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THE HOLY SPIRIT

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THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK A MUST IN OUR SALVATION

L.R. Shelton, Jr.

In our past messages we showed you from God's Word that the Holy Spirit *must* work in our hearts the salvation that God gives to poor sinners because each one of us is totally depraved, dead in trespasses and sins, lying buried in the grave of sin, held captive by Satan at his will and therefore of necessity must be resurrected by a power greater than our own and greater than Satan.

We have shown you also that the work of the Holy Spirit as described in John 16:8-11 is to *reprove, convict, and convince* us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, so we will know our need of the Lord Jesus Christ who has been set forth as our Justifier and Deliverer from sin and its power, dominion and presence.

We have shown you also that the Holy Spirit must convict us of the awfulness of the sin of unbelief because it robs God of His glorious attributes and robs Christ of His glory and authority as the eternal Son of God, Lord over the living and the dead.

In today's message I would like to set before our hearts the place the Scriptures give to the work of the Holy Spirit in all the phases of the salvation that God gives in Christ. I pray that He who has been given to open our eyes, the Spirit of truth Himself, will this day open all of our hearts to view this truth of the necessity of His work.

The Scriptures plainly declare in 1 Corinthians 2:11,14,13 these words: "For what man knoweth the things of a

man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but by the Spirit of God. [for] the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned the Holy Spirit teacheth [those spiritual things to us]; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”

Again, the Scriptures declare in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.” Here we have the greatest proof of the necessity of His Work. We will not, and cannot, call Jesus “Lord” in a true saving way apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. No man will crown Jesus Christ as the Lord of his life until his will is broken, until he is brought to see and know his utterly lost condition without Christ. The Holy Spirit alone makes us willing in the day of His power. He gives us that which God requires: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa. 51:17).

In the matter of the New Birth it is imperative that the Holy Spirit work, for the Scriptures plainly declare in John 3:3: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” When Nicodemus on this occasion asked our Lord how this could be accomplished, he was told it was by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. In describing this same thing, we read in 1 Peter 1:23 these words: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.”

Yes, the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God, the Word of Truth, and plants it in the heart of the sinner whom He will save; and that seed, that Word, watered and nurtured by the Holy Spirit, springs up into eternal life. The New Birth is not a decision you make; it is not a feeling you get, nor is it something that you can produce by any work that you might perform. No! It is the operation of the Spirit of the living God in your heart and affections that produces this New Birth by using the Word of God, the Word of Truth. Our Lord in John 3:8 declared unto Nicodemus that the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man is like the wind: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit [of God].” The work in the heart of man is performed by the Holy Spirit in His own way and in His own time, for He is sovereign.

Let us give you an illustration of this. In Luke 1 we find the story of the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary, the virgin woman who was engaged to Joseph of Nazareth. When Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she was to be the mother of the Messiah, her question was: “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (vs. 34). Gabriel’s answer was: “The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (vs. 35). Mary knew one thing if she knew anything, and it was that without the male sperm she was as helpless to produce a child as she could be. She knew that she could pray, beg, do all manner of penance, deny herself all things; but without the male sperm uniting with her female seed, the thing was impossible. She knew that though she lived to be a hundred years old she could not of herself produce a child.

Then she was told that the Holy Spirit would do it. He would come upon her; He would overshadow her; He would place the male sperm in her womb. He would guard over it, and that Holy Thing which would be born of her would be called the Son of God. As it was in the birth of our Lord in the womb of the virgin Mary, so it is in the New Birth or the birth of our Lord in our hearts—Christ’s being formed in us, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8-14; Gal. 4:19). It must be done by the Holy Spirit. We can beg, pray, do all manner of works, live morally clean lives, go to church, be baptized, take communion, preach, teach, give our money and our bodies to the Lord’s work, deny ourselves everything under the sun, but we cannot produce the New Birth; we cannot plant the seed, water the seed, give the seed life, nor form Christ in us without the Life-Giver Himself doing the work. This is the necessary work of the Holy Spirit.

