to open the student's minds and hearts to understanding. He sees everything in the classroom, and He is speaking.

This means that Pentecostal teaching is a very active process. Not only are lines of message and feedback proceeding between Instructor and Student, but messages and feedback also need to be moving between the Instructor and the Holy Spirit! He will tell you what to focus on; when to speed up, when to stay a while longer on a topic. You will sense a spiritual uneasiness if the lesson is not reaching the target. The Word of Wisdom can function through you in the class as your students

struggle to understand and overcome the obstacles to receiving your God-given message. God will often give you a timely illustration that makes the whole thing clear to the students and also serves to motivate their commitment and response. If God gives you this kind of powerful illustration, it is a good idea to write it down in your class notes for future reference.

If you will model vertical communication with the Spirit in class, the students will learn to depend on God in their ministries. If you involve them in giving the Holy Spirit his invitation to preside over the class, the students will begin hearing the voice of God in class as well.

This is why sometimes people come up to you to thank you for preaching or teaching on one topic, when in fact your topic was something different. Your words opened a door, and then the Divine Counselor began speaking to the listener on a related theme. As you taught them with horizontal messages and feedback, the Spirit was teaching them with vertical messages and feedback; a lesson from heaven! The Holy Spirit is a good teacher, and in their gratitude, they have now come to thank you. Really, your role was a facilitator of the Spirit's activity, not the final dispenser of all wisdom.

Every class session should begin with prayer for the Lord's presence and for Unreached People Groups to be converted. Every semester should begin with not only the presentation of a syllabus, but with a joint prayer and declaration that this class shall be a Classroom of the Spirit. Educational pride should be held in check and God's specific daily agenda and glory should be upheld. He is the most important Teacher in the classroom.

Practicing Pentecostal Communication: God in the Gaps

Dr. Del Tarr, a former missionary to Africa, was the

president of the seminary where I studied. Dr. Tarr believes in “knowledge on fire.” He is a master communicator who believes that Pentecostals have an advantage in communication—not only our communication with heaven, but also communication here on earth.¹ This is how it happens.

Communication theory tells us that in every class there is a teacher who knows the subject being taught, and students who are active learners in the process. Some message must pass from teacher to students. However, there has been no learning unless a feedback message returns from the students back to the teacher. This is why you cannot simply play a tape of last year’s lecture. The students are different, their needs are unique, and the teacher has a heavy responsibility to listen well to the verbal and nonverbal messages students are sending back.

I have not taught when I have merely recited what is true; but rather when I have verified that the students have understood what is true and applied it in practical ways. This involves going with my students to their places of ministry and observing them in action as ministers of the Gospel.

Pentecostal communication includes the element of the Holy Spirit, as explained in the last section. However, the Pentecostal communicator faces an academic challenge. How can God speak to you, or through you, if the schedule is inflexible, entirely filled with content, and set in advance?

The secular model leaves no room for God. There is no time to listen to the Holy Spirit in the class hour. There is no acknowledgment that God may speak to us in a unique way today. The lesson plan has no gaps for divine activity.

The Pentecostal model is different! We prepare lessons and outlines with as much diligence as anyone else; however, we then leave “gaps” where God can speak. We allow for time to pursue the topic that the Holy Spirit is highlighting to this

particular class, because we have decided to facilitate the presence of the Spirit in our classes. We note on the outline the places where a spiritual response may occur. When the Spirit asks for an interruption in the lesson plan, we gladly allow it. He knows what needs to be taught and when it is time to go on.

This does not mean that every class turns into a prayer meeting—but some class sessions do. Not every lesson is left unfinished, but some days we leave the lesson plan to pursue higher business. Not every class is a time for extended discussion, but some days the Spirit says to allow the students time to discuss and process the implications of a great truth.

God is in the gaps in the lesson notes and sermon plans of Pentecostal communicators. When our skill ends, His has just begun. The teacher opens the door, and the Master Communicator enters the room. Pentecostal teachers leave gaps for the activity of the Holy Spirit.

If God is silent, we go on with the plans we have diligently and prayerfully prepared. He has approved of them. If God speaks, we respond. God is in the gaps.

Constantly Asking the Application Question

Jesus was an extremely practical person. He understood heavenly mysteries, but then he lived them out so that all could see. He set us an example and reminded us “Now that you *know* these things, you will be blessed if you *do* them.” (John 13:17, emphasis added).

Pentecostal teachers have a special responsibility to steer the discussion of information towards practical application. The Spirit of God is looking for someone to use. He is not primarily trying to educate people, but to transform them. We must learn to constantly ask the Application Question in our

teaching. We must learn to tirelessly ask questions such as these:

- What difference does this make?
- What does this truth mean to the people I am teaching?
- Why is this doctrine important to the daily Christian life?
- What difference does this lesson make to the Church?
- How can this fact be used to reach the lost?
- Why does God care about this? Why should we also care?

Failure to ask the application question leads to the construction of vast intellectual cathedrals that sadly have no doors for the common man. A man can be a learned theologian but remain unsaved if he does not ask the application question. A teacher can recite the tenets of Pneumatology but be unable to lead people into the baptism of the Holy Spirit if he or she does not ask the application question. A Christian couple can counsel other families but lose their own marriage to divorce if they do not ask the application question. A church can be orthodox in doctrine and teaching and yet remain powerless, unloving, and irrelevant to its community if it does not ask the application question.

