

The Holy Spirit in the Life of Faith

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The Holy Spirit is the Breath of God. All Scripture is God-breathed. We experience the Breath of God upon our life when we listen attentively to the God-breathed Scriptures. Paul speaks, in 2 Timothy 3:15-17, of the relationship between the Breath of God (the Holy Spirit) and the God-breathed Word (the Holy Scriptures) 'the Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

1) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to make us wise

The wisdom which comes from the Spirit and the Word is a special kind of wisdom. It is not the wisdom of this world. It is the wisdom which is bound up with Christ, salvation and faith. Worldly wisdom places great value on intellectual attainment. It emphasizes the importance of getting on in the world. True spiritual wisdom has quite different priorities. As we feed upon God's Word, the Spirit imparts wisdom to us, a wisdom which the world can neither understand nor receive. This is the wisdom of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 2. He describes this wisdom as 'a secret and hidden wisdom' (v.7). This wisdom is no longer hidden from us – 'God has revealed it to us by his Spirit' (v.10). It is hidden only from those who refuse to read and hear with faith the 'words . . . taught by the Spirit' (v.13).

2) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to lead us to Christ

Jesus has given us his promise concerning the Holy Spirit: 'He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (John 16:14). If we are to honour the Holy Spirit in our preaching, we must focus on the cross of Christ – 'we preach Christ crucified' 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 1:17,23; 2:2). We must pray for 'the Spirit's power' (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). How are we to preach Christ crucified? Will it mean preaching only from a select group of 'gospel texts' which refer explicitly to the death of Christ? Preaching Christ and him crucified does not mean that we must nar-

row down the focus of our preaching. What, then, does it mean? It means that we must learn to see Christ in 'all the Scriptures' (Luke 24:27). At the very centre of all of our preaching from God's Word, there must stand Jesus Christ and him crucified. We do not read Christ into places where he is not to be found. Rather, we emphasize that Christ – 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29) – is the central theme of the Scriptures. The Spirit of God points us to Jesus Christ and him crucified. We are to 'keep our eyes on Jesus' (Hebrews 12:2). As we keep our eyes on him, we will find that the Spirit directs our attention to the cross, graciously reminding us that we have been 'redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ' (1 Peter 1:18-19).

3) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to bring us to salvation

Jesus Christ is 'our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1:30). He is our full salvation. From beginning to end, our salvation is in him. There is no room for boasting on our part: 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord' (1 Corinthians 1:31). Our salvation is an 'out of this world' salvation. It is 'out of this world' in its origin. It is a salvation which has its origin in the 'before the ages' love of God, the eternal love of God. It is a salvation which has, as its destiny, 'our glorification' (1 Corinthians 2:7). When Paul speaks of this eternal salvation, this glorious salvation, he emphasizes its 'out of this world' character. He writes, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived . . . God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Corinthians 2:9). This salvation is not only 'out of this world'. It has entered into our experience: 'God has revealed (his salvation) to us through the Spirit' (1 Corinthians 2:10). Salvation has been revealed. It has come 'from above'. Here below, we experience salvation. Here below, we confess, with gladness of heart, that salvation has come to us. Tempted to doubt God's salvation, we must allow the Spirit to bring to our remembrance this salvation which comes 'from above'. Tempted to think that we 'know it all', we must remember that we are still here below. When we speak of God's salvation, we must speak with deep gratitude to God 'for his inexpressible gift' (2 Corinthians 9:15). Our words can never give adequate expression to God's great salvation. Nevertheless, we must not be hesitant in preaching Christ and his salvation. As we preach the gospel of salvation, we must never lose sight of the way in which the Spirit has revealed God's salvation to us. Salvation has not come to us from the depths of our own heart. It has not come to us from some 'great beyond' which makes the whole matter so private that we dare not speak of it. Salvation has come to us through 'words . . . taught by the Spirit',

the words of Holy Scripture. To those who live below, salvation has come 'from above'. When we think of God's salvation, we will come to appreciate its greatness, as we learn to see the greatness of our sin, the greatness of our need. God's salvation corresponds to our need. We have a need for forgiveness.

The gospel speaks to us of 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 5:1). We doubt our ability to keep going in the life of faith. God's Word says to us, 'Do you not know . . . that God's Spirit dwells in you?' (1 Corinthians 3:16). We wonder if there is hope. God assures us that there is hope. He does this by pouring his love 'into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Romans 5:5). Peace with God provides us with the God-given foundation for living the life in the Spirit. Before we are called to the life of discipleship, God says to us, 'There is . . . now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:1). To the believer, God says, 'You have been set free' – set free 'from the law of sin and death', set free 'for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' (Romans 8:2). This freedom is in Christ. The Lord Jesus says to us, 'if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' (John 8:36). His way of setting us free is emphasized in John 8:32 – 'you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'. Our experience of freedom, given to us by Christ through his word of truth, is to be an ongoing experience. This experience of freedom is described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:16-18. It begins 'when a man turns to the Lord' (v.16). Freedom is the gift of God. It is the gift of the Spirit: 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom' (v.17). Our ongoing experience of freedom – freedom from sinfulness, freedom for Christ-likeness – grows 'from one degree of glory to another as we behold the glory of the Lord' (v.18).

4) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to bring us to faith

God's salvation is a gracious salvation. When, however, we join in Paul's affirmation of Ephesians 2:5 – 'by grace you have been saved' – , we must take care to look down to verse 8 where we find the additional words, 'through faith': 'By grace you have been saved through faith'. There must be no hint of a grace which works apart from faith, a grace which makes faith redundant. That would be 'saved by grace without faith' which is very different from 'saved by grace through faith'. In our preaching, we must emphasize both the absolute necessity of grace and the absolute necessity of faith. It is important for us to ask some key questions about faith.

Our first question is this: 'Where does faith come from?' Is there a basic inclination in man towards believing? The parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14) gives us, in the proud Pharisee, a striking picture of man apart from the grace of God. We may not believe that we are absolutely perfect but we will, nonetheless, look around ourselves until we see someone to whom we can point and say, 'Lord, I'm not as bad as him. I'm better than him.' The Holy Spirit has a very definite answer to such sinful pride – 'you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn

yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things' (Romans 2:1). How do we move from being the proud Pharisee, boasting of our own self-righteousness to becoming the humble publican, crying to God for his mercy? There is only one way, the way of the gospel. It is when the 'gospel' comes to us 'not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction' that we are brought to faith (1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:13). Let us not imagine that we can bring others to faith without the power of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us.

When we move on to our second question, 'What is faith?', we find that the parable of the Pharisee and the publican provides us, in the publican, with a simple picture of faith. The contrast between the faith of the publican and the works of the Pharisee is total. The faith of the publican was not a 'work' by which he earned salvation. He received salvation as a gift of God's grace. The faith of the publican points in one direction only: the mercy of God. His prayer, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner' (v.13), points away from the sinner to the Saviour. When we observe Jesus' use of the word, 'justified', in verse 14, our thoughts tend to move towards Paul and the doctrine of justification by faith. The doctrine of justification by faith was Jesus' doctrine before it was Paul's. What does Paul say about justification by faith that is not already said – in essence – by Jesus in this parable? Paul contrasts grace and works in Romans 11:6 – 'if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works'. He contrasts faith and works in Romans 9:32 where he states that Israel did not fulfil the law because 'they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works'. While Paul contrasts both grace and faith with works, he never contrasts grace and faith. They belong together. In our preaching, we must emphasize both the offer of grace and the call to faith.

There is a third question we must ask – 'Why is faith so important?' Again, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican answers this question for us: 'this man went down to his house justified rather than the other' (v.14). It is faith which marks the difference between the man whom God has declared righteous and the man who is robed in the 'filthy rags' of his own religion and morality (Isaiah 64:6). The contrast between Pharisaism and saving faith is brought out well in Luke 7:36-50 where a sinful woman is forgiven as the Pharisees say among themselves, 'Who is this, who even forgives sins?' (v.49). Jesus' words to the woman, in verses 48 and 50, consist of three very short sentences which are packed with gospel truth. 'Your sins are forgiven' – these words were spoken to the woman, but not to the Pharisees. Why? The answer is found in the next sentence – 'Your faith has saved you'. The reason that the woman, and not the Pharisees, heard the words, 'Your sins are forgiven', is clear. She believed. They did not believe. The Lord Jesus then said to the woman, 'Go in peace'.

From these words of peace, we may find our thoughts turning to the Dove of Peace, the Holy Spirit. In giving to the believer the forgiveness of sins, the Lord Jesus also gives the Holy Spirit. In grace and mercy, God gives the Holy Spirit to us: 'regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit', given to us by 'the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour . . . poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour' (Titus 3:4-7). The direct connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit is emphasized in John the Baptist's prophecy:

'He (Jesus Christ) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). In Galatians 3:14, Paul stresses that it is 'in Christ Jesus that we receive the promise of the Spirit through faith'. He goes on to emphasize that 'faith works by love' and speaks also of 'love' as 'the fruit of the Spirit' (5:6,22-23). Love – this is so important. Love – this is the practical context for all of our theological reflection concerning the Holy Spirit in the life of faith.

5) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God for our profit

At our local primary school, I began a lesson on the Old Testament prophets by asking the question, 'What is a prophet?' One boy gave the answer, 'It's when you sell something for more than you bought it for'. We profit from the Scriptures because Scripture is a word of prophecy: 'men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God' (2 Peter 1:21). How do we profit from the prophets? How do we profit from the Scriptures? The answer is given in 2 Timothy 3:16 – 'All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable'. Scripture is profitable because Scripture is God-breathed. The Bible is the Word of God. That's why it profits us. If the Bible is not the Word of God, no amount of our saying, 'I derive profit from reading the Bible' will make it the Word of God. It is not our faith or lack of faith which decides whether or not the Bible is God's Word. Our faith or lack of faith can neither add to nor take away from Paul's great declaration, 'All Scripture is God-breathed'. Our faith rests on a sure foundation: 'How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!' Despite our unbelief, 'the Word of God is not bound' (2 Timothy 2:9). Through his Word, God is able to lift us out of our unbelief and bring us into the assurance of faith. We profit from God's Word when we allow the breath of God, the Holy Spirit, to breathe his God-breathed words into our hearts and lives.

6) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to teach us

Jesus tells us, in John 7:17, that if we want to understand His teaching, we must commit ourselves to doing the will of God. True understanding of Christ and his gospel goes hand in hand with a practical commitment to living as his disciples. If we are not to be 'blown here and there by every wind of teaching', we need to commit ourselves to being 'doers' of God's Word (Ephesians 4:14; James 1:22). There are 'some things', in God's Word, which are 'hard to understand' (2 Peter 3:16). Many demands will be placed on those who take seriously the task of 'correctly handling the Word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15). As we wrestle with the many-sided complexities of gaining an accurate understanding of God's Word, we must never lose sight of 'the simplicity which is in Christ'. We must take great care to maintain our 'sincere and pure devotion to Christ' (2 Corinthians 11:3). In our learning from God's Word and in our teaching God's Word to others, we are to honour the Holy Spirit. He is our Teacher. This is what Jesus says concerning him – 'the Counsellor, 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). As we walk with the Lord, 'letting the Word of Christ dwell in us richly' the Holy Spirit will not fail us. He will not leave us without a word to speak for him (Colossians 3:16; Luke 12:12). In the ministry of God's Word, we are to say only what the Holy Spirit gives to us for the spiritual feeding of the people.

When I was a student, this lesson was impressed upon me by my Minister, George Philip. He pointed out to me that there may be many things which will interest me in the study, but they may not be what God is wanting me to share with the people when I go to the pulpit. I have never forgotten his words. They have provided an important framework for my ministry. Our goal is not to impress people with our great learning. Rather, it is to give them a glimpse of the greatness of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jack Rogers gives us a thought-provoking account of a sermon preached by G.C. Berkouwer while he was in the U.S.A. – 'The worshippers were disappointed by his sermon. They could understand it! They expected the great professor to be profound (i.e. abstract, dull). Instead, he preached a simple gospel sermon of pastoral comfort and affirmation' (*Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, p.141). If our preaching is a disappointment to those who bring with them the wrong expectations, let us not be perturbed. If our preaching is a help to those who are eagerly seeking to be instructed in the Word of God, let us rejoice. We are to help our hearers to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (2 Peter 3:18). This is 'the work' for which we have 'set apart' by 'the Holy Spirit'. This is 'the work' to which we have been 'called' by 'the Holy Spirit' (Acts 13:2).

7) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to reprove us

This ministry of the Spirit – his reproofing ministry – is vitally related to his correcting ministry. These ministries belong together. In His reproofing ministry, the Spirit is concerned with showing us where we have gone wrong. In his correcting ministry, he is concerned with bringing us back to the right way. There will be those who are reproofed by the Spirit of God yet they refuse his correcting ministry. The Word of God speaks very directly of this in Proverbs 29:1 – 'He who is often reproofed, yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken beyond healing.' This, however, is not the intention of the Spirit's reproofing ministry. The Holy Spirit reproofs us so that he might bring us back into the way of holiness. In Hebrews 3:7, we read words which 'the Holy Spirit' speaks to us, 'Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts'.

In Paul's letters, we have two different yet related instructions concerning obedience to the Spirit of God – 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God' (Ephesians 4:30). and 'Do not quench the Spirit' (1 Thessalonians 5:19). While these two instructions may be similar, there is a difference of emphasis. The warning against grieving the Spirit is more related to the Spirit's reproofing ministry while the warning against quenching the Spirit is more related to his correcting ministry. When the Spirit is reproofing us for our wrong living, we

must not grieve him by continuing in the wrong way. When the Spirit is seeking to bring us back into the pathway of holiness, we must not quench him by resisting his holy promptings within us.

