

The Mission of the Holy Spirit

Back in the days when the Christian Church was still very young, an evangelist came to the city of Ephesus, and there he met twelve men who were followers of John the Baptist. These were sincere men who believed devoutly in God the Father, and accepted most of what we would call the Christian code of conduct. What these men believed was true and altogether necessary and good—but *something was lacking*. And as the missionary-evangelist was probing to discover what it was that they lacked, he found that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit! The evangelist was the Apostle Paul, and he gladly brought these men the Gospel in a more complete way—and when they had been instructed carefully, he baptized them into the Christian faith. All this had taken place in the city of Ephesus.

Ephesus was the home of the temple dedicated to Diana (the Phoenecian goddess of lust), the place where thousands of people practiced open prostitution day after day. It was a very wicked city, but twelve sincere men believed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and were empowered with the Holy Spirit—and it is in this city that we find one of the strong churches of New Testament times. The primary cause for the deadness and indifference in our churches today is due to the fact that the average church member knows practically nothing of the Holy Spirit, and has not experienced the fullness of the Spirit in his life. Probably no other doctrine in the Bible has been more neglected, more misunderstood, and more abused than the truth concerning the Holy Spirit and His ministry throughout the ages. We look today at His person, His deity, and His work.

1. The Personality of the Holy Spirit

Who is the Holy Spirit? Many regard the Spirit as merely an impersonal force—a sort of divine influence emanating from God. They think that “the Spirit of God” is just a synonym for “the power of God,” and that the Spirit is some kind of mysterious power floating around in the air. But the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person, and not merely some kind of force or influence.

It is true that the Holy Spirit does not have a *body* like we have. He has no hands and legs and arms, but remember that personality is altogether independent of the body. Personality exists wherever there’s intelligence and reason and mind. Jesus always used *personal* pronouns when speaking of the Holy Spirit. John 16:7 says, “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 depart, I will send *him* unto you.” Jesus used the personal pronoun; Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit as a person; Jesus says the Holy Spirit is “someone,” not “something.”

Note too that the Holy Spirit manifests *personal* characteristics. 1 Corinthians 1:10 says He has *knowledge*. “The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God (knoweth them).” The Holy Spirit knows. He has knowledge. He knows the things of God. And knowledge implies personality. Romans 8:27 says the Holy Spirit has a *mind*. Revelation 2:7 says He *speaks*. All these statements (and many others like them) indicate that the Holy Spirit is a person, and therefore we must always be careful to speak of the Holy Spirit in personal terms. We should always speak of “him” and never use the pronoun “it.”

The Holy Spirit is a Person distinct from God the Father and God the Son, and yet He is united to both the Father and the Son in the mysterious oneness of the Holy Trinity. The phrase “the Holy Spirit” is not merely a figurative expression for the divine energy of God; the Holy Spirit is an intelligent Person possessed with all the attributes of personality.

2. The Deity of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is not merely a person. He is a *divine* Person. The Holy Spirit is God. Acts 5 tells about Ananias and Sapphira. Peter said to Ananias, “Why hath Satan filled your heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” When Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, he was lying to God. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is God.

Then too, the Holy Spirit *does* things which only God can do. For example, the Holy Spirit had a part in creation. Genesis 1:2 says, “The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” Job says, “The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.” The Scriptures ascribe the work of creation to God the Father, God the Son, and also to the Holy Spirit. Only God can create, and therefore this is another evidence that the Holy Spirit is God.

Notice too that the *name* of the Spirit is coupled with the name of God the Father and of God the Son. Jesus commanded his disciples to baptize in the “name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19). Suppose Matthew 28:19 would read, “Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of Paul.” You would object. You would say that it’s altogether improper. Why? Because Paul is only a man. He has no business having his name coupled with that of the Father and of the Son. You see, the very fact that the name of the Spirit is coupled with the name of the Father and of the Son—argues for His deity.