What do the Scriptures say? “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). Praise the Lord, when He commands, it is done! Yes, it is the work of the Holy Spirit to brood over the sinner as He brooded over the earth when it was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep when He commanded the light to shine out of darkness. So in the salvation of a sinner, the Holy Spirit commands the light to shine into our souls convincing us of the darkness, sin, misery and deadness we are in; then grants us

repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, giving us faith to lay hold of the Lord Jesus Christ Who is offered in the Gospel as the Substitute for sinners, God's Sin-Offering. Yes, He grants faith to see in Christ the precious Love-Gift of the Father to His people. Only then can the sinner see by faith that the Lord Jesus meets his every need, and that in His shed-blood there is the forgiveness of sin and the putting away of the wrath of God for him. In His light we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Again, the Scriptures declare that only by the Holy Spirit can the love of God be shed abroad in our hearts. In Romans 5:5 we read: "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us." You see, there is no love of God in us, no love for God that we can produce of ourselves in our hearts and affections. Why? because by nature we hate Him. Scripture declares (Rom. 1:30) that we are by nature HATERS OF GOD. Therefore, if there is any love in our hearts for God we can rest assured that it was put there by God the Holy Spirit Himself.

O that you and I would know and understand this great truth more and more! that because we are totally depraved sinners, void of everything that would bring us to God, *salvation has to be of the Lord* or no soul would ever be saved apart from His work in him. Has the Holy Spirit ever shown you this?

Listen again, my friend, to the Word of God! It is plainly declared in both John 6:63 and Ephesians 2:1 that the Holy Spirit alone quickens our dead spirit and makes us alive in Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:6 declares that the Holy Spirit alone gives life, spiritual life, and therefore eternal life in Christ. Ephesians 2:18 tells us that by the Holy Spirit only we have access unto the Father on the basis of the shed-blood of our Lord Jesus. Romans 8:26 tells us that it is the Holy Spirit Himself who helps our infirmities. "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Also we read in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that by the Holy Spirit alone we are baptized into the body of Christ—His church—and made one with Him. Therefore, we see from all these Scriptures that there is no way to be born again—to see the kingdom of God, to get into the kingdom of God to be partakers of God's divine nature, to be united to Christ and have access to the Father—but by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. I for one am going to ascribe all the work of salvation to my glorious triune God: to the Father for choosing me, to the Son for dying in my place and to the Holy Spirit for applying it to my heart and life.

O may we bow in adoration before our triune God and give praise unto Him for Himself as manifested unto us in His three Persons! Let us adore His wisdom, give thanks unto Him for His grace, love Him for His condescension to make Himself known unto us in the Person of His Son. Let us praise His holy name for His Holy Spirit who was sent to convince us of sin and bring us to Christ. Let us praise Him for seeking us out as lost sinners and saving us by His grace, if indeed He has done this work in our hearts.

Let me speak this last word today unto you who know the Lord Jesus. How much we should praise the Lord for the gift of His Holy Spirit to us in the salvation He has given us! We owe all that we have to His work in us. He is the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). He is the One Who bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). He is the Spirit of Christ, for He is given by Christ and speaks of Him (1 Pet. 1:11). He is the Spirit of life, for He is the Communicator of the life of God, the Sustainer of the life of God in us (Rom. 8:2). He is the Spirit of Truth, in opposition to everything that is false and untrue (John 14:17). He is the Spirit of grace as the Bestower of all the graces of the spiritual life (Zech. 12:10). He is the Spirit of power as opposed to all that is weak and inefficient (Acts 1:8). He is the Spirit of holiness, therefore He alone can sanctify and make us like Christ in holiness (Rom. 1:4).

The list seems to be endless of the things the Holy Spirit does for us and in us. We are sanctified by Him, moved by Him, kept by Him, filled by Him; we have joy in Him, bear His fruit, sing in Him, pray in Him, rejoice in Him, and our body is His temple. Therefore, we should not grieve nor quench the Spirit, but be controlled by Him moment by moment; for He is the Father's and the Son's Love-Gift to us. We should yield to Him, be filled with Him, be controlled by Him and praise our living God daily for His presence within us.¶

Taken From: The Work of the Holy Spirit in our Salvation

THE WITHERING WORK OF THE SPIRIT

C.H. Spurgeon

“The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: Because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: Surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: But the word of our God shall stand forever.”
—Isaiah 40:6-8

