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*The
Christian
and
The Holy
Spirit*

BY GEOFFREY BINGHAM

THE CHRISTIAN

AND

THE HOLY

SPIRIT

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I. THE SPIRIT AND GOD'S PLAN

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.” These words were spoken by Paul, in Romans 8:9. He expresses the mind of the early Church. The real test of the man of faith was that he possessed the Holy Spirit. In another place Paul said, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them for they are spiritually discerned.” (I Cor. 2:14). These two Scriptures are sufficient to show that a man cannot be a Christian without the Holy Spirit.

In these studies we want to look at the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and discover why it is so essential, indeed indispensable that a man have the Holy Spirit indwelling him.

[i] The Person and Work of the Spirit

We should see, first of all that the Holy Spirit is Person. We do not say “a person” for fear He might be thought one amongst many. He is Person in a special way, as indeed is the Father and the Son. In present-day ways of speaking we say personal being has three elements—knowing, willing and feeling. The Spirit has the knowing element for He is the Spirit of truth, and leads into all truth. Isaiah 11:1–2 shows several abilities or attributes and one of them is wisdom. The Spirit has the element of will since the Son, Messiah was said to have followed the Spirit, that is walked according to His will, and all who are sons of God do this, as Romans 8:14 indicates. He also possesses the element of feeling, or as we say, affections. He is the Spirit of love, and His fruit in a person's life includes love, as also joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness; and so on— These are all the affections.

Another word that is often used in regard to personal being is the technical term “discrete.” It must not be confused with the other term “discreet” which we use.

It means “having being which is one’s own,” or having being within oneself. In this sense each member of the Trinity is said to have discreteness. We know the Holy Spirit is a Person in Himself, although the essence of true personal being is to relate to others. This, of course He does, within the Trinity.

When we study the Person of the Spirit in the Bible we find out so many things about Him. That He is very tender is seen from Romans 8:26–27 where we are told that the Spirit is present with us in our weakness, and because He is there He makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. We find His love, His encouragement, and His concern to be very personal and intimate.

We also discover that He has deity. He is called “the Spirit of God”, “of the Lord”, “of Christ”, “of the Son”, “of Jesus.” Moreover He is present in the great work of Creation. Psalm 104:30 says “When Thou sendest forth thy Spirit they are created, and Thou renewest the face of the earth.” The scope of His work in history is vast. As He is present in creation, so also in the lives and works of the patriarchs, in Israel—its leaders, artisans, prophets and judges. Also He stimulates the prophets to prophesy concerning Messiah, the coming Kingdom and Covenant, and the events of the end-time. More than that He is present in the birth, baptism, temptation, ministry, death resurrection and ascension of Christ.

We ought to stop there but we must go on to show that He is present in the activity of the church, helping to work out the present reign of Christ, who is in heaven, upon earth. He will be in the final events at the end time, and without doubt will be powerfully present in eternity.

This thumb-sketch of the Person and work of the Spirit is one prepared so that we can later paint a fuller canvas. It should however convince us that He is Person, and that His great creative powers should be known and experienced by us. Also, knowing He is Person should take away unnecessary fear of Him and prepare us for personal and intimate relationship. It is a

glorious thing to know that we as persons can relate to the Person of the Holy Spirit.

[ii] Man and the Spirit

When God said, “ Let us make man in our own image,” this image must have been after the pattern of the full Godhead. So then it relates to the Spirit Himself . When, in Genesis 2 :7 it is said that God breathed into man the breath of life, this must then have been related to the Person of the Spirit. This is indicated in Ezekiel 37 where the bones and flesh of former slain Israelites become enlivened by the “Breath” or the Spirit. He is often referred to as the Spirit of life (Rom. 8: 2, and II Cor. 3:6) . Whilst we cannot define the way in which man relates to the Spirit we can on the one hand say that without Him man dies, and on the other, where man seeks to live apart from Him he lacks spiritual understanding and life. The principle is made clear from I Corinthians 2:14 where it is said “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness unto him, and he cannot know them for they are spiritually discerned.” Again in Jude 20 it speaks of “worldly divisive people devoid of the Spirit.” In other words, a man who is not submitted to the Spirit, however religious or intellectual or capable he may be cannot be called a spiritual man.

