

The Work of the Holy Spirit

XVI. - The Grand Finale

“But when the kindness [serviceableness] and the love of man of God our Saviour appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, in order that having been justified by the grace of that One we might become heirs according to the hope [expectation] of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

I give the following as something of a summation of the things that we have been talking about relative to the Holy Spirit. It is most important that we understand in a substantial way the true place and work of the Holy Spirit, and that we avoid the tendency to use the Holy Spirit as something of a “magic wand” to resolve all of the inadequacies and failures of the human person. It is commonly assumed that all personality problems and problems in human relationships can be resolved by some special “anointing” of the Holy Spirit. In this respect the Holy Spirit is seen as something of an elixir to pour out on humans who have not quite handled the Christian experience adequately. It is seen as something of a “second step” to overcome all of the problems not handled in the first step.

It is most important to consider the Holy Spirit as a Person—the third Person of the Trinity—who, being in spirit form, is able to dwell within our spirits and give us the power or energy to identify with God forever, and to become partakers of His divine nature. While the Holy Spirit is a person, He is not separate and apart from the aspects of the Trinity. He is God in Spirit form, entering into us through the channel of Jesus Christ. God is the eternal Spirit, the Author of the energy of the universe; Christ is the form of God brought into relationship to a material world of humans, and through the incarnation recovered them to a position with God, and energized them to that end by the presence of the Holy Spirit within. Jesus was the Spirit of God brought temporarily into human form and effecting the sacrifice necessary for recovery. So the Holy Spirit becomes the vital replacement of Christ on the earth to function within the spirits of humans on the earth.

The Holy Spirit was called by Jesus “Comforter” (*Paraclete*) who said that if He did not go away, the Comforter would not come, but that if He did go away He would send Him to us (John 16:7). Thus, the Holy Spirit is clearly the replacement of the incarnate Christ. On the other hand, it is obvious from the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit was, in reality, the Spirit of Christ. So Christ dwells in us, then, in the function of the Holy Spirit.

And thus, the Holy Spirit becomes a vital part of our whole being and represents a constant flow of energy from God which enables us to maintain our identity with God. And so also the Holy Spirit is an essential part of our lives, and not some added element who gives special powers.

According to the text above, the Holy Spirit comes in an abundant Presence to all who seek salvation. He does not withhold Himself from any who have thus sought Him. It is absurd to think of the Holy Spirit coming only partially and awaiting some special experience to complete His work.

How then does one receive the Holy Spirit? Aren't there special things that we have to do to receive Him?

Absolutely not. According to the text that we have quoted it is “*not according to works that we have done, but according to His mercy...*” Paul makes the same clear statement to the Ephesians—“*By grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast*” (Ephesians 2:8,9). If anything is left to us humans to do, we are all in trouble. The problem with many discussions of the Holy Spirit is that a number of steps are offered as preliminaries to receiving the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit thus becomes a reward for human efforts. But humans are not able to put forth such effort until they have received the Holy Spirit. Why would one need the Holy Spirit if one could accomplish all of the perfections of life apart from Him?

According to the text, God exhibited familial [*phile*] love in serving us with salvation, completely apart from our own effort and provided us richly, with the Holy Spirit, who in turn washed us with regeneration and renewed the Holy Spirit within us (having been lost in the Fall). The purpose, of this was restoring man to God through justification, which made him then the rightful heir to God on the basis of the hope [expectation] of eternal life.

Since we have received the Holy Spirit richly, we can depend on that Spirit to “make us partakers of the divine nature” as well as to bring with Him the gifts outlined in Galatians 5:22. We have sought to clarify in the last number of issues the reality that all who are saved do indeed possess the gifts in their spirits. We have shown that where the confusion comes is in trying to identify these gifts in the flesh. Love, joy and peace, for example, are the portion of every believer, as far as their spirits are concerned. These gifts do not always express themselves in the flesh in the measure we would like them to. We have pointed out that much of the problem lies in factors of personality that vary considerably with each individual. Some personality problems can be modified, but some cannot. The effort to tie the gifts of the Holy Spirit to human personality brings about great disappointment and leaves the individual in a constant state of guilt, and feelings of inadequacy. One is thus robbed of the peace that should come with the recognition that the Spirit of Christ is indeed at work within, in spite of the human failures.

But shouldn't we try to improve ourselves?

Certainly. There are many reasons to improve our attitudes and actions on the earth, especially if it helps us to get along better with others as well as with ourselves. It may make a lot of difference in terms of our peace of mind in the fleshly sense. If one has a temper, for example, one may be in danger of losing one's family or one's job or even one's life. It is thus well to exercise control. However, these personality traits need to be seen not as a spiritual problem, but as a fleshly problem. One who has a temper problem is just as much filled with the Holy Spirit, as one who has the good fortune of being mellow. The common misconception—“If he were a Christian, he would not do that”—is faulty. Salvation has to do with the presence of the Holy Spirit within bringing us new life. As well, one might say, “If he were alive, he wouldn't do that.” The Holy Spirit thus brings life to us and not always the restructuring of our personalities.

It is well to remember that the indication of the presence of the Holy Spirit is in the struggle itself. The Holy Spirit brings a new set of general attitudes, but we are not always able to function as we would like to. If the Holy Spirit were not in us, we would not struggle with these issues. There are many reasons why one ought to improve one's behavior patterns, but doing so in order to promote "spirituality," is not one of them. Any cultist can modify his behavior so as to appear spiritual, but that does not bring eternal life. I suppose one might say that the most well-behaved person in the world is a corpse.

So go in peace. Know that the Holy Spirit is in you, else you would not be reading these words. And know that your life may be a struggle in spite of the presence of the Holy Spirit within. And know too that all of your fellow believers struggle in their own way. Satan, of course, would like to keep all believers off balance. If he can load them with guilt, he is not, of course, assuming that he will bring about repentance, but rather that he will bring about discouragement and will cause people to back away from Christ, as unworthy. But Satan is identified as the accuser of the brethren. *"And I heard a loud voice saying in Heaven, now has come salvation, and strength and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: For the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night"* (Revelation 12:10). If you are being robbed of your peace, be aware of Satan's attack. Peter says *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world"* (I Peter 5:8,9). Never forget that if you did not have the Spirit of Christ within you, you would not be struggling.

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December 1994

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