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.” —1 Peter 1:23-25

The passage in Isaiah which I have just read in your hearing may be used as a very eloquent description of our mortality, and if a sermon should be preached from it upon the frailty of human nature, the brevity of life, and the certainty of death, no one could dispute the appropriateness of the text. Yet I venture to question whether such a discourse would strike the central teaching of the prophet. Something more than the decay of our material flesh is intended here; the carnal mind, the flesh in another sense, was intended by the Holy Ghost when he bade his messenger proclaim those words. It does not seem to me that a mere expression of the mortality of our race was needed in this place by the context; it would hardly keep pace with the sublime revelations which surround it, and would in some measure be a digression from the subject in hand. The notion that we are here simply and alone reminded of our mortality does not square with the New Testament exposition of it in Peter, which I have also placed before you as a text. There is another and more spiritual meaning here beside and beyond that which would be contained in the great and very obvious truth, that all of us must die.

Look at the chapter in Isaiah with care. What is the subject of it? It is the divine consolation of Zion. Zion had been tossed to and fro with conflicts; she had been smarting under the result of sin. The Lord, to remove her sorrow, bids his prophets announce the coming of the long-expected Deliverer, the end and accomplishment of all her warfare and the pardon of all her iniquity. There is no doubt that this is the theme of the prophecy; and further, there is no sort of question about the next point, that the prophet goes on to foretell the coming of John the Baptist as the harbinger of the Messiah. We have no difficulty in the explanation of the passage, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God;” for the New Testament again and again refers this to the Baptist and his ministry. The object of the coming of the Baptist and the mission of the Messiah, whom he heralded, was the manifestation of divine glory. Observe the fifth verse: “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” Well, what next? Was it needful to mention man’s mortality in this connection? We think not. But there is much more appropriateness in the succeeding verses, if we see their deeper meaning. Do they not mean this? In order to make room for the display of the divine glory in Christ Jesus and his salvation, there would come a withering of all the glory wherein man boasts himself: the flesh should be seen in its true nature as corrupt and dying, and the grace of God alone should be exalted. This would be seen under the ministry of John the Baptist first, and should be the preparatory work of the Holy Ghost in men’s hearts, in all time, in order that the glory of the Lord should be revealed and human pride be forever confounded.

The Spirit blows upon the flesh, and that which seemed vigorous becomes weak, that which was fair to look upon is smitten with decay; the true nature of the flesh is thus discovered, its deceit is laid bare, its power is destroyed, and there is space for the dispensation of the ever-abiding word, and for the rule of the Great Shepherd, whose words are spirit and life. There is a withering wrought by the Spirit which is the preparation

for the sowing and implanting by which salvation is wrought.

The withering before the sowing was very marvellously fulfilled in the preaching of John the Baptist. Most appropriately he carried on his ministry in the desert, for a spiritual desert was all around him; he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness. It was not his work to plant, but to hew down. The fleshy religion of the Jews was then in its prime. Phariseism stalked through the streets in all its pomp; men complacently rested in outward ceremonies only, and spiritual religion was at the lowest conceivable ebb. Here and there might be found a Simeon and an Anna, but for the most part men knew nothing of spiritual religion, but said in their hearts: "We have Abraham to our father," and this is enough. What a stir he made when he called the lordly Pharisees a generation of vipers! How he shook the nation with the declaration, "Now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees"! Stern as Elias, his work was to level the mountains, and lay low every lofty imagination. That word, "Repent," was as a scorching wind to the verdure of self-righteousness, a killing blast for the confidence of ceremonialism. His food and his dress called for fasting and mourning. The outward token of his ministry declared the death amid which he preached, as he buried in the waters of Jordan those who came to him. "Ye must die and be buried, even as he who is to come will save by death and burial." This was the meaning of the emblem which he set before the crowd. His typical act was as thorough in its teaching as were his words: and as if that were not enough, he warned them of a yet more searching and trying baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire, and of the coming of One whose fan was in his hand, thoroughly to purge his floor. The Spirit in John blew as the rough north wind, searching and withering, and made him to be a destroyer of the vain gloryings of a fleshy religion, that the spiritual faith might be established.