The Holy Spirit has the same essential deity as the Father and God the Son. The Spirit is to be worshiped and adored and loved and obeyed in the same way that we worship the Father. The Holy Spirit is not some mysterious power floating around in the air—not the mystical power of God that we can somehow get a hold of and use. The Holy Spirit is a living, divine Person, who desires to get a hold of us, and use us.

3. The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is eternal, and that His work has always been going on. He had a work to do in the past; He has a work to do in the present; and He will have a work to do in the ages to come.

In the *past*—the Holy Spirit had part in the work of creation. He superintended the writing of the Holy Scriptures. He kept the writers from error as they penned the Bible. Holy men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit.

In the *future*—the Holy Spirit will also have a work to do (especially in connection with the nation Israel). But today we want to look at the mission of the Holy Spirit during this present age, the age in which we now live.

The Holy Spirit regenerates. The whole process of becoming a Christian (from beginning to end) is really a marvellous work of the Holy Spirit. He begins by bringing conviction into the human heart. When the Word of God is preached, the Holy Spirit bears that message home to the heart of the sinner, and convicts him of sin and of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:11). The Holy Spirit is God's convicting agent in this world. He is the one that puts the pressure on; He is the one that makes people squirm in their seats; He is the one that brings tears to the eyes. The Holy Spirit deals with unsaved persons by convincing them of their lost condition. An unsaved person can never in his own power come to Christ. Man is entirely cut off from God and blinded until the Holy Spirit opens his eyes and draws him to the Father. Those who are now Christians remember the uncomfortable feeling they had in their unconverted days, when they sat under the sound of the Gospel. A still small voice would even speak in the wee hours of the night, and say, "What if God should require my soul tonight?" That voice pleading with your heart, was the Spirit of God convicting you of sin, and convincing you of the need of a Saviour.

But not only does the Holy Spirit convict men of sin—He actually imparts a new life to those who will respond to the conditions of salvation. Paul says in Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing (which is) of the Holy Ghost." The "renewing" is of the Holy Spirit. The new life, the new birth, the new creation—this the Bible says is all of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to transform a godless, hell-deserving man or woman, into a new creature. The Holy Spirit imparts a new nature to those who believe in Jesus Christ and repent of their sins. He makes saints out of sinners. He makes children of God out of children of the devil. Of course all this is supernatural. Its explanation is beyond our human understanding—but it is a miracle that God the Holy Spirit performs. We sing sometimes:

"It took a miracle to put the stars in place,
It took a miracle to hang the world in space;
But when he saved my soul, cleansed and made me whole,
It took a miracle of love and grace."

This miracle (this act of imparting new life to the unsaved sinner), is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit baptizes. The baptism to which I refer is the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Water baptism is an outward symbol (on the part of one who believes in Jesus) that something has taken place within. It's a symbol of death to an old life of sin and a resurrection to a new life in Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit (on the other hand) is an act of God within one who believes, whereby he is made a member of the Body of Christ. The Scriptures make it plain that *every* born-again Christian who has met the conditions of salvation, *has been* baptized by the Holy Spirit at the moment of regeneration. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free." And remember that this statement was made to the Church at Corinth, where there were factions and other defects of the faith. And yet *these brethren* are reminded that they have all been baptized into one Body by the Holy Spirit of God.

The Day of Pentecost was the occasion of the *original* baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had said in Acts 1:5, shortly after His resurrection, "John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy

Ghost not many days hence.” Then Jesus was taken up, and ten days after his ascension, as the disciples were together with one accord, the Bible says, “There came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” Acts 2:2. The Holy Spirit filled the room where they were sitting, and those present were literally immersed (baptized) with the Holy Ghost. And every believer in Christ *today*, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13, shares in that baptism of the Holy Ghost in the moment of his regeneration. There were followers of our Lord Jesus before the Day of Pentecost. One hundred twenty met in the upper room; we read of more than five hundred in the country of Galilee; there may have been more than these. But *before* Pentecost, each one of these persons was a single unit believer. But when the Holy Spirit descended on the Day of Pentecost, all these believers were constituted together into the one mystical Body of Christ. They were united together into one Body. And every true believer today, in the moment of regeneration (by an act of the Holy Spirit), becomes a member of Christ’s mystical Body. None of us can fathom how it is done.