The Jailer of Philippi heard the testimony of Paul and Silas and listened to their songs in the night. Then God turned the jail into a classroom of the Spirit by shaking its foundations with a violent earthquake! When the jailer saw the character of the apostles as they remained in the open jail, he was shaken to the core of his being and he asked them a searching application

question. The question was not “What should I *believe*?” but rather “what must I *do*?” (Acts 16:30, emphasis added)

Our students and the world around us are asking the same question. Right belief must always be pointed toward right practice. We must be ready to ask the application question, and explain to people what they must do in light of God’s revelation.

Actively Recognizing the Educational Domain Where the Spirit Is Focusing

Sometimes in the classroom I feel an unusual sense that God is not interested just then in what I am saying. I am on point “B” but the Spirit is not there with me. This is not a negative experience, if you realize it is the voice of the Spirit and then respond to it.

We can experience the Holy Spirit’s presence in the classroom if we will listen to his voice. Often what He is trying to tell us is to focus on another domain (practical area) of education at this moment. We have to deal not only with the intellectual (cognitive) educational domain, but also the feeling (emotional) domain, the will (volitional) domain, and the spiritual (supernatural) domain of learning. Failure to develop each domain will result in an imbalanced disciple.

Perhaps you are dealing with an overwhelming truth, such as Redemption. You are zealously trying to fill the students’ minds with all the knowledge of the topic that you have prepared. The demands of the cognitive domain are pressing on you. However, the students are not keeping up. They are not being disrespectful, but the impact of Redemption is washing over their minds, emotions, wills, and spirits, and they simply cannot go on.

This interruption in the cognitive lesson plan is actually a teachable moment. The students’ minds cannot be pressed

further; they are still trying to contain the last truth you shared. However, if instead of focusing on the mind, you move your focus to the emotion, spirit, or will, you will find a productive response. Ask them how the lesson makes them feel (emotional), or tell them your emotions concerning this great truth. Tell them what you sense spiritually (spiritual perception). If the moment is right, give them opportunity for a personal commitment (volitional).

Paul once said “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.” (1 Cor 3:2). The reason they were not ready was not that they were unintelligent, but because their wills, feelings, and spirits had not caught up to their cognitive knowledge. Paul changes domains and deals with their wills and spiritual perceptions in the next breath: “Are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? (will) ...the fire will test the quality of each man’s work” (spiritual perception). (1 Cor. 3:3, 13)

It is not always a rebuke that is needed. Encouragement and exhortation may also apply. In Ephesians, Paul frequently switches domains as the importance of his topic comes over him. “And you also were included with Christ...you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (cognitive truth)...For this reason...I have not stopped giving thanks for you” (emotional domain) “I pray that ...the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of Wisdom” (spiritual domain)...”so that you may know him better” (Eph. 1:13, 16-18). “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (volitional domain) (Eph. 4:1).

One day in Ethiopia my class asked me a very difficult question to test me and see what my response would be. It seems that in one Ethiopian province the only viable cash crop was a type of narcotic drug often abused by unbelievers. The people of

the churches were farmers and lived in dangerous poverty. They had no money, could pay no tithes, and could hardly survive.

Should they be allowed to grow the drug for profit?

Complicating the question was the fact that students of several churches were in the class, and their churches had addressed this problem differently!

I did not immediately know how to answer and I instantly prayed for wisdom. The response from the Lord came back to my heart: “Ask them what they would do in this situation.”

Several of the class leaders responded willingly and explained how the issue had been handled in their churches. One response stood out to me and I explained why I felt this was a wise and biblical response. The lesson plan was not yet over, but I felt compelled to pause and give God a “gap” in which to work. I felt that the issue which had been addressed intellectually had not yet been answered in the emotions and wills of the students.

So, I told the class some things are too important to discuss without prayer. We began to pray and call on God with tears. God’s presence filled the room in an entirely new way, and a great victory was won that day. Not only was a troublesome issue discussed intellectually, but hearts were opened to follow God’s wisdom as well. I also learned that the students’ respect for my teaching had increased because we took time for sincere prayer and the Spirit’s presence. In fact, what we did was to address the emotional and spiritual domains of learning after we had dealt with the intellectual domain. Perhaps the wills of some present were also affected.

Man is a holistic creature and sometimes you must let the Spirit guide you as to which domain to deal with next. Failure to deal with all domains will result in uneven growth. Imagine a man that only exercises one leg. How can he walk

until he learns to balance his strengths and have two strong legs?

Conclusion

If you follow God's leading, you can experience the Classroom of the Holy Spirit. Many times Pentecostal teachers are intimidated by the impressiveness of the academic world. We can find ourselves trading our Pentecostal dynamics for a purely intellectual approach. This is a poor exchange.

I encourage you that Pentecostals are not the worst teachers in the world, but the best! Because our theology and experience makes room for a more complete communication model, we can do more with less by the power of the Spirit. Because we are not afraid of the gaps, we can work creatively there with the Holy Spirit and see amazing results. Because we cannot forget the lost and the needs of the church, we continually ask the application questions that make our teaching relevant and fresh. Because we recognize God's concern with the multiple domains of learning, we can more effectively develop and educate our students.

Establish a Classroom of the Spirit, and you will see people become useful. The church will be disciplined, the world will be reached, and no one will be able to accuse you of producing "cooked grain."

Endnote

1. Del Tarr, "Preaching the Word in the Power of the Spirit: A Cross-Cultural Analysis," in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, eds. Murray Dempster; Byron Klaus, and Douglas Peterson, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 127-133.

Also By the Author

The Biblical Theology of Missions. Springfield, MO: Africa's Hope Discovery Series, date