When our Lord himself actually appeared, he came into a withered land, whose glories had all departed. Old Jesse's stem was bare, and our Lord was the branch which grew out of his root. The sceptre had departed from Judah, and the lawgiver from between his feet, when Shiloh came. An alien sat on David's throne, and the Roman called the covenant-land his own. The lamp of prophecy burned but dimly, even if it had not utterly gone out. No Isaiah had arisen of late to console them, nor even a Jeremiah to lament their apostacy. The whole economy of Judaism was a worn-out vesture; it had waxed old, and was ready to vanish away. The priesthood was disarranged. Luke tells us that Annas and Caiaphas were high priests that year—two in a year or at once, a strange setting aside of the laws of Moses. All the dispensation which gathered around the visible, or as Paul calls it, the "worldly" sanctuary, was coming to a close; and when our Lord had finished his work, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, the sacrifices were abolished, the priesthood of Aaron was set aside, and carnal ordinances were abrogated, for the Spirit revealed spiritual things. When he came who was made a priest, "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life," there was "a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof."

Such are the facts of history; but I am not about to dilate upon them: I am coming to your own personal histories—to the experience of every child of God. In every one of us it must be fulfilled that all that is of the flesh in us, seeing it is but as grass, must be withered, and the comeliness thereof must be destroyed. The Spirit of God, like the wind, must pass over the field of our souls, and cause our beauty to be as a fading flower. He must so convince us of sin, and so reveal ourselves to ourselves, that we shall see that the flesh profiteth nothing; that our fallen nature is corruption itself, and that "they who are in the flesh cannot please God." There must be brought home to us the sentence of death upon our former legal and carnal life, that the incorruptible seed of the word of God, implanted by the Holy Ghost, may be in us, and abide in us forever.

The subject of this morning is the withering work of the Spirit upon the souls of men, and when we have spoken upon it, we shall conclude with a few words upon the implanting work, which always follows where this withering work has been performed.

1. Turning then to THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT IN CAUSING THE GOODLINESS OF THE FLESH TO FADE, let us, first, observe that the work of the Holy Spirit upon the soul of man in withering up that which is of the flesh, is *very unexpected*. You will observe in our text, that even the speaker himself, though doubtless one taught of God, when he was bidden to cry, said "What shall I cry?" Even he did not know that in order to the comforting of God's people, there must first be experienced a preliminary visitation. Many preachers of God's gospel have

forgotten that the law is the schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. They have sown on the unbroken fallow ground, and forgotten that the plough must break the clods. We have seen too much of trying to sew without the sharp needle of the Spirit's convincing power. Preachers have labored to make Christ precious to those who think themselves rich and increased in goods; and it has been labor in vain. It is our duty to preach Jesus Christ even to self-righteous sinners, but it is certain that Jesus Christ will never be accepted by them while they hold themselves in high esteem. Only the sick will welcome the physician. It is the work of the Spirit of God to convince men of sin, and until they are convinced of sin, they will never be led to seek the righteousness which is of God by Jesus Christ. I am persuaded, that wherever there is a real work of grace in any soul, it begins with a pulling down: the Holy Ghost does not build on the old foundation. Wood, hay, and stubble will not do for him to build upon. He will come as the fire, and cause a conflagration of all proud nature's Babels. He will break our bow and cut our spear in sunder, and burn our chariot in the fire. When every sandy foundation is gone, then, but not till then, behold he will lay in our souls the great foundation-stone, chosen of God and precious. The awakened sinner, when he asks that God would have mercy upon him, is much astonished to find that, instead of enjoying a speedy peace, his soul is bowed down within him under a sense of divine wrath. Naturally enough he inquires: "Is this the answer to my prayer? I prayed the Lord to deliver me from sin and self, and is this the way in which he deals with me? I said, 'Hear me,' and behold he wounds me with the wounds of a cruel one. I said, 'Clothe me,' and lo! he has torn off from me the few rags which covered me before, and my nakedness stares me in the face. I said, 'Wash me,' and behold he has plunged me in the ditch till mine own clothes do abhor me. Is this the way of grace?" Sinner, be not surprised: it is even so. Perceivest thou not the cause of it? How canst thou be healed while the proud flesh is in thy wound? It must come out. It is the only way to heal thee permanently: it would be folly to film over thy sore, or heal thy flesh, and leave the leprosy within thy bones. The great Physician will cut with his sharp knife till the corrupt flesh be removed, for only thus can a sure healing work be wrought in thee. Dost thou not see that it is divinely wise that before thou art clothed thou shouldst be stripped! What, wouldst thou have Christ's lustrous righteousness outside whiter than any fuller can make it, and thine own filthy rags concealed within? Nay, man; they must be put away; not a single thread of thine own must be left upon thee. It cannot be that God should cleanse thee until he has made thee see somewhat of thy defilement; for thou wouldst never value the precious blood which cleanses us from all sin if thou hadst not first of all been made to mourn that thou art altogether an unclean thing.