We can, then understand why Jesus said to the Jewish teacher and leader, Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of the . . . Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” In other words, the person devoid of the Holy Spirit cannot even begin to see there is a spiritual kingdom, much less enter into it. By “spiritual kingdom” we do not simply mean an unseen supernatural realm. It is much more than that; it is the total realm of the reign of God. However this kingdom is daily by-passed unseen by countless numbers of human beings who have not been born of the Spirit.

[iii] History, God’s Plan, and the Spirit

We sketched above the work of the Spirit in history. Now, however we have to see that God has deliberately

planned all history. Everything is moving towards a given goal, however much that may not appear to be. In Revelation 10:1–7 we read of the drawing to a close of that plan. The passage concludes: “. . . that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.” This plan is spoken of in other places; for example we are told in Ephesians 1:9–10, “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him things in heaven and things on earth.” In Ephesians 3:9 Paul speaks of “the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” and says that it is realised in Christ (v. 11).

There are stated elements of the plan. For example we are told in Ephesians 1: 3–4 that the plan is to bring God’s elect, His chosen children to be before Him, holy and blameless. In other words, the history of man is not just a “stint” nor even a pleasure jaunt which he is doing on this earth, but God’s purpose being fulfilled. It is in this plan that the Holy Spirit plays an important part. As we have to say, Father, Son and Spirit work together in order to fulfil the plan. Nevertheless each has His own special work which He does. This is rather obvious since One is Father, One is Son, and One is the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

Thus, when we see the Spirit working in creation we are reminded that the Father initiates the creation, the Son mediates it as He creates, and the Spirit, the creative Spirit of life, is the powerful Agent in creation. He also sustains life, so that history may go forward to its goal. When we see this we realise how significant and necessary it is that the Spirit be present in every aspect and facet of the world’s happenings. If we understand this, then we will understand that His work in and through early mankind, prior to the Flood, as also His work following the Flood, in the patriarchs, and then in Israel, in many varied ways, is all part of the fulfilment of the plan.

In Revelation 19:10 we are told that the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. This seems to speak particularly of the last times, but in fact Revelation 10:7 as we saw said the plan had been announced “to His servants the prophets.” In Acts 3:20–21 Peter said, . . . that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.” This phrase “from of old” is sometimes translated “since the world began.” It can also be literally translated, “from eternity.” It is also used, in Luke 1:70 speaking of Christ’s coming. When we read in Luke 24:25 “Oh foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter His glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.”

This seems to be a long explanation concerning the Spirit but it needs to be made. Our point is that you cannot understand the work of the Spirit unless you first understand the plan of God, for what the Spirit does relates to that plan. Sometimes, unfortunately, we think of the Spirit only in relation to ourselves as persons, and not to what He is about in history. We must however, come to this conclusion, that all history is primarily concerned with what Messiah will do and be, for what Messiah will be and do, as Son of God, will concern the fulfilment of the Father’s plan. So before leaving this thought let us see two things:–

- (a) All prophecy in its prediction and fulfilment is concerned with Messiah and His working out of the Father’s plan.
- (b) The Spirit is One with the Father and the Son in that plan. He it is who is in all the predictions and He it is who is concerned to see they are fulfilled, through Messiah.

In pursuit of the latter point let us look at two Scriptures. The first is I Peter 1:10–12. It says, “The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and enquired about this salvation: they enquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of

Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.” The second passage is II Peter 1: 20–21, “ First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

What we mean is that the Spirit, if He comes to a man will come in the context of God’s plan, and for God’s purpose. Part of that purpose is the personal redemption of men and women. The full purpose is the entire working out of God’s plan. This is what the prophets have always been speaking about for God’s plan is in Christ and through Him. That is why the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

[iv] Man’s Redemption and the Holy Spirit

The word “redemption” refers primarily to the price paid for a slave, a prisoner, or a debtor in order that he should be released from his bondage. So Jesus said, “The Son of man has not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.” In other words man’s redemption from the slavery of sin is by Christ. When a man is redeemed he has to go through the experience of the conviction of sin, repentance, faith, receive the gift of forgiveness, be justified and adopted as a son of God. Not one of these things happens apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, although it was Christ who suffered so that man could experience them. Now we shall see the ministry of the Spirit in imparting them.

