

LESSON 8

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe that Repentance and Faith are sacred duties, and also inseparable graces, wrought in our souls by the regenerating Spirit of God; whereby being deeply convinced of our guilt, danger and helplessness, and of the way of salvation by Christ, we turn to God with unfeigned contrition, confession, and supplication for mercy; at the same time heartily receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King, and relying on Him alone as the only and all sufficient Savior.

I. INTRODUCTION (PG. 30)

In John 3:5-8, Jesus answered, **“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”**

The Holy Spirit is invisible, like the wind. Wind is elusive and mysterious, but it is nonetheless real – we see the effects in trees being uprooted. So it is with the Spirit. He is intangible and invisible, but his work is more powerful than the most ferocious wind. He brings order out of chaos and beauty out of ugliness. He can transform a man ruined by sin into a model of virtue.

Because He is mysterious, we are susceptible to make distortions of His person and His work, so we need to listen carefully to what we hear from Scripture to get it right. In lesson 7 we looked at His person, in this lesson, we will look at His work.

II. THE OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT (PG. 30)

In the Old Testament, God promises to give his people his Spirit. Ezekiel 36:27 says, **“And I [God] will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”** Well, this was a promise that was fulfilled in the New Testament with the new covenant in Christ. Does this mean then that those believers in the Old Testament did not have God’s Spirit within them?

To answer this question, it’s helpful to see that God’s Spirit was active prior to Pentecost. God’s Spirit frequently empowered his people for special service. We need to look no further than how the Spirit empowered the judges, such as Othniel (3:10), Gideon (6:34), and Samson (13:25), to deliver Israel from their oppressors. Other skills were given by the Spirit to God’s people, such as the ability to construct the tabernacle (Ex. 31:3). We also see the Spirit of God in men such as Joshua (Num. 27:18), David (I Sam. 16:13), and Daniel (Dan. 4:8-9). Specific texts point to these men having the Holy Spirit.

The Old Testament may not frequently speak of people who had the Spirit of God, but there are examples that show us that the Spirit was working among his people. So whatever God’s promise in Ezekiel is saying, it’s not saying that there was no activity of the Holy Spirit in Old Testament times. That said, this new promise seems to suggest that there will be a more powerful and fuller work of the Holy Spirit that would characterize the new covenant age. This is what Peter seems to be testifying to in his sermon at Pentecost when he quotes the Old Testament prophet Joel, Acts 2:17-19, **“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”**

And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.”

And so we see that the Holy Spirit was at work in the lives of God’s people in both the Old and New Testaments but that there seems to be a greater manifestation of his power upon the death and resurrection of Christ showing that God was especially at work during that time.

III. THE SPIRIT AT WORK (PG. 30)

We also see the Spirit’s work in a number of areas:

1. As the One who Gives Life (pg. 30)

a. In Creation (pg. 30)

Ps 104:30, "**When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.**" The Spirit gives life.

Job 34:14-15, "**If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust.**" The Spirit sustains life.

b. Regeneration (pg. 30)

Just as it’s the Spirit’s role to give physical life and breath to all of creation, so it’s his role to give spiritual life to men. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be “born again” by the Spirit in John 3:6-7. He also tells his disciples that “the Spirit gives life” in John 6:63.

Just as we did not create our own bodies, we cannot make ourselves “alive in Christ” as we read in Ephesians 2:5. Neither can we make ourselves “new creations.” We cannot give ourselves the gift of saving faith. We cannot give ourselves the new birth that is necessary before we can truly repent and trust in Christ. We cannot add anything to the Spirit’s work in this area. It’s wholly of God’s grace, and we must give Him the glory.

2. As the One Who Purifies (pg. 31)

a. Cleansing from Sin (pg. 31)

When someone becomes a Christian, the Spirit does an initial cleansing work in them, making a decisive break with patterns of sin that were in their life before.

We’ve seen already that when Jesus explained to Nicodemus that we must be born again, He explained we must be “born of water and the Spirit.” In using the imagery of water Jesus was referring back to an Old Testament prophecy in Ezekiel (36:25) to describe how the Spirit of God cleanses us from our sin. God pledged spiritual renewal: 1) cleansing from sin; 2) a new heart of the New Covenant; 3) a new spirit or disposition inclined to worship Him; and 4) His Spirit dwelling in them, enabling them to walk in obedience to His word.

Later on in the New Testament, Paul explains more fully in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "**And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**"

b. Fruit of the Spirit (pg. 31)

Though the sanctification that the Holy Spirit brings about in believers has a definitive, once-for-all aspect to it, we still grow over time as we repent from sin. God's Spirit does bring forth fruit in the lives of those who have been regenerated and are being sanctified.

