

## A Different Spirit



Gary Wilkerson October 24, 2011

Numbers 13 contains a list of names every Christian should be familiar with. See if you recognize any of the following: Shammua, Shaphat, Igal, Palti, Gaddiel, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi or Geuel.

Having trouble recognizing them? Don't worry—it would be unusual if you did know these names. They're the spies sent by God to scope out the Promised Land. When I say we ought to be familiar with these names, the failure isn't ours—it's these men's.

The Bible tells us each of these men was a leader in his tribe. They were known as men of outstanding skills, having power and authority, standing out above others. Evidently, they were easy to choose for this kind of mission. So, how did their names fade into oblivion?

I can answer that in two words: Joshua and Caleb. These are the two names we do remember from this episode in Scripture. They alone returned from their mission with “a good report.” The other spies' reports were based on fear; they warned against entering into Canaan because of the fearsome tribes dwelling there. But Joshua and Caleb urged Israel to move on in faith knowing God would prepare the way.

What made Joshua and Caleb act differently from the others? The answer is found in God's words to Moses: “My servant Caleb...has a different spirit and has followed fully” (Numbers 14:24).

I should point out that the overwhelming majority of Israelites were ready to go along with the other ten spies' advice. They were afraid of being slain by powerful enemies in Canaan. How did God respond to this?

The Lord commanded the ten spies and all who agreed with them: “Turn tomorrow and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea” (14:25). In other words, “You've chosen to go back to the wilderness. And with that choice, you refuse to inherit the land I promised you.”

“Except for Caleb...and Joshua... not one shall come into the land where I swore I would make you dwell. But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected” (14:30-31).

There's a clear message here for everyone who follows Jesus. It is this: If we don't seek to be of a “different spirit,” our choice will have an adverse affect on our entire community. Our choice to wander in a wilderness of “moderated faith” doesn't just hurt us but also those around us. Our children are especially at risk. Even though God doesn't charge them with our sins, they are deeply affected by our sinful choices.

What a hard lesson. Yet there are scores of Christians today who are just like those Israelites. Such believers are content to wander in a wilderness of fear-based faith. Their only desire is to blend in with the crowd at church. They tell themselves, “Radical Christianity isn't for me. I just want to be faithful to my faith community and my family. Is that so wrong?”

Numbers 14 addresses this very mindset. God says here in essence, “If I have promised something to you, I will provide a way for you to obtain it. Yet by your own choosing you have refused what I offer. Therefore, you will

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never inherit what I've promised. You're destined to wander in a wilderness you've chosen for yourself."

Clearly, there was something in both Joshua and Caleb that set them apart within their faith community. And that difference was clear in God's eyes. What was it? What did the Lord mean when he said these men were "of a different spirit"? And what does that look like in a believer today?

I want to look first at what a different spirit is not.

The kind of different spirit that God is looking for can't be manufactured by the flesh. It's not an external strength, fortitude, zeal or determination. The ten unknown spies in Israel had all these things—indeed, their tribes had chosen them for these very qualities. Obviously, God was looking for something else.

So what makes a spirit "different" in God's eyes? It is not a "Type A" personality, someone who moves forward boldly according to his own vision and ambition. If this were the case, the ten unknown spies would have gotten the job done. Many Type A Christians today move forward boldly but according to their own vision. That doesn't please God at all.

Samson is an example of this kind of believer. He took the vow of a Nazarite, which called for a strict religious way of life. Samson wouldn't let a razor touch his hair and he refused to drink wine. He devoted all his strength to serving God and battling Israel's enemies with zeal.

Yet Samson tolerated certain fleshly things in himself. He often turned to ungodly ways and casually accepted things that clearly displeased God. (For example, he frequented prostitutes.) In short, Samson had a *form* of a different spirit—but his heart wasn't wholly given to God. He was all too willing to drift away from God's ways and he had no remorse about it.

By contrast, consider Barnabas. There is nothing on the outside that says this gentle man was of a "different spirit." He wasn't the kind of fire-brand we associate with bold faith, like a Joshua or Caleb. On the contrary, Barnabas was a peacemaker. His name meant "encouragement," not "spiritual warrior." Let's be honest: Not many of us would put Barnabas in the same category as a Joshua or Caleb.