[a] Man, Sin, and the Spirit

Sin, as we have said, has its own inbuilt deceit. It makes out that it is not really sin, and anyway that it does not matter. It has the power to draw man from God, and into his own world. Left to himself man would not really come to know what sin is. Jesus said “When the Spirit of truth is come He will convince (convict,

rebuke, judge) the world of sin.” This is the first work the Spirit does. At the same time He also convinces of righteousness and judgement.

[b] Man and Repentance

If man does not see what sin is, because he has no genuine spiritual sense, and because Satan has blinded his eyes (II Corinthians 4:4), then he will never repent. However when the Spirit comes and convinces of sin, men repent. This is seen whenever the Gospel is preached with power. We saw that at Caesarea, when the Spirit came on the Gentiles it resulted in them receiving the “gift of repentance unto life.” Repentance is a gift which comes with the Spirit. Peter points this out in Acts 5:31–32. He says that Jesus was raised to the right hand of God. With the pouring out of the Spirit came also the pouring out of repentance and forgiveness of sins.

[c] Man and Faith

No man comes to faith in God the Father, without first coming by faith to Christ, the Son. However no one can really know who Christ is until the Spirit of truth reveals Christ to him. That is why Jesus said, “He will not glorify Himself. He will glorify me. He will take the things which are mine and will show them unto you.” The great revelation of Christ comes through the Holy Spirit.

[d] Man and Forgiveness

Unless the Spirit reveals the Cross, no man comes to forgiveness. Paul said “I was with you in weakness and fear and much trembling, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.” Paul, of himself, was weak, but through the Spirit fully able to lead men to the forgiveness of sin.

[e] Man, and Justification

Romans 8:1–3 tells us that for the man in Christ there is no condemnation because the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” In other words the Holy Spirit so applies in the inward part of a man, the work of the Cross, that he is now free from guilt and condemnation. That is why it is said “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (II Cor. 3:17). Man, by the Spirit knows he is acquitted from death and condemnation.

[f] Man and Regeneration

Again the Scripture is clear. “Except a man be born of the Spirit he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” Paul describes this in Titus 3:4–7. He says, “When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration, and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.” We see that the new birth, or being made anew—from above, is the greatest miracle that happens to man. The Holy Spirit works this internally.

[g] Man and Sonship

We can say that man is not truly man until he is a son of God. That is what God created him to be. Regeneration makes him a child of God, for he is born of God. Other New Testament terms speak of him as a son of God. It is not inferred that to be a child is not to be a son. It is simply that adoption or sonship is a status given immediately on conversion. It is, however, more than a status. It is an actual experience of relating to the Father. In Galatians 4:4–6 Paul says, “In the fulness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem them that are under the law, that we might receive the sonship. And because you are sons God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying ‘Abba! Father!’”

This is a wonderful fact as well as experience. It means we can now relate totally to God. We should understand, of course that we relate so well because the Spirit has led us to the Son who has led us to the Father. He causes us genuinely to know God as Father.

[h] The Spirit and Conversion

We use the term “conversion” to cover the whole complex of conviction of sin, repentance, faith, receiving of forgiveness, justification, new birth and adoption. It really means “turning to God.” The onus is placed on man, the sinner, to turn to God. First he must repent; then turn. This is seen in Acts 3:19 and 28:18–20. We are told in Romans 5:6 that man was too weak and helpless, morally, to do anything about his own salvation. However the Spirit comes to man’s aid. Paul said to the Thessalonians, “Our gospel came to you not in word only, but in much assurance and power of the Holy Spirit.”

It is time for us now to cease simply listing what the Spirit does and see how He effects these things, conviction, repentance, faith, justification, forgiveness and adoption within a person. They constitute a most astounding miracle. Paul recognises that whenever he preaches the Gospel he can utter the form of the truth which converts a man, but he knows he has no power to make his utterance come through convincingly, or convertingly. He has to rely on the Spirit; which, of course, he is glad to do.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of the Gospel being preached which was “attested to us by those who heard Him (Jesus), while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.” The gifts of the holy Spirit may be those referred to in I Corinthians, Chapters 12 and 14, or Ephesians 4:7–11, but the primary fact is that the presence of the Spirit causes the Gospel to be powerful in action. So Peter writes (I Peter 1:1) of “Those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven.” Paul in Romans 15:18–19 speaks of a similar

ministry. He says, “ I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum

I have fully preached the Gospel of Christ.”

