

THE HOLY SPIRIT

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on April 29, 1962 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

On one occasion, late in his public ministry, Jesus said to his disciples, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you." (John 16:7). When the disciples heard these words, "It is expedient for you that I go away" their hearts must have been filled with sad forebodings. I can almost imagine the despair that crept upon them as they realized that Jesus was saying that he would be leaving them soon. After all, his visible person had been the symbol of their security. In all of his teaching he had been present. In the working of his miracles he had been physically present. In the facing of opposition Jesus had always been there. They had come to lean upon him and a very large part of their assurance was his constant personal presence. This is brought out in John 11:32, where, in the story of the death of Lazarus, Mary came to Jesus four days after Lazarus had died and said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died." The personal presence of Jesus, she was sure, would have made the difference. Now suddenly Jesus said to his disciples that he would soon be leaving them. Surely this must have brought misgivings and fears to their hearts.

Spirit Presence vs. Sense Presence

You and I, looking on it from the perspective of nineteen centuries, can see the wisdom of it all. Jesus was about to establish a kingdom that would be universal, not tied to one little country. Instead of being present to a very few and absent from a great many, as was necessary as long as he inhabited a human body, his kingdom was to reach all parts of the world and millions of people in the course of time. It was necessary for Jesus to abandon the physical limitations of the earth and go back to heaven in order that he could be universally present wherever his disciples might need him. His spirit presence must take the place of his sense presence.

For a moment imagine what it would be like if Jesus still lived on the earth in bodily form. Imagine that he were in Jerusalem today. Around him there would be an inner circle of a few but the rest of us would feel far away, separated by two great continents and by a wide ocean. How much better it is for Jesus to have left the earth, to reign in heaven as a spirit that is available to all Christians in every corner of the earth at every instant of the day or night. Surely Jesus is with each one of us whenever we need him. Through him we pray to the Father at any moment that we may need to call upon God. Christ, then, understanding all of this, went back to heaven and there reigns in heaven as a spirit being. In his place he sent the Holy Spirit to live among men and carry on the work of the Godhead.

For a few moments let us think together concerning the Holy Spirit, a most important subject in the Christian religion. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit is referred to some eighty-eight times; in the New Testament two hundred sixty-four times. Different names are used--sometimes it is the Holy Spirit, sometimes it is the Spirit of God, sometimes it is just the Spirit. Sometimes he is called the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Advocate. Whatever the name these hundreds of references are to that third part of the Godhead.

Who or What?

We might begin with the question, "Who, or as some people would say, what is the Holy Spirit?" He is a spiritual being, a personality like God and like Christ. Let me read to you from John 14:16, that such is true. Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him: ye know him; for he abideth with you, and shall be in you." Notice the personal pronouns, he and him. Obviously, the Holy Spirit is a personality like God and like Christ. But listen to John 14:26, "But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said unto you." Skipping to John 15:26, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall bear witness of me." Obviously he is a person.

Now let us turn to the final chapter of the book of Luke and read from Luke 24:49. Again Jesus speaks, "And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high." Then continuing to read from Luke, in Acts 1:4-5, "Being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me: for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence." These passages all indicate that the Holy Spirit is a personality.

Now let me say just another word about the Godhead. This is a term used only occasionally in the New Testament--some three times, I believe. It indicates that the Godhead is made up of three separate personalities--God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. Each one of them is a part of the one divine nature or substance. Do you recall in Matt. 28:19-20 the statement in the great commission that indicates all three of these are a part of the Godhead? Remember the words, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit." Another passage that links these three names in such succession as to show that they are all divine is I Cor. 12:4-6, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are

diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God,” Notice, the same Spirit, the same Lord, and the same God. Still another such passage is the final sentence of the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. There, in II Cor. 13:14, we read, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” These three separate and distinct personalities, are one in the deep sense of being divinity. These make up the Godhead.

What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

Allow me to turn again to the passage with which we began our study. In John 16:7 we read, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you,” Then in the following verses we read, “And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. (John 16: 7-13). As you listen to this reading carefully you notice that when the Holy Spirit comes he will tell the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Even more especially, “he shall guide you into all the truth.” In John 15:26 we read a moment ago, “he should bear witness of me,” as Jesus put it. In chapter 14:26 again from the lips of Jesus, “He shall ... bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.” The Holy Spirit, then, is to teach and to guide.

You will recall that in Matthew 10, a passage early in the ministry of Jesus, when the disciples were ready to go out to preach, he Said, “But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.” You see, the Holy Spirit guides those who speak for God. This was true in the Old Testament of the prophets that God selected and it was true of the apostles in the New Testament period.

There are many passages that emphasize the particular theme that the Holy Spirit guided the men who were selected to be God’s special spokesmen, but let me read it to you from I Cor. 2:10-13. The earlier part of this chapter tells about certain things that were taught of God, then we begin the reading, “But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But ye received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that men might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words.” Putting that in our own words, the apostle Paul was simply saying that the things which he and the other apostles preached orally and which they wrote down in these inspired books that make up the Bible were really the speaking and teaching of the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8:14 we have a related teaching, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” II Peter 1:21 in a special way shows that our writings in the Bible are really from the Holy Spirit of God. “For no prophecy ever came by the will of men: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit” What is the work of the Holy Spirit? When Jesus left the earth the Holy Spirit came to guide man to all truth. He guided the apostles in what they spoke and in what they wrote. We have it in the Bible. The Bible is the instrument or the tool which the Holy Spirit uses in telling us God’s will.

