

Truth for Today

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The Great Salvation: The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Power is sought after on every hand. Governments seek after it. Politicians search after it all to gain some honour for themselves. Christians need power, but not for their own glory. This power is the Holy Spirit Who is given to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus promised His disciples this power, saying, "And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). This Person came on the day of Pentecost from Christ, ascended and seated on the right hand of God, as promised.

Let us think first of some characteristic features of the Holy Spirit.

He is a Person

It must be remembered that the Holy Spirit is not only a power or influence, He is a Person. Not only is this so, He is God. He is altogether equal with the Father and the Son. The expression, "God the Holy Spirit" often used, is correct, although not found in the Bible. On many occasions the Lord Jesus, particularly in the Gospel of John, referred to the Holy Spirit as HE. One example is, "HE shall glorify me" (John 16:14). The work of redemption upon the cross must be completed before the gift could be given. This work was done once for all by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gift of the Holy Spirit is Permanent

The Lord said of the Holy Spirit, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). This gift of the Spirit would be a great encouragement to the disciples because the Saviour was to leave them and go back to His Father. They had only known Jesus' company for three and a half years. The Person of the Holy Spirit would never leave them. The name "Comforter", used by the Lord Jesus means, "One who would stand alongside of them". Just as the Lord had been their support so, in like manner, the Holy Spirit would be their support.

He is an Indwelling Person

Another feature of the Holy Spirit is that He is an Indwelling Person. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "For He dwelleth with you and shall be in you" (John 14:17). What was said to these few disciples about the presence of the Holy Spirit is equally true of all Christians.

The Holy Spirit is the source of Power

We will now look more closely at the Holy Spirit as the source of power. Basically, this power is the power to live for God. Man by nature has no power to overcome the sinful nature within him. Many are not concerned and feel no need. Others, however, do have a sense of need without the power to overcome. That power is the Holy Spirit. As the heading to our talk today reminds us, it is a gift. If someone listening to this message feels that this speaks to their own particular need at the moment - listen well!

It is a good thing to have a sense of need. The Bible tells us clearly how this need can be met. It is through the Gospel which proclaims forgiveness; this is vital. The Bible makes very clear the terms of the gospel. The Apostle Paul wrote to Christians many centuries ago reminding them of the gospel they had received. In a direct and forceful way, he sets out the terms of the gospel. This is what he wrote, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3- 4). Paul then goes on to enlarge on the truth of Christ's resurrection. There were many witnesses of this event. If there is no resurrection of the Lord Jesus, there is no good news. The question must then be asked, "Have you believed the gospel?"

Receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit

What then of the gift of the Holy Spirit? How do we receive it? There is nothing mystical about it! It is helpful to think about some words written by the Apostle Paul to Christians in Ephesus. They had trusted Christ, and so he says, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). Here is described the reception of the Holy Spirit, not only for power, but as a seal upon our faith, marking us out as God's property. A brief mention has already been made of the day of Pentecost. This was the day, fifty days after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, on which the Holy Spirit came to earth. He came to take up residence in the disciples who were waiting for this event. Acts 2 gives the details. It says, "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting" (verse 2). And it goes on to say, "... And it sat upon each of them" (verse 3). Among those waiting were the eleven disciples who had been with the Lord during His life. They had been attracted to Him. Some, who were disciples of John the Baptist, left their master and followed the Lord. Others were called from their secular occupations and followed Him. They did not do this as the result of any mere natural impulse. There had been a work of God in their hearts that had opened their eyes to see beauty in the Lord Jesus. The leaders among the Jews said, "There is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2).

In spite of this Divine call to follow Him, the disciples never understood Him. They stumbled so often at His words; they did not have the necessary power. This shows the difference between new birth and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But what a difference there was on the day of Pentecost! Those disciples were changed men; they had courage which they did not possess before. As Peter preached, he was able to quote from the Old Testament with such wisdom. The power of his preaching was such that those who listened were convicted of their sin and we read that there were three thousand souls saved. The early chapters of this book of Acts record the onward advance of the gospel; there was no power able to check its progress. They must have been wonderful days; how often our hearts long for this today.

The assurance which the Holy Spirit gives

The preaching of the disciples at Pentecost bore witness to the truth that God had reversed man's verdict. Most of what the apostles said could be condensed into Peter's words "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). So what they preached, they themselves were fully assured of. Just think of the Lord's message to them in John 15:26, "The Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me; And ye also shall bear witness". The important matter here is the witness of the Spirit. One more verse may help, "And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Spirit" (Acts 5:32). It is just the same with us today. When Paul preached to the Thessalonians, he said, "For our gospel came not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Notice the power of the Spirit and much assurance are mentioned together.