Galatians 5:22-23 says, "**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**" The Spirit-filled life is one in which the Holy Spirit is at work in us producing these fruits. It's the work of God in our lives that reflects his character and seeks to purify us. And yet recognize that we have a duty to love, a responsibility to be joyful, an obligation to be peaceful and so on and so forth. The Spirit dwells in us and works and empowers us to live up to our responsibilities.

c. Conviction of sin (pg. 31)

Now if anyone in this room is honest, we know that even as Christians, we are not always loving, joyful, patient, and kind. But as we veer off the path of righteousness, the Spirit of God is the one who convicts us. In John 16:8, Jesus says of the Holy Spirit, "**When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.**"

Of course we can grieve the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and harden our hearts to His conviction which leads us to the path of life. Hebrews 3:12-15 warn us, "**Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."**

One implication that comes from this is important not only for our evangelism but also for our relationships with other Christians. We aren't the Holy Spirit. We don't convict people. We can try, but all we end up doing is a shallow guilt trip that manipulates someone. Our job is to lovingly and gently speak truth into the other person's life and then pray (see 2 Tim. 2:24-26, "**And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.**") And we pray because we know this is the work of God. As we respond to the Spirit's conviction whether for the first time in becoming a Christian, or the thousandth time as a Christian, God is the one who grants repentance. And as we say no to sin, as we battle against it and seek to kill it, we find it is "by the Spirit" we put it to death. Rom. 8:13 says, "**For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**"

d. So whose job is it then? (pg. 31)

When we consider topics that deal with the way the Holy Spirit purifies us, we may be tempted to think that we have *no* part in it and that all we do is sit back and let it happen. But while we are passive in some aspects of becoming a Christian (such as regeneration), that is not the case as we seek to follow Jesus. Consider Paul's instruction in Philippians 2:12-13, "**My dear friends...continue to work out**

your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

Whatever tensions there might be, here we see that God’s sovereignty and our responsibility as creatures are completely compatible. Paul does not explain how they are compatible, but he sees no contradiction. As Christians, we are called to obey, to work, to will, and to act, but we are to know that we are doing these things by God’s grace because the Spirit Himself is working in us to do these things.

You will find that this appears throughout Scripture. Consider the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:27 –“**I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.**” If you’re being obedient as a Christian, it’s because God is causing you to be obedient, and yet He does this without doing violence to your will or to your notions of personhood. This indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer does not render us as puppets but changes our very natures and transforms our desires so that we will seek after God and will find joy in obedience to His Word.

We have to make choices to be patient, loving, joyful, faithful, and to have self control; all fruits of the Spirit. That can be hard work – yet, you never see a tree grunting to bear fruit. In the same way, obedience can be challenging, but as we rely on His Spirit, we find “His commands are not burdensome” (1 Jn. 5:3b), and His “yoke is easy and, [His] burden is light.”

***Questions or Comments?**

3. As the One Who Empowers (pg. 31)

a. Jesus

In the Incarnation: Luke 1:35, “**The angel answered, “The *Holy Spirit* will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”**

In His life and ministry: Luke 4:1, “**Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert.”**

b. Spiritual Gifts

Well, not only did the Spirit empower Jesus’ ministry, not only does He produce godly fruit in our lives; He also gives gifts to the people of God for the purpose of building up his church. God’s people are unified together in Christ, but there is also diversity among the members. The Triune God loves diversity and makes this known in his church.

Paul writes to the church in Corinth and in I Corinthians 12:7-11 he says, “**Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.”**

One need only open the book of Acts to see confirmation of this work of the Spirit as the church was being established.

4. As the One who Prays for Us (pg. 31)

Another work of the Spirit in our lives is intercession on our behalf. Romans 8:26-27 says, “...**the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express...the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.**”

What a glorious truth this is. When we don’t know what we should be asking God for in our lives as Christians and when we don’t know what we should be petitioning Him for as a church, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. In fact we know this intuitively when we think about our conversion. Before we were Christians, we did not seek God. We did not know what we needed. But the Spirit intervened for us. He revealed to us, but he also interceded for us.

5. As the One who Gives Assurance (pg. 32)

The Holy Spirit brings us assurance that we belong to God. Romans 8:16 says, “**The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.**” This is the highest form of Christian assurance. You can have no greater assurance that you are a Christian than on those blessed occasions when the Spirit testifies to you that you belong to God. And this is more than an intellectual assurance. The Spirit also gives us an experiential assurance worked in our hearts spiritually and emotionally.

Think of a father and his young son walking along the beach together hand in hand. The son knows he is loved by the father. But let’s say that the father bends down, scoops up his son, and gives him a big hug. The son’s experience of his father’s love in that moment will be particularly assuring. Well, so it is with assurance in our own lives – there are seasons where the Spirit manifests God’s love to us in a special way.