Without doubt the New Testament writers mean that when the Holy Spirit is present, the Gospel is preached with power, and with signs and acts which show the Gospel not to be only a teaching, but a sure power which effects what it sets out to do. Through the Spirit God is present in unmistakable actions.

[v] The Work of the Spirit in Man

The Holy Spirit, at Creation—with the Father and the Son — sets about the matter of creating the universe, and forming man in God’s image. Man fell, but not to God’s surprise. This, also was in God’s plan. Before the world began God had planned his redemption. So the Spirit works at the various stages of history which shape events up to the coming of the Messiah, and the redemption of man.

What we must see is that the Spirit has no other aim, than to see the plan of God fulfilled. To speak humanly, He bends up every energy, uses every power and capacity to see that it is accomplished. He does this to the point where He actually participates in the very work of the Son as He the Son, becomes man and ministers amongst men. There is no action of the Son in which He does not lead, or enable, and in which He does not, to some degree participate. He is the Spirit of Truth. Truth not only resides in Him, but it operates through Him, as also it is communicated by Him. Only when we see this do we realise something of the enormous creative, redemptive and restorative powers that this Holy One possesses.

For Him to come to a man; for Him to work first upon a man, and then in a man, is a most glorious thing. Man is so lost, so degraded, so filled with dark cavernous depths of sin, and so much a sink of iniquity that we wonder this Holy One should even venture near

him. Yet He is the Spirit of love, and again we are left breathless at the mighty measure of His love. No one can compute the tremendous thrust and drive of that love. It has to find its way down into man's lost and despairing system; into places of hurt and fear and terror, into realms of indescribable filth and hatred. Yet there is no place into which that Spirit does not go. He undoubtedly so works that man is glad to come to repentance and faith. Man hungers for the forgiveness of sins, and longs for the love of God. The old shattered image is transfigured and renewed by this great Lover of men. New powers of holiness begin to surge through the depths, not only purifying, but renewing the joy, love and peace that is the need of every man born, and every sinner redeemed.

How foolish for man to try to analyze and categorise this Spirit of whom Jesus said, "He moves where He wills." Of whom Paul wrote, "The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." How simple for Him to understand us, and how wonderful for Him to impart to us "things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, things which have never entered the heart of man." (I Cor. 2:9-10). This is the Spirit who effects conversion in a man.

[vi] Man, The Spirit, the Son and the Father

We must now come to our conclusion on this study of the Spirit and redemption by saying that the three-fold work of God is naturally Trinitarian, that is in creation, redemption, and the final restitution or restoration of all things. These three things are essential to man's coming to sonship, growth in sonship, and completion in sonship. However, without the plan of the Father man would be lost. Without the redemption of the Son man could not be restored to the Father. Without the Spirit aiding that work, and bringing man to the Son, there could be no access to the Father.

If we truly see the ministry of the Spirit we will see it as drawing us to the Son, and so to the Father. He is the One who gives us the revelation of both. He is sent, not only to effect salvation in all its aspects, within a

person, but He is sent to indwell that person so that the process may go on. In our next studies we will see this principle in more detail. Now, however, let us come to our conclusion. The question has to be asked; “Have you received the Spirit?” For this there must be a clear answer. On the day of Pentecost the full proclamation and offer was, “Repent, and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Did you receive the Spirit when you believed?

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ; he is none of His.”

You must ask this question of yourself. Then remember the words of our Lord. “ Shall not your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” It was in that same context that He said, “Ask and you shall receive.”

II. THE SPIRIT AND THE BELIEVER

“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His.” This we saw in our previous studies. When one possessed the Spirit, then, and only then did one belong to Christ. This thought is reinforced in many places in the New Testament, and in fact leads us immediately to the fact and experience of receiving the Spirit.