It is important to remember that whatever truth has been made known, the Holy Spirit will give us the assurance of it. For instance, in Romans 8:14, Paul writes that all Christians are "children of God". How can we be assured of this? He writes, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16). Certainty and enjoyment are the result.

The practical implications of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit

The practical implications of the gift of the Holy Spirit are found in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. Every believer should be well versed in this foundation epistle. In it, four chapters must be read before any mention of the Holy Spirit is given. In these opening chapters there is a sweeping exposure of the guilt of all mankind. It can be likened to the prisoner in the court of justice, listening to the summing up of the judge, who says "... guilty before God" (Romans 3:19). But through the death of Christ, God can be, "just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). The sinner must have faith in Christ. "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The Christian will very quickly find that he is exposed to trials and testings in his life. There will be tribulation, the need of patience and experience but there is hope. Paul goes on, "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). Here we find the first mention of the Holy Spirit in this epistle. However deeply the Christian is tested, there is the assurance of the love of God because of the indwelling Spirit.

Deliverance from the old nature by the indwelling Spirit

The believer often begins his new life with great joy. He has learned that he has peace with God. He has a new life and there is a desire to put his old life behind him and to please God. However, very soon it becomes evident that the old nature is still very much alive and there is a pull in the opposite direction. Disappointment takes away the initial joy.

Romans 6-8 tell us how God has provided for this problem. In chapter 6, Paul describes the old nature as the “old man”. In chapter 7, it is “sin that dwelleth within”. In chapter 8 it is “the flesh”. In the death of God’s Son upon the cross God has judged the flesh and the “old man”. God has done what we could never do. We must look away from ourselves to Christ, now risen and glorified. Believers now possess a new CONTROL in their lives. He is the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8 we see the way of deliverance from the flesh. Verse 1 is a positive statement; it is the position of every believer. It is true NOW. “There is therefore NOW no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (verse 1). However, we must pay attention to verse 2. Paul writes from his own experience, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”. The word “law” in this verse does not refer to the Ten Commandments. The best illustration of this is the law of gravity. It never alters and moves uniformly. To overcome the law of gravity a power greater than itself is required. It may be easier to understand this word law, if we substitute the word “control”. We need this control in our lives. Before our conversion we were always under the control of sin and death, always being pulled down. Now, there is a new control in operation, great enough to overcome the old control. The believer has not only a new life but a new power, called “The control of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” Instead of pulling down, it moves in an upward direction.

Verse 3 refers to the cross again, “God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh”.

The Christian now has the power to fulfil the righteous requirements of the law, that Old Testament law of Moses - “Fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (verse 4).

Walk in the Spirit

The Bible uses the word ‘walk’ to describe the Christian’s manner of life. It is to be different. In Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, he tells us that this new life can only be lived in the power of the Spirit. He writes, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16). There is an on-going conflict between the flesh and the Spirit. There is to be subjection to Him, which will only be maintained by prayer and reading the Word.

Fruit of the Spirit

If the ‘walk’ is right there will be fruitfulness. Paul writes of this next. He contrasts the “works” of the flesh, and the fruit of the Spirit which is, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). This fruit was seen in perfection in the life of the Lord Jesus when on earth. It should be the ambition of every believer to be like Him. The Holy Spirit is the only power which will achieve this.

Another expression Paul uses in this same letter has to do with sowing. In the old days the sower would have his basket of seed. Some would be scattered to the right, other to the left. This is the figure he uses and so he writes, “For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:8). We all need to be careful that we sow to the Spirit and not to the flesh. Another verse on the same subject says, “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14). We all know our weaknesses; it is important therefore to avoid circumstances where we may fall. Don’t let us grieve the Holy Spirit. He is here to take of the things of Christ and show them to us. Let us not hinder His work within us through inattention and concern with things that are unprofitable.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit

The Apostles, in those early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, are described as being. “Filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). As they witnessed they were certainly emptied of self. These were outstanding times. For us, in our time, Paul writes, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). This is normal Christian experience. If someone is drunk and disorderly they are charged with “being under the influence.” The lesson for us is to be under the influence of the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit stimulates worship

It is important also to notice that the Holy Spirit stimulates worship.

Worship is the response from grateful hearts to the God who has done so much for us. Let us see what the Bible says. Paul, this time writing to the church at Philippi says, “We ... worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

The Holy Spirit promotes hope

In the Letter to the Galatians we read, “For we through the Spirit WAIT for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Galatians 5:5). We do not wait for righteousness. That is ours already because of the death of Christ. We wait for the coming again of the Lord Jesus for all believers.

Christians are well cared for, there is no resource lacking. The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God is readily available at all times.

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