The convincing work of the Spirit, wherever it comes, is unexpected, and even to the child of God in whom this process has still to go on, it is often startling. We begin again to build that which the Spirit of God had destroyed. Having begun in the spirit, we act as if we would be made perfect in the flesh; and then when our mistaken up-building has to be levelled with the earth, we are almost as astonished as we were when first the scales fell from our eyes. In some such condition as this was Newton when he wrote:—

*"I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace,
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.*

*'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he, I trust has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.*

*I hoped that in some favour'd hour,
At once he'd answer my request,
And by his love's constraining power
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.*

*Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart;
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in ev'ry part."*

Ah, marvel not, for thus the Lord is wont to answer his people. The voice which saith, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," achieves its purpose by first making them hear the cry, "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field."

2. Furthermore, *this withering is after the usual order of the divine operation.* If we consider well the way of God, we shall not be astonished that he beginneth with his people by terrible things in righteousness. Observe the method of creation. I will not venture upon any dogmatic theory of geology, but there seems to be every probability that this world has been fitted up and destroyed, refitted and then destroyed again, many times before the last arranging of it for the habitation of men. "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth"? then came a long interval, and at length, at the appointed time, during seven days, the Lord prepared the earth for the human race. Consider then the state of matters when the great architect began his work. What was there in the beginning? Originally, nothing. When he commanded the ordering of the earth how was it? "The earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." There was no trace of another's plan to interfere with the great architect. "With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" He received no contribution of column or pillar towards the temple which he intended to build. The earth was, as the Hebrew puts it, Tohu and Bohu, disorder and confusion— in a word, chaos. So it is in the new creation. When the Lord new-creates us, he borrows nothing from the old man, but makes all things new. He does not repair and add a new wing to the old house of our depraved nature, but he builds a new temple for his own praise. We are spiritually without form and empty, and darkness is upon the face of our heart, and his word comes to us, saying, "Light be," and there is light, and, ere long, life and every precious thing.

To take another instance from the ways of God: When man had fallen, when did the Lord bring him the gospel? The first whisper of the gospel, as you know, was, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed. He shall bruise thy head." That whisper came to man shivering in the presence of his Maker, having nothing more to say by way of excuse; but standing guilty before the Lord. When did the Lord God clothe our parents? Not until first of all he had put the question, "Who told thee that thou wast naked?" Not until the fig-leaves had utterly failed did the Lord bring in the covering skin of the sacrifice, and wrap them in it. If you will pursue the meditation upon the acts of God with men, you will constantly see the same thing. God has given us a wonderful type of salvation in Noah's ark; but Noah was saved in that ark in connection with death; he himself, as it were, immured alive in a tomb, and all the world besides left to destruction. All other hope for Noah was gone, and then the ark rose upon the waters. Remember the redemption of the children of Israel out of Egypt: it occurred when they were in the saddest plight, and their cry went up to heaven by reason of their bondage. When no arm brought salvation, then with a high hand and an outstretched arm the Lord brought forth his people. Everywhere before the salvation there comes the humbling of the creature, the overthrow of human hope. As in the backwoods of America, before there can be tillage, the planting of cities, the arts of civilization, and the transactions of commerce, the woodman's axe must hack and hew: the stately trees of centuries must fall: the roots must be burned, the old reign of nature disturbed. The old must go before the new can come. Even thus the Lord takes away the first, that he may establish the second. The first heaven and the first earth must pass away, or there cannot be a new heaven and a new earth. Now, as it has been outwardly, we ought to expect that it would be the same within us; and when these witherings and fadings occur in our souls, we should only say, "It is the Lord, let him do as seemeth him good."