[i] The Reception of the Spirit

Paul asked the Galatians, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Notice he did not ask them simply, “ Did you receive the Spirit?” He would have scorned to do that, for where He preached Christ, and people repented and had faith, they, of course, received the Spirit. In Romans 5:5 Paul says, “The love of God is flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given unto us.” In I Corinthians 2:12 he says, “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God. . .” In II Corinthians 1:22 it is written, “He . . . has put his seal upon us, and given us his Spirit in our hearts.” Of course in addition there are many Scriptures which speak about the Holy Spirit

being promised. For example Jesus says to His disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. “ In Acts 1: 4, . . he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father . . you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit.” Also in Galatians 3:14. “. . . . that we might receive the promised Spirit by faith.”

The **principle** of receiving is spoken clearly on the day of Pentecost when indeed the Spirit was poured out from on high. When Jesus had been shown to be the Messiah, and Israel had been convicted in its heart of the sin of killing the Lord of glory, Peter said, “Repent, and be baptised everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This means that repentance and faith, expressed in baptism are the grounds for receiving the Spirit. Galatians 3:3 indicates that with the preaching of the Cross, was also the promise of the Spirit, for they received the Spirit by faith. In Acts 10:42 and following verses we see that when the Gentiles believed in Messiah, especially for forgiveness, then the Spirit came upon them.

What does need to be said here is that the Cross and the Lordship of Christ were preached in the power of the Spirit, and we suppose that this clear, uncompromising message brought the full acts of repentance and conversion, and with them an equally powerful experience of the Holy Spirit. Paul, we repeat, did not have to ask the Galatians whether they had received the Spirit or not, but whether the reception had been through faith or works. The answer is obviously, “through faith,” and that is the undeniable principle.

[ii] The Sealing of the Spirit

In Ephesians 1:3 Paul says, “In him you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.” (NASB)

Again the matter is clear. You listened to the Gospel and you believed and were at that time sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise. No time-lag is indicated here between believing and being sealed. The question is, "What is meant by sealing?" The answer is partly given in Ephesians 4:30 " . . . the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption." We see that (i) We are sealed in, or into Christ, or into Christ's people as a result of believing. (ii) The Spirit is the Spirit of promise. The promise relates to " that day, " the day of final redemption. Therefore we are sealed unto that day. Sealing was a stamp or brand fixed to an animal or a piece of material to identify it with its owner. In our case we are sealed into the body of Christ's people, and for the day of redemption. Of course, if we do not have the action of the Spirit upon us, as well as His indwelling in us, the matter is hopeless. In Romans 8: 11, Paul says the Spirit who indwells us will raise our bodies on the day of resurrection. No Spirit; no resurrection.

This sealing, though seldom mentioned by believers is in fact a dynamic reminder, and reassurance, that each child of God belongs to Him, and is set for the redemption of the body, in resurrection.

[iii] The Earnest or Guarantee of the Spirit

Directly linked with the seal of the Spirit we read in II Corinthians 1:22, "He has put his seal upon us, and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." The guarantee or earnest was the first down-payment on a purchase, and it obligated the earnest-giver to make payment of the remainder. The Holy Spirit is given to us, to assure us that the fulness of redemption, that is the total glorifying of our beings, is certain. Ephesians 1:14, following on the sealing with the Spirit, adds, "(the Spirit) who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." This is almost the same as "the first fruits of the Spirit" which Paul says we possess (Rom. 8:23). The first fruits were the evidence of the coming harvest. To pick the first fruits

meant that one possessed the entire harvest. We know the work and fruits of the Spirit within us.

[iv] The Spirit and the Hope of Justification

In Galatians 5:5 Paul says, “For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness.” The word “righteousness” can be equally translated “justification”, that is acquittal from accusation and clearance from guilt. The Gospel makes it plain that all who believe in Christ are justified. This the believer knows. He does, however, wait for the day when his clearance will be, as it were, publicly announced. His assurance of justification is often attacked in this world. Men scorn the idea that a man can be free from guilt, and Satan accuses the brethren day and night. (Rev. 12:10). However the Holy Spirit, along with faith, keeps the believer in assurance, that on that day he will be seen to be justified, even as he now knows he is.