Yet Barnabas was very much of a different spirit in God's eyes. How? Consider his vital work with the apostle Paul and their young protégé Mark. Paul was frustrated with Mark, who had left their ministry in the midst of a crucial mission trip. Now Mark wanted to rejoin.

But Paul refused to take him back. He reasoned, "We needed to have an impact on certain cities but Mark's departure left us shorthanded. The gospel was less effective there because of him. There's no way I'm letting him come back."

Barnabas insisted, "Paul, the young man needs another chance. He needs our kindness. This isn't about our success. It's about training Mark to become a faithful servant." In short, he stood up to Paul. And when Paul refused to budge, Barnabas left him, saying, "This isn't right in God's eyes. I'm going with Mark." That is a man of a different spirit.

Here's something else that was different about Barnabas. He was the same man who went to Paul just after his conversion, when everyone was still afraid of Israel's great persecutor. Just weeks before, Paul was breathing deadly threats against the church. But Barnabas had the boldness of the Spirit to trust what others didn't: that God wanted to use Paul mightily. To do so, he put his own life at risk.

Simply put, Barnabas's "different spirit" had nothing to do with being a Type A personality. He illustrates that you can be a quiet, gentle person and still have what Joshua and Caleb had. Indeed, the Holy Spirit longs to fall on every type of believer to make Christ known to the world.

You may protest, "This still doesn't include me. I know God can use quiet people, but my problem is different. I've got alcoholism in my background. I battle depression daily. How can I be of a different spirit when I struggle just to get through the day?"

I remind you: God is no respecter of persons. It doesn't matter to him whether you have serious problems or little problems. His Spirit is waiting to fall on you and to fill you for his purposes. No matter what your state, God has his

eye on you.

Besides, it is God's work—not yours—to make you of a different spirit. When he does so, people will ask, "What has happened to you?" You'll be able to answer, "Jesus happened to me"—and that will please and delight God to no end.

Let me offer an illustration of two young Christian men.

The two young men I want to talk about here are composites of Christians we've all known.

Ben came to Christ as a teenager through a high school ministry. He grew in his faith and brought his friends to Christ. Eventually Ben joined the staff of the ministry and met his future wife there. They got married, had children and served in the children's ministry at the church where they worshiped.

Over time Ben became busier and busier with his job, and his spiritual passion started to diminish. He still prayed, read the Bible, went to church and served in ministry, but little by little he drifted from the spiritual intensity he once had. When this happened Ben began to rationalize it: "That type of zeal was for my youth group days. Being 'on fire for God' just isn't meant for this period of my life. Now I have responsibilities. A husband and father can't afford to have a 'radical faith.' I have to show moderation because others depend on me."

After this, Ben began to be lax about sin, both his own and others'. Again he rationalized, "We all stumble in different ways. At least I don't commit gross sins." Worst of all, he had begun to settle for less in his life with Jesus. The idea of pressing on for more in Christ no longer entered his mind. He had lost the fiery prayer of his younger years: "Lord, I can feel myself drifting. Restore my passion for what pleases you."

Ben also rationalized others' choices to serve God. He saw young people going into ministry and told himself their choices were ultimately self-serving. Ben had no idea his own spiritual compromise had led to jealousy, causing him to judge others erroneously.

Simply put, Ben's life was blessed—but he himself was no longer a blessing. The Bible describes this particular state very clearly: "You are still carnal" (1 Corinthians 3:3). When Paul wrote this, he was addressing veteran Christians who should have been mature in Christ. Instead, they remained as "spiritual babes": "I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not ready, for you are still of the flesh" (3:1-3).

Paul was dealing with true carnality here—gossip, backbiting, envy and strife. And he pointed out in love to the Corinthians how compromise had led them to carnality. At one time these people's hearts had been on fire for God. He was telling them, "I expect a lot from you because I know you are spiritually capable." But those who could have inherited great blessings were still wandering in a wilderness.