Now, the believer’s subjective experience is not the reason we have assurance of our salvation. That is, we don’t say that we have assurance because we *feel* like we have the Spirit. No, instead we have assurance based on objective realities: God’s promises in Scripture, the finished work of Christ on the cross, the evidence of God’s work within us, etc.

Ephesians 1:13-14, “**In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.**”

Paul writes in Romans 8:7-9, “**For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**”

There may be times in a believer’s life where he is not experientially aware of the Spirit’s presence, but the Lord has promised never to leave us or forsake us, and he will not take His Spirit from His children.

6. As the One who Inspires Scripture

In our first lesson, we learned that Scripture was inspired by God. II Timothy 3:16 says that “**all Scripture is God-breathed,**” and several times in Scripture the Holy Spirit is designated as the “breath”

of God (Job 33:4). It shouldn't surprise us then that it's the Holy Spirit who is behind the inspiration of Scripture.

II Peter 1:21 says, **"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."**

Jesus also made it clear that the Spirit would inspire the apostolic writings. He tells his disciples, **"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you"** (John 14:26).

7. As the One who Teaches (pg. 32)

John 16:13, **"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."**

1 Corinthians 2:12, **"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us."**

Psalms 119:18, **"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."**

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH (PG. 32)

The passages on the gifts of the Holy Spirit read earlier make it clear that the gifts are not given merely for individual edification but for the building up of the church, and this is where we now want to turn our attention. The Holy Spirit works to build up the church.

The Spirit raises up leaders within the church, such as pastors, elders, and deacons, to lead his people. In instructing the elders in the church at Ephesus, Paul says, **"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood"** (Acts 20:28).

The Holy Spirit also actively works to strengthen, unify and encourage the new covenant church, as we see of the early church in Acts 9:31, **"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit; it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord."**

If there are good things happening here at EBC, if we're being led well by those in authority to teach and govern, and if we're being encouraged by the growth that we're seeing, it's not because we are smart or godly, it's because of God and His kindness. We have an obligation to give God the praise for that because He is the source of that strength.

Questions or Comments?

V. BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT (PG. 32)

Now that we have spent time covering the primary work accomplished by the Holy Spirit, we should spend some time talking about certain phrases in Scripture dealing with the Holy Spirit that have been taken to mean different things. The first phrase we want to consider is what it means to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit." This phrase appears in seven New Testament passages.

For example, in Luke 3:16, John the Baptist says, “**I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**” And in Acts 1:5, the Lord says, “**John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.**”

This last verse shows that whatever baptism of the Holy Spirit is, it certainly happened at the day of Pentecost.

Pentecostals take these two verses and come up with the following position: 1) that baptism in the Holy Spirit is ordinarily an event *following* conversion; and 2) that baptism in the Holy Spirit is made evident by the sign of speaking in tongues, because the disciples spoke in tongues at Pentecost.

“According to this teaching Christians receive the Spirit in two stages: first, in a limited manner at their conversion; [and] second, when they obtain ‘the baptism of the Spirit’ and the Spirit is known in his fullness.”

This has the effect of creating three classes of people: 1) Those who are not saved; 2) Those who are saved but have not been baptized with the Holy Spirit (i.e., ordinary believers); and 3) Those who lead spirit filled lives, having been baptized with the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by speaking in tongues (i.e., spirit-filled believers).

This teaching conflicts with I Corinthians 12:13 which says, “**For we were all baptized in or by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.**” As far as Paul is concerned, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” refers to the activity of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the Christian life when we’re given new spiritual life in regeneration and are...given a clear break with the power of love and of sin.” Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not some second experience for only “extra-spiritual” Christians. Besides, we never finally “arrive” while in the body – we’re still being made perfect as Philippians 3:12 says.

VI. BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT (PG. 33)

The second phrase used repeatedly in Scripture that we should help to clarify is the phrase “being filled with the Spirit.” Now this is not to say that there is a uniform experience of the Holy Spirit that is equally discernable at all times. There is a Biblical notion of being filled with the Spirit. Paul tells the Ephesians 5:18 that we should not, “**Get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit.**”

Being filled with the Holy Spirit often results in increased sanctification and increased power for ministry. It’s usually the result of using the means of grace that God has provided for our growth: Prayer, reading our Bibles, assembling together for the preaching of the Word and fellowship. Consider Acts 4:31, “**After they prayed...they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.**”

Thus, it’s appropriate to understand being filled with the Holy Spirit not as a one-time event but as an event that can and should occur over and over again in a Christian’s life. In Acts, Stephen’s life was marked as someone who was full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5). Paul often prayed that the people He ministered to would receive more of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:17).