The Holy Spirit indwells. The Spirit actually comes into the heart of a newly born child of God, to abide there. It is almost inconceivable to believe that God would come and live inside us, but it is true. Every person who has met the conditions of salvation, has received the Holy Spirit at the time of his conversion. The Bible says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” Acts 2:38. When one sincerely and with an honest heart believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and repents of his sins, and receives water baptism—the Holy Spirit comes and lives within. The Spirit does not necessarily *infill* every believer, but He does *dwell* within those who are believers. Notice what Paul says to the Christians at Corinth: “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” 1 Corinthians 3:16. He doesn’t say that these Christians (who were guilty of theological mistakes), *ought* to be the temples of the Holy Spirit, but he says they *are* the temples of the Spirit of God. And then he appeals for a holy life consistent with the standards of this One who dwells within. Our bodies are headquarters for God here on this earth, and therefore we need to keep our bodies physically and morally clean, because these bodies are the temples of God.

My body is the place where I (the real self) actually live, and the Holy Spirit lives there too. And since we live in the same house (this body), we are close neighbors. And we need to be careful that we don’t allow anything in our lives that would make Him uncomfortable and ill-at-ease. The Bible says that our body is the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost “whom ye have of God, and you are not your own.” We must remember those words and repeat them over and over again. We must say them until they grip us so that we’ll never forget. “My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, God dwells in me.” Tomorrow when temptation comes your way, say them again: “My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit—God dwells in me.” How careful we should be, lest we grieve the Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

The Holy Spirit infills. Everyone who has sincerely opened the door of his heart to Christ, has been regenerated, baptized, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. But many have never experienced the *infilling* of the Spirit of God. What was it that caused such a mighty transformation in the lives of those cowardly disciples in New Testament days? What was the secret of the power with which those men of God preached the Gospel? The answer is simple: “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” We are not commanded in the Scriptures to be *indwelt* with the Spirit (nor are we commanded to be *baptized* with

the Spirit)— these things have already taken place the moment we became Christians. But we *are commanded* to be *filled* with the Spirit. Paul says in Ephesians 5:18 (and this is in the imperative mood; it's a command)—"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." In other words, we who are servants of the Lord, are obligated to be as much dominated and controlled and swayed by the Holy Spirit, as the drunkard is with his wine. Just as the drunkard gives himself over completely (body, soul, and spirit), all that he is and all that he does, to alcohol—just so we who are children of God, should give ourselves over completely (all that we have and all that we are), to the Spirit's control. We need men and women who are drunk with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a Person (He can't be divided). You either have all of Him or none of Him. It is impossible to have *part* of the Spirit. Our problem here is not to get more of the Spirit, but to let Him have more of us. God desires to fill us with His Spirit, but only what's empty can be filled. Obviously we can't be filled with the Holy Spirit if we are half-full of self and selfish desires. It's a fundamental law of nature that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. The Holy Spirit will not share your heart with some pet transgression or some filthy habit. When the sin goes out, the Holy Spirit comes in. It's just as simple as that. If I take a glass of water and turn it upside down, the water will run out (and you may think the glass is empty)—but it's not, because immediately air rushed in and took the place of the water. And so it is with the Spirit. He occupies immediately every part of our being that we surrender to Him.

Do you have an unforgiving spirit, a sharp tongue, a filthy habit? Until you get rid of these things (through an honest decision of your mind to lay them aside), you'll never be filled with the Spirit. We must judge sin in our lives, and then when we have confessed it and laid it aside, the Spirit will come in and take complete control. And the Scriptures are clear that this experience should be repeated many times—in fact, it should be a daily experience. Ephesians 5:18 literally says, "Keep on being filled with the Spirit."

If you are not in the family of God today, why don't you turn from your rebellion against God, and trust the Saviour, and let the Holy Spirit take control of your life? If you will repent and believe the Gospel, God will forgive your sins and blot out the past record of your life. You will receive the Holy Spirit who will live in your heart.

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