Ben was no different from those Christians in Corinth. He was carnal, living according to the mind of flesh, not his understanding of God's Word. Years into his walk with Jesus, Ben was still living on milk rather than meat. He may have attempted to corral his fleshly desires or to muster up some energy to "be more spiritual." But that's not the power of the Spirit—and it cannot accomplish God's purposes. The truth is Ben no longer valued the things of God.

Jay's life stands in stark contrast to Ben's.

Another young man—this one named Jay—came to Christ through the same high school ministry that Ben did. He also became active in the group and led his friends to the Lord. Jay had such a hunger for the Bible that he carried around the biggest one he could find. His constant thought was, "God, your Word is like honey to my lips!"

Jay also met his future wife in a ministry setting, and they too got married and had kids. As Jay's job demanded more of him, he prayed, "Lord, I won't turn away from you, no matter how busy I get. I'll pursue you in the midst of my job. I know you have a purpose in it, even if I'm not able to see it. 'Not by power nor by might but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.'"

The difference between Ben's heart and Jay's heart is all the difference in the world. One is inclined toward his own reason and will, while the other is inclined toward continual trust in God. And if you lined up the two next to each other in church, you would sense the difference in them. How could this be, when they lead virtually the same

lives? Here is the difference: *When you encounter Jay, you immediately know he has been with Jesus.* You could put Jay in a line with 100 other believers and even then he would stand out as having a “different spirit.”

You may know someone like Jay. He’s a strange, unusual mix of soberness and joy. At times he can be difficult to be around. But being in his company gives you a taste of Jesus—and you know it.

Jay can be too hard on himself. His sins grieve him to the point of visible anguish. But deep within his heart he’s growing in freedom from the bondage of flesh. Others tell him to lighten up. But Jay wouldn’t trade his brokenness—and the freedom that comes with it—for all the approval in the world. He doesn’t engage in coarse jesting, and he is offended when you do. He has an intensity concerning the things of God. And he’s always ready to pray at the mention of a need, any-time or anywhere (which can be embarrassing). When he fails—and he fails as often as any other Christian—he immediately turns to the Lord for forgiveness and grace. He is growing in grace, and his countenance shows it.

People like Jay often get the silent treatment at church. They don’t receive a lot of invitations to parties. We see the Jays of the world as strange in a way we don’t want to be. Yet we know there is a depth about them, that they’re attuned to heaven as well as the world around them. We may rationalize, “He’s too heavenly minded to be any earthly good.” But there is no such person. Anyone who is heavenly minded will be more earthly good than anyone else.

You see, the Jays of this world long to do what God desires them to do. It’s what gets them up in the morning. And it’s what sends them to the prayer closet. Anyone who is acquainted with Jay knows he’s going to come out of his prayer time with a vision of Jesus. That vision will lead him through-out the day—and it will accomplish heaven’s purposes.

What exactly sets apart a person with a different spirit?

The difference is revealed in the contrast between Ben and Jay. Ben is afraid of being caught in sin; Jay is afraid of offending God. Ben is afraid of losing the company of his peers; Jay is afraid of grieving God’s Spirit. Ben does what his church requires; Jay longs to do what God desires.

In short, what makes someone of a different spirit is a *consecrated life*. There is no other answer. What does “consecrated” mean? The first part of the word—“con”—means “with” and the second part means “holy.” Consecration is an attachment to holiness. It means being “with” a life outside your own. It is a life filled with the Spirit, which comes from God alone.

My father taught me one of the lasting lessons of my life when he told me as a child, “Gary, you can have as much of Jesus as you want.” I’ve seen this proven again and again. God never holds back his anointing from those who press on in his high calling. It is our response to his offer that determines whether we’ll inherit what he has planned for us.

So, are you living a carnal life? Do you wonder what God desires of you? Your Father wants to make his desires clear to you—if you will take time to know those desires. Is your life full of weakness, lacking vision? He wants to restore you and give you his vision, that you may accomplish the works he has prepared for you.

If you’re living a moderated, compromised life in Jesus, there is but one thing to do. Call on him to renew your sensitivity to his Spirit. He will answer you. He wants you to be of a different spirit!

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