So how can a Christian, who already has the Holy Spirit, be filled more with the Holy Spirit? Well, to answer this think of a balloon. A balloon is already filled with air, but if we blow more air into it, the balloon becomes more filled. We can be filled with the Holy Spirit and at the same time be able to receive much more of Him and His transforming power. It was only Jesus himself to whom the Father

gave the Spirit without measure. John 3:34 says, **“For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.”**

Attempts to divide Christians into multiple spiritual classifications harm the church. The Roman Catholics, for example, have three categories: ordinary Christians, saints, and priests. This, of course, is a denial of the priesthood of all believers and the fact that all of the New Testament writers refer to all Christians as saints. Other classifications such as “spiritual v. carnal Christians” are likewise inherently suspect. They’re based on bad theology usually teaching that one can be saved without being sanctified and that you can have Christ as your Savior even if you have not made him your Lord.

Well, if baptism in the Holy Spirit generally occurs at conversion as we’ve maintained, how do we explain Jesus telling His disciples that in a few days they would be baptized by the Holy Spirit in the first chapter of Acts right before He ascended into heaven? Surely, they were converted at that point. There can be no doubt about that. And it’s important to note that they had already received the Holy Spirit before Pentecost. In John’s gospel, when Jesus appears to His disciples on the day of His Resurrection, he breathes on them and gives them the Holy Spirit. In John 20:21-22 **“Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”** So what happened at Pentecost?

The best explanation seems to be that the disciples received the new covenant power of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, believers experienced a transition from an old covenant experience of the Holy Spirit to a more powerful, new covenant experience of the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that the new covenant itself began at the day of Pentecost, but that the new covenant experience of the Holy Spirit began at Pentecost because it was there that Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit to begin His new covenant ministry with fullness and power.

There are actually four such outpouring recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. In Acts 2, the Spirit comes to the Jews, in Acts 8 He comes to the Samaritans, in Acts 10 the Gentiles are baptized into the Spirit, and in Acts 19, followers of the John the Baptist receive the Holy Spirit. This marks the strategic steps in the extension of the church” and teaches “that there is but one church into which all converts are baptized by the same Spirit – whether Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, or followers of John. Racially and culturally diverse people are regenerated, cleansed, and baptized by the Spirit into the one spiritual body of Christ.

This helps us understand what happened to the disciples at Pentecost. They received a remarkable new empowering from the Holy Spirit because they were living at the time of the transition between the old covenant work of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant work of the Holy Spirit. Though it was a “second experience” of the Holy Spirit coming after their conversion, it’s not to be taken as a pattern for us to be repeated, because we don’t live at a time of transition in the work of the Holy Spirit. We, today, don’t first become believers with a weaker, old covenant work of the Holy Spirit and wait until some later time to receive a new covenant work of the Holy Spirit. Rather we’re in the same position as those who became Christians in the church at Corinth: when we become Christians, we are all “baptized in one Spirit into one body.”

VII. REVIVAL (PG. 33)

The last thing that we should speak to regarding the Holy Spirit is his work in revival. The Spirit of God was given to the church once for all at Pentecost, but the measure and degree of the Spirit’s activity is not constant. Iain Murray in his book, *Pentecost – Today?*, says that the work of the Spirit can be viewed in two aspects – normal and extraordinary.

This difference is biblically based on what we've already talked about with the filling of the Holy Spirit. Christians didn't receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit permanently because we see this filling being repeated at different times to the same Christians in Scripture (See Acts 2:4 and 4:31 for an example of this). History itself is evidence of an extraordinary work by the Spirit as we read witness accounts when God has poured out His Spirit in abundance, such as during the Great Awakening or the New York revival of 1858.

And these times of revival are clearly found in God's own sovereign will. They aren't orchestrated by man nor conditioned upon the obedience of the church, as though *we* can effectively strum up revivals (I Cor. 3:6-7).

One of the dangers that's often associated with revival is a primacy that many place on having an emotional experience. We must beware of all efforts to kindle mere excitement. Well meaning Christians often confuse such experiences of strong feelings with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and have gone to excesses apart from Scripture. No doubt that God affects our emotions, but this in itself isn't proof that the Holy Spirit is the author of what is happening. In all revivals, it's the Biblical truth of Christ and the gospel that affects the mind, which produces an internal change. Even at Pentecost, the people were "cut to the heart" after Peter's sermon in which he expounded the Scriptures (Acts 2:14-41).

Referring to the historian Iain Murray again, he says that there are six things true revival will bring. These are 1) the restoration of faith in God's Word; 2) the restoration of understanding what a Christian is; 3) the swift advancement of the gospel; 4) a greater moral impact upon communities; 5) a better understanding of the call to the ministry; and 6) a true admiration of God in the public worship of churches.

If we're to grow as Christians we must cry out to God to fill us with His Spirit and we must increasingly submit to the authority of the Spirit in our lives. And we should pray for revival that God would display His glory and power by calling many to Christ, by pouring out His Spirit mightily upon us, and lifting the church up to the heights of glory.

Questions or Comments?