The Spirit is with us, always assuring us that we are redeemed, free from the law of sin and death, justified, children of God, and that we will stand before God, that we will be raised. Imagine if this Spirit were not present! How helpless and hopeless we would feel. Let us remember that only he who knows he is free from guilt can tackle the business of living. That is why Paul says, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” He meant that the Spirit continually assures us we are free from the condemnation of law, and that we do not have to revert to law—practices to be right with God. Hence he says in Romans 7:6 “But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.”

That is why we can be told to “Stand fast in the liberty for which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1). Justification is a powerful factor in the life of Christians, and the Spirit is the one Who has made us free from the law of sin and death, and keeps us in that assurance. This is why we should continually walk in the Spirit.

III. THE SPIRIT, THE BELIEVER, AND THE BODY

[i] The Unity of the Spirit

There is a term, “the unity of the Spirit.” Paul uses it in Ephesians 4:3, “Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” He shows us that the unity is already present. All we have to do is to maintain it. This unity was seen clearly on the day of Pentecost when the 3,000 came to Christ. We are told they continued together in the apostles’ doctrine, in prayers, the breaking of bread and the fellowship. Paul speaks of this fellowship in Philippians 2:1. Generally, however it is seen in the nature and structure of the church, the body of Christ.

In I Corinthians 12 Paul explains the delicate balance of the human body with all its parts and members functioning as they are inter-dependent, showing that one cannot work apart from the others. He says the Spirit is the Spirit of one-ness, and that we were all baptised in this Spirit of one-ness, and we were all made to drink of Him. He means we have been nourished upon, and impregnated by the unity-Spirit. Thus we must live in unity.

We must not think of living in unity as a difficult thing, and requiring sweat and tears. We only suffer when we strain away from the unity. The unity itself is a very beautiful thing.

[ii] The Love of the Spirit

The “love of the Spirit” is a term Paul uses in Romans 15:30. In Romans 5:5 he tells us that God’s love has been flooded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He really means that God has shown His love to us through the Cross, and we have experienced it by actually receiving the forgiveness of sins, and being personally reconciled to God. Love has not come to us in the abstract, but very much in the concrete.

The great principle is “We love, because He first loved us.” That is we love God, our fellow-man, and even ourselves—in a good way of course because we have seen God’s love. Now that love which we have

seen and which has caused us to love, is kept fresh and active by the Holy Spirit, who is himself the Spirit of love. Hence Paul says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” (Gal. 5:22).

It would be foolish to talk of fellowship and unity, unless love were present. Love always expresses itself by deeds, operating where, and only where, there is a need. The Body or the Church, we are told, upbuilds itself in love, (Eph. 4:16) as each member contributes towards the local present need by supplying what it has for the common good. No one thinks of anything as his own, whether a material possession, or a spiritual gift. All go into the common pool of caring love.

Another way of saying this is that the Holy Spirit, in assuring us of our right-standing with God and man, and reminding us continually of the love of the Cross, and communicating the present love of the Father and the Son, keeps us in the love of God. Of course, on our side we must respond. We must walk in the Spirit— every step— and love will continue to be a present experience.

[iii] The Spirit, Worship, and Prayer

Worship is the experience and expression of man’s union with God. It is best described by the Scriptural statement, “Deep calleth unto deep,” that is “like calls unto like.” God made man in His own image, and man, we say, has affinity with God. This is truly so when he is restored in that image. Then he desires to worship the Father, as Jesus said, “In Spirit and in truth.” Man’s spirit needs the Spirit of God to aid him in worship. Hence Paul says in Philippians 3:3, “We are those who worship God in (or, by) the Spirit.” No one can assess the benefit and strength that true worship brings to a believer.

Worship is a whole life, really. It is worship in a special situation where others worship, and it is also worship in a personal private situation. Of the latter Jesus said, “Enter into a private room, and there pray to your Father.” Worship is also the whole manner of life we live. We see in I Corinthians 14:26f, that worship

is richest when all present participate according to the gifts God has given them. However when we read Ephesians 5:18–20 and Colossians 3:16–17 we see that all worshippers should be filled with the Spirit; so that their gifts may be exercised in love. Then worship is more pure, more oriented to the Father, more enabled by the Spirit.