In connection with the Spirit's reproof ministry, we must consider Christ's warning against committing the unpardonable sin, 'the blasphemy against the Spirit' (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:10). What is Jesus saying to us here? He is urging us to be responsive to the Spirit in his ministries of reproof and correction. We must not isolate this sin against the Spirit from all other sins of resisting the Spirit. Jesus is pressing home the urgent importance of not grieving the Spirit and not quenching the Spirit. In his ministries of reproof and correction, the Spirit speaks to us as the Spirit of Christ. He speaks as the One concerning whom Jesus says, 'He will bring glory to Me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you' (John 16:14). The Spirit convicts us of our sin with a view to bringing us to the Saviour who graciously forgives our sin.

8)The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to correct us

The Spirit's ministries of reproof and correction belong together. In Ephesians 4:30, we see both reproof and correction. We are warned – 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God'. We must take care that we do not follow a pathway that will lead us further away from the Lord. We are encouraged – 'in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption'. We must not lose sight of the glorious destiny towards which the Lord is leading us. In his ministries of reproof and correction, the Lord does not treat us as strangers. He treats us as children. 'Sent into our hearts' by 'God' the Father, 'the Spirit' enables us to call God our 'Father' (Galatians 4:6). In love, we are reprov'd – 'the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives' (Hebrews 12:6). His goal is our correction. He wants to transform our life, to bring us out of a life dominated by sin and into a life filled with his blessing.

Calling us back from a life that dishonours God – Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery', he invites us to live a life that brings glory to God – 'be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18). The Spirit corrects us as we respond, with the obedience of faith, to the Lord's command – 'be filled with the Spirit'. Paul does not say, 'Fill yourselves with the Spirit'. He says, 'let the Holy Spirit fill you' (N.E.B.). God is calling us to 'the life-long walk in the Spirit' (A.W. Tozer, *The Divine Conquest*, p.110). He is calling us to 'keep on being filled with the Spirit. There can be no room for boasting of our own moral superiority. All the glory belongs to the Lord. We can only look away from ourselves to him and say, 'the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes' (Psalm 118:23). Our testimony must always be this, 'Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your Name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness' (Psalm 115:1).

9) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to train us in righteousness

Whenever a preacher speaks about being baptized with the Spirit or filled with the Spirit, different hearers hear the words in different ways. An important biblical way of thinking about the baptism with the Spirit is indicated in Matthew 3:11-12 and Luke 3:16-17. The baptism with the Spirit is a baptism with 'fire' – 'His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire'. The Spirit led Jesus, after his baptism, into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2). The Spirit leads us into the refining fire where we are trained in righteousness. Training in righteousness is not fun. Compare training in righteousness with the training of a sportsman. It is hard work. There are times when it is difficult to see the goal. When we are going through hard times, we must remember the goal – 'praise and glory and honour at the revelation (or appearing) of Jesus Christ' (1 Peter 1:6-7).

When we are being trained in righteousness, there will be difficulties arising from the fact that loyalty to Christ is not welcome in an unbelieving world. God's Word tells us that 'all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted' (2 Timothy 3:12). When we are being trained in righteousness, we must recognize that God's way for us may not be the way that we would have planned for ourselves. When Paul prayed about his 'thorn in the flesh', his prayer was answered – but not in the way he had hoped. The weakness remained, but in it Paul experienced something greater – the grace of God. God can turn even the most unlikely circumstances into ideal situations for training in righteousness. We can be assured that God knows what he is doing. Over the whole process of training in righteousness, he writes these great words – 'My grace is sufficient for you' (2Corinthians 12:7-9).

10) The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to make the man of God, complete for every good work.

'Man of God' – isn't that a wonderful expression? That's what God calls us! We don't deserve to be called this, but this is what God has made us in Christ. God is determined to make us worthy of this marvellous title which he has so graciously bestowed upon us! We are called to maturity. we are called to mature holiness. We are to mature in our response to God's call to holiness, that call which is at one and the same time both a command and a promise – 'be holy, for I am holy', 'You shall be holy, for I am holy' (Leviticus 11:44; 1 Peter 1:16). God's call to holiness is clear – 'God has not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness'. This call is followed by these solemn words of warning – 'whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you' (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8). Maturity is bound up with holiness. The nearest we have, in Scripture, to a definition of maturity is found in Hebrews 5:14 – 'solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil'. 'Trained by practice to

distinguish good from evil' – what a practical definition of maturity! May God grant a revival of such maturity in our day. We are being 'equipped for every good work' These good works are the works of faith – 'By grace you have been saved through faith . . . to do good works' (Ephesians 2:8-10). These good works are produced in us through the sanctifying

work of the Holy Spirit. As we 'let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly', the Spirit works in us to make us more like our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ – 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Colossians 3:16; Galatians 5:22-23).