The Baptismal Measure

At this point I would like to suggest that there are three manifestations or measures of the Holy Spirit. First of all, there is the baptismal measure. You recall a few moments ago that we read from the final part of Luke that the disciples were to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. Then you remember that we read from Acts 1:4-5 the line, “Ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence.” Now we turn just one leaf in the Bible and read of the events of Pentecost, the day when the church began, “And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire, and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4). Later that day Peter preached a sermon in which he said, “Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he (that is, Christ) hath poured forth this which ye see and hear.” (Acts 2:33). Christ had gone back to heaven and had poured forth the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on Pentecost.

Now this baptismal measure that overwhelmed and covered these disciples was known only one other time in all of the New Testament. In Acts 10 we find Peter at the household of Cornelius preaching about Christ to the first of the Gentiles to be brought to Christ. We read these words, “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the circumcision that believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speaking with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” (Acts 10:44-47). Later, when he returned to Jerusalem, Peter told the other apostles, as we find it in Acts 11:15-16, “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the

Holy Spirit,” These two occasions are the only times that we know of the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit. This measure was poured out on Pentecost, poured out at the household of Cornelius. It came directly from God, covering, overwhelming these few selected people. It never happened again and does not happen now.

The Miracle-Working Measure

The second measure of the Holy Spirit is the miracle working measure. It came through the laying on of the apostle’s hands and enabled the person on whom they laid their hands to work miracles. For example, in Acts 8 we read the story of Philip preaching the gospel in Samaria. People believed, accepted the gospel, were baptized, but they did not receive the miracle working power of the Holy Spirit. I now read Acts 8:14f, “Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John (two of the apostles): who when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: for as yet it was fallen upon none of them: only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they their hands (that is, hands of the apostles) on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” There are many other examples in the New Testament of people receiving the power to work miracles through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Acts 19:2-6 is another passage. In II Tim. 1:6 Paul tells of the gift that Timothy had through the laying on of his own hands. Now this is the second measure of the Holy Spirit. Just as the first, or baptismal measure, ended during New Testament, apostolic times, so also the miracle-working power ended during the time immediately following the apostles. When the last apostle, the last man who could pass on this miracle-working power, had died, and when the last man who had had hands laid upon him by an apostle died, this miracle-working power through men was extinct. You and I, then, will never know the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit. We will never know the miracle-working measure. That was to authenticate the gospel in the first century, to prove that these men were speaking with God’s approval before the time that the New Testament had been written. We do not now need to work miracles; we have the holy scriptures to authenticate our message.

The Ordinary Measure

Do we have any connection with the Holy Spirit today? Oh, yes, the ordinary or normal measure of the Holy Spirit is for all Christians. For example, on Pentecost Peter preached, “Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Yes, everyone who comes to Christ receives the Holy Spirit as a gift. Then in Acts 5:32 we find, “And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” The normal measure of the Holy Spirit does not enable us to work miracles, but it is the very wonderful possession of everyone who comes to Christ, obeying him in all of the commandments, including , baptism. Let me mention to you I Cor. 3:16-17, where the apostle Paul says, “Know ye not that ye are a people of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye.” Then in I Cor. 6:19, he says, “Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify therefore God in your body.” You see, the Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian. The Holy Spirit dwells in us just exactly in the same way that Christ dwells in us. Do you recall the passage in Col. 1:27 that uses the phrase, “Christ in you, the hope of glory”? The Holy Spirit dwells in each of us just as God dwells in each of us. In II Cor. 6 there is a passage which reads, “And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (II Cor. 6:16). Just as God dwells in us the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

The Indwelling - How?

As the gospel of Christ which we received from the Holy Spirit dwells in us this happens. That is not merely the written word dwelling in us, for that would mean that the man who memorized the most scriptures or who read the Bible most often would have the most of the Holy Spirit. As H. Leo Boles says, that would be to confuse a man’s tool with the man himself. The Holy Spirit uses the written word as his tool. What it means is that as you and I meditate upon God’s word, understand the teachings from God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, open our lives unto them. and imbibe the spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

You have known certain people of whom it could be said, “He is a very spiritual man.” It simply means that God’s word, which the Holy Spirit brings, the Bible, has had a very great effect upon that man and he has grown in spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in him to a great degree. He does not work miracles; he has never been baptized with the Holy Spirit, but in the ordinary way the Holy Spirit through God’s word has come into his heart and life. We have known other people of whom it could not be said that they were spiritual. They have become Christians, but then, as Paul warned, they have “grieved the Holy Spirit,” or to put it in other words, they have “quenched the spirit.” They have not read their Bibles much, nor meditated, nor lived close to the Lord, so the Holy Spirit has had only a small hold upon their hearts.

Since the Holy Spirit comes into our lives exclusively through God’s word, the Holy Spirit does not speak to us directly as it did to Paul and to Peter and to others. That was in the long ago; that was a different kind or measure of the Holy Spirit. Since it comes to us through the reading and the studying and the imbibing of God’s word, let us strive to use this means more extensively and more effectively. Let us study until the Holy Spirit has his rightful place in our understanding and in our lives. The Holy Spirit provides for us through the written word everything that we know of God, and of Christ and his church. Surely we need to listen as he teaches. Let

us learn more of the Holy Spirit and let us work that he may dwell in our hearts, just as Christ dwells in our hearts, and just as God dwells in our hearts.