Prayer, of course, is part of that worship. We are told to pray “with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, watching thereunto with all perseverance for all saints.” (Eph. 6:18). Jude, too tells us to be “praying in the Spirit, building yourselves up in your most holy faith.” Perhaps, however the most powerful passage on prayer in the Spirit, or the praying of the Spirit is in Romans 8:26–27 where we are told that because of weakness we do not even know what to pray for. In this state the Spirit identifies with us, and intercedes, and God, seeing and hearing the prayer of the Spirit, accepts this as our prayer. Of course prayer demands a larger treatment than we are here giving it, but no prayer is real prayer apart from the Spirit.

We conclude this study, then, by saying that the personal life of each member of the Body of Christ, and the corporate life of all members for community living in love, fellowship, and prayer, springs from the loving and able ministry of the Spirit Himself. That is why we must repeat, “If we live by the Spirit, then let us also walk by the Spirit.” (Galatians 5:25).

IV. THE SPIRIT FOR POWER, MINISTRY, AND SERVICE

We saw in our very first study that God has His plan for all time and eternity. Indeed that they are the one, and we saw that in this plan Father, Son and Spirit work equally, although their functions differ. We also saw that the Spirit came at Pentecost in order to open up this era of the last days, and to lead the people of God in the plan which God is fulfilling for this age. Now we are going to see that the Spirit comes for witness to Jesus. Christ Himself had said, “You shall receive

power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, and all Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth.” In effect this means, “When you have received power you will witness to me amongst Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. The Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached until nothing remains to be done, for then God’s plan will be fulfilled.”

Witness to Jesus as Messiah constitutes a number of things:—(i) The proclamation of the Gospel must be with power, effecting salvation on the one hand and judgement on the other — “Whosoever’s sins you remit, they are remitted, and whosoever’s sins you retain, they are retained.” (ii) The life and conduct of God’s people must be fitting, reflecting the person of Christ. (iii) The very action of Christ as Lord must be worked out through the ministry of His people. We will take the second point first, and deal with it, and then combine the other two points and discuss them.

[i] Christ’s Life Reflected in His People

It goes without saying that the life of the church should be the life of its Lord. When in Exodus 19:5–6 God tells Israel that she is a holy nation, He means she should live after a holy manner. In Leviticus 11:44–45 the command is given, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” Peter, in his first Epistle develops this theme, and uses both passages to exhort Christians to a holy life. He says “ You are a holy nation. “ Also, “ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.”

This theme, is of course throughout all Scripture, and this demand made upon all God’s people. Our particular interest is the ministry of the Spirit, in the believer, bringing holiness. If we carefully read I Peter 1:2 we will see that the phrase “sanctified by the Spirit” shows that there is an act in God’s will which takes place before we come to Christ, and which leads us to Christ. It means that when God plans we shall be part of His holy people, the Spirit sets us apart, then, for that calling. The identical thought is repeated in

II Thessalonians 2:13. Then we read in I Corinthians 6:9–11 that we were washed, sanctified and justified—in that order—in the name of Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. “Sanctified” here means “set apart”, that is included in God’s holy people. Hence we have the term, “saint” or “holy one” which in fact has its origin in Daniel 7 where the Kingdom is given to the saints of the Most High.

There is, however, another aspect of sanctification which we might call “experimental holiness”, that is holiness of living. Paul said that God had not called us unto uncleanness, but to holiness (I Thes. 4:7). “Without holiness”, the writer of Hebrews comments, “no man shall see the Lord.” It is the pure in heart who will see God, for to the pure in heart all things are pure. (Matt. 5:8 Titus 1:15).

Holiness, rightly understood, is continuous conformity with God’s will in active obedience, the heart desiring to effect that obedience. It is the rejection of impurity and uncleanness and a love of the holy. In a world where the mind is continually being attacked by all forms of evil, and seduction, holiness must constitute a battle. Also the body has developed its behaviour patterns, and its natural drives for food, comfort, sex, and security, are all very strong. When a believer tries, in his own strength to defeat these he fails miserably. It must be the Spirit who aids him.

In Romans 8:13 Paul gives excellent advice. He says, “ If you, through the Spirit, do put to death the deeds of the body, you shall live.” He means, “You cannot defeat the natural drives of the body, and so prevent right deeds from progressing into lustful ones. Yet, with the aid of the Spirit you can overcome such drives, and keep them at their right level of operation.”

