

The Believer and the Spirit

II. The Empowering of the Spirit

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”
(John 3:5,6).

In discussing the meaning of the Spirit we have observed the carelessness with which the word and the concept and the Person of the Spirit have been bandied about. We must distinguish between the Biblical usage of the term and the general non-Biblical usage. In the non-Biblical sense of the word it refers to a certain vitality of attitude as in “the spirit of 76” and “school spirit” or “community spirit.” In this respect it is akin to the French *elan* and *joie de vivre*. But also in the non-Biblical sense it has been used through the ages to refer to the inner consciousness or ultimate essence of the individual. In this respect it is not precisely identified and turns out to be no more than brain function, at the level of integrated thought. It is akin to the Biblical usage of the word “soul” which has to do with the human mental process, including the intellect, emotions, and motivations. These are all a natural part of brain function.

When one has reached the ultimate in terms of the inner essence of one’s being, one is still within the confines of this human thought process. To function outside these confines requires an external input that goes beyond the inevitable influences of that which makes up each individual’s “mental grid.” The “grid” is made up of the genetic influences as well as the acquired data of knowledge and experience. To go beyond this requires input from some supernatural source, such as a “universal spirit.” This, of course, has been a common speculation in many different cultures over the millennia of human history. Outside of the Bible, this “spirit” belongs in the realm of legendary speculation.

In the so-called “new age” concept, the appeal is not so much to such an external source, but to an internal dynamic that coordinates the human resources and applies them to our life process. This is, of course, also speculation. The unfortunate factor is that such a dynamic coordination can never really get beyond the accumulated data of the natural mental process. Every thought that we think and every assumption that we make is ultimately governed by the data of the “grid pattern.” Unfortunately, the instrument that collects the data affects the data it collects. So we can never be certain that we are coming to ultimate reality. Again, we must observe that one is wandering about in the wilderness of human speculation without compass or guidepost or map.

In the Biblical concept, we have both a human spirit and a Divine Spirit identified. According to the Genesis account, the Spirit of God was breathed into the human clay. The Divine spirit was lost in the Fall and we were left with only a human spirit. The human spirit with which we were left is a prisoner of the human brain function. It does not go beyond the capacities of the natural thought process and is identified in the Scripture as “the old man” or the “natural man” or the “flesh.” In salvation or the “born-again” experience, the Spirit of God occupies the human spirit and becomes the true essence or nature

of our being. The Spirit of God returns to dwell within our spirits as is clearly defined in John 14. *“If a man love Me, he will keep my words and my Father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him”* (John 14:23). According to the Bible, the Holy Spirit is personal. He and Christ are both personalized manifestations of the multiplex eternal Deity which we know as God.

The first verse of Genesis gives us such a concept in the name *Elohim*. *“In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth.” Elohim* is a plural form and reflects a multiple person. The verb form *bara*—created—is singular which indicates that this multiple personality is resident within one Person. The Holy Spirit is a facet of that person. So the Biblical concept of God is not a universal “force,” but a real person. In the form of the Holy Spirit, that Person can and does come to dwell within the individual. If it be wondered how God can be thus involved with billions of individuals, we have only to realize that the human brain is involved with trillions of neurons in the human body with which it is in instant contact.

The power or energy that was involved in the creation of the universe is thus resident within us. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 1—*“And what is the surpassing majesty of His power in us who believe, according to the energy of the might of His strength, with which He energized Christ when He raised Him from the dead . . .”* (v.19, 20). And of course John had earlier declared, *“As many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name”* (John 1:12).

In the manifestation of the Godhead, the eternal Deity manifested Himself in a material creation through a facet of His Being known as Christ. At that point Christ was a Spirit entity who was involved in the creation of the material universe. *“All things came into being through Him and without Him nothing came into being...”* (John 1:3). And in Colossians—*“Who is the image of the invisible God, the first emerging of all creation, because in Him were created all things both in heaven and upon the earth, things visible and invisible . . . all things were created through Him and for His sake and He is before all things and in Him all things stand together”* (Colossians 1:15-17).

Christ, the eternal Spirit, became embodied in Jesus, the earthly manifestation of God. *“The Word (Logos) became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as the only begotten [only emerging] of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

The acceptance of Jesus as the Divine/human manifestation of Christ is vital to our redemption. We humans cannot merely identify with the Spirit of God apart from the recovering sacrifice that atones for sin. In the beginning it was an animal sacrifice offered continually, day by day, to maintain the connection with God. Then came Jesus to be the ultimate sacrifice, making a propitiation for sin forever. All who accept this are included in this eternal atonement. Humans cannot identify with God apart from this sacrifice. Any questions as to why such a redemptive process was required are hypothetical. The Bible is very clear on this subject. To accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God is to accept the redemptive process which it teaches.

Thus, mortal man becomes immortal, and the death that was the consequence of sin is forever vanquished in all who will accept the sacrifice. *“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory”* (I Corinthians 15:54).

The empowerment of God for individuals is fulfilled after the death and resurrection of Jesus. At that time, Christ returns in the presence of the Holy Spirit. *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you . . .”* (Acts 1:8). Jesus made this clear to His disciples as He faced His crucifixion. *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter [Holy Spirit] will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you”* (John 16:7).

Divested in the Fall of the inner presence of the Spirit of God, that presence is restored to us by the coming of the Holy Spirit, who will indwell any who request it. Accepting the reality of sin and the offer of atonement by Christ, one may then ask for the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ and receive it, instantly. There are many religious groups that have a complicated series of steps that one must take in order to be saved, but these steps go beyond the simplicity of the Scripture, as well as its plain teaching that humans have no capacity to do anything for their salvation, but to receive it. Being reborn in the Spirit is like being born originally in the flesh. The baby can do nothing about it. It is not even a matter of human faith. The faith that the Bible speaks of is an energy process from God. It is His faith or energy that is operative. It has nothing to do with our own personal feelings of confidence, but rather with the energy of God flowing through us. Paul speaks of it to the Philippians *“Not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness, of God by faith”* (Philippians 3:9). To the Galatians he said, *“The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). The evidence that the faith of God has been operative in us is that we want His presence within. The very fact that we seek Christ is the evidence that His Spirit is at work within us. If His Spirit were not within us, we would not be interested in Him. Human feelings of trust or confidence are totally unreliable. We go through many mood-swings. But to the one who has been born again, there is always the inner caring about Christ. That is the meaning of the empowerment of the Spirit. Through His Spirit we have become *“partakers of the divine nature”* (II Peter 1:4). We are forever identified with God and His universal energy.

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