In Galatians 5:16–25 Paul gives us a brilliant explanation of the battle between the principle of flesh, and the Person of the Holy Spirit. Recognising all we have said above, and knowing that flesh is all that is opposed to God, and wishes to go its own way, Paul says, “This flesh seeks to take advantage of natural drives in man, and make him go into lust. You, however

realise the flesh is striving against the Spirit, so that He may not control the situation. However the Spirit is stronger than the flesh. If you obey the Spirit, and walk according to His leading the flesh will be overcome by the Spirit.” In other words experimental holiness depends upon the operation of the Spirit and our submission to Him.

[ii] Christ’s Life and Plan Outworked Through His People

Holiness is not a goal in itself. It is simply the daily walk of Christ’s people. As we have seen it involves obedience. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14). These sons, like the Son, obey their Father, and help in the outworking of His plan.

We saw that Christ’s people were to receive power with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and this power was to be used to proclaim Christ and witness to Him throughout the world.

When we open the book of Acts we see this to be so. Immediately men are filled with the Holy Spirit they are filled with power, and they proclaim the Word of God with boldness, or confidence. The word “boldness” means they are care-free, assured, not seeking to compromise, and fearing no man. The power of the Spirit, as Jesus prophesied, convicted men of sin and righteousness and judgement. Sometimes they repented and were saved; sometimes they became antagonistic and persecuted the believers. Even then some of them came to Christ. We do not have the opportunity here to pursue this subject in detail, but we are concerned that each one of us recognises the need for power. This needs to be emphasised for much orthodox Christianity today frowns upon the idea of power. It needs to be reminded that one of the signs of the last days is that men will have “a form of godliness but deny the power thereof.”

The power is evidenced at Pentecost when the Jews begin to come to Christ; at Samaria, where the Samaritans are inducted into the Kingdom of God, and at Caesarea where the first Gentiles receive redemption,

and have the Kingdom opened to them. More than this, time and again, persons are filled with the Holy Spirit and face situations of proclaiming the Gospel, persecution and threats, and yet continue preaching, even to the point and experience of martyrdom. On one notable occasion, recorded in Acts 4, when the apostles are persecuted and return to their people, the church bands together to pray, and suddenly the house in which they are praying shakes, and they are all filled with the Spirit, and preach the Word with boldness.

It is evident from the Scriptures we quoted in our second study that the preaching of the Gospel was attended with signs and wonders, and also what have been called “powers”. (Heb. 6:5). These Scriptures are Hebrews 2:4, I Peter 1:12, Romans 15:18–19, I Thessalonians 1:5 and I Corinthians 2:5. Some say that the last two references do not refer to acts and signs, and that in fact when these appeared they were only done by apostles. Stephen and Philip are evident contradictions of this theory. We should accept the fact that the early church possessed great gifts of Christ, brought to them by the Spirit, and they did not hesitate to use them when directed by God. For example we read in Acts 19:11, “God did extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul.” Yet Paul claims in Galatians 3:5 that God goes on doing these miracles amongst His people, as He also goes on supplying the Spirit.

We conclude then, concerning this principle, that Christ, who has given gifts to His church (Eph.4:7–10) indeed has given His own fulness (Eph. 1:21–23) is working out the Father’s plan for the ages, through His people. If this is so we have only one question to ask ourselves, “Are we filled with the Spirit? Are we aglow with the Spirit? Are we walking in the Spirit?” That question we must answer.

Conclusion

In Ephesians 5:18–20 Paul tells his readers to go on being filled with the Spirit. He means, “as you have been filled, so go on being filled.” He would also mean, ‘ If you have ceased to be filled, then come and be filled again, and continue to be in this state.’”

We who are sealed, who have the earnest of the Spirit, and who are enabled by Him in love, unity, fellowship worship and prayer, how shall we have power unless we depend upon Him entirely? He it is who relates us to the Father and the Son, and He it is who causes us to stand up, “an exceeding great army.” to be in the forefront of the battle of the Lord, and to share in the might and victory of the Kingdom.

“Are you filled with the Spirit?”

“Be filled with the Spirit.”

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