3. I would have you notice, thirdly, that we are taught in our text *how universal this process is in its range* over the hearts of all those upon whom the Spirit works. The withering is a withering of what? Of part of the flesh and some portion of its tendencies? Nay, observe, "*All* flesh is grass; and *all* the goodliness thereof"— the very choice and pick of it— "is as the flower of the field," and what happens to the grass? Does any of it live? "The

grass withereth," all of it. The flower, will not that abide? So fair a thing, has not that an immortality? No, it fades; it utterly falls away. So, wherever the Spirit of God breathes on the soul of man, there is a withering of every thing that is of the flesh, and it is seen that to be carnally minded is death. Of course, we all know and confess that where there is a work of grace, there must be a destruction of our delight in the pleasures of the flesh. When the Spirit of God breathes on us, that which was sweet becomes bitter; that which was bright becomes dim. A man cannot love sin and yet possess the life of God. If he takes pleasure in fleshly joys wherein he once delighted, he is still what he was: he minds the things of the flesh, and therefore he is after the flesh, and he shall die. The world and the lusts thereof are to the unregenerate as beautiful as the meadows in spring, when they are bedecked with flowers, but to the regenerate soul they are a wilderness, a salt land, and not inhabited. Of those very things wherein we once took delight we say, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." We cry to be delivered from the poisonous joys of earth, we loathe them, and wonder that we could once riot in them. Beloved hearers, do you know what this kind of withering means? Have you seen the lusts of the flesh, and the pomps and the pleasures thereof, all fade away before your eyes? It must be so, or the Spirit of God has not visited your soul.

But mark, wherever the Spirit of God comes, he destroys the goodliness and flower of the flesh; that is to say our righteousness withers as our sinfulness. Before the Spirit comes, we think ourselves as good as the best. We say, "All these commandments have I kept from my youth up," and we superciliously ask, "What lack I yet?" Have we not been moral? Nay, have we not even been religious? We confess that we may have committed faults, but we think them very venial, and we venture, in our wicked pride, to imagine that, after all, we are not so vile as the word of God would lead us to think. Ah, my dear hearer, when the Spirit of God blows on the comeliness of thy flesh, its beauty will fade as a leaf, and thou wilt have quite another idea of thyself; thou wilt then find no language too severe in which to describe thy past character. Searching deep into thy motives, and investigating that which moved thee to thine actions, thou wilt see so much of evil, that thou wilt cry with the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Where the Holy Ghost has withered up in us our self-righteousness, he has not half completed his work; there is much more to be destroyed yet, and among the rest, away must go our boasted power of resolution. Most people conceive that they can turn to God whenever they resolve to do so. "I am a man of such strength of mind," says one, "that if I made up my mind to be religious, I should be without difficulty." "Ah," saith another volatile spirit, "I believe that one of these days I can correct the errors of the past, and commence a new life." Ah, dear hearers, the resolutions of the flesh are goodly flowers, but they must all fade. When visited by the Spirit of God, we find that even when the will is present with us, how to perform that which we would, we find not; yea, and we discover that our will is averse to all that is good, and that naturally we will not come unto Christ that we may have life. What poor, frail things resolutions are when seen in the light of God's Spirit!

Still the man will say, "I believe I have, after all, within myself an enlightened conscience and an intelligence that will guide me aright. The light of nature I will use, and I do not doubt that if I wander somewhat, I shall find my way back again." Ah, man! thy wisdom, which is the very flower of thy nature, what is it but folly, though thou knowest it not? Unconverted and unrenewed, thou art in God's sight no wiser than the wild ass's colt. I wish thou wert in thine own esteem humbled as a little child at Jesus' feet, and made to cry, "Teach thou me."

When the withering wind of the Spirit moves over the carnal mind, it reveals the death of the flesh in all respects, especially in the matter of power towards that which is good. We then learn that word of our Lord: "Without me ye can do nothing." When I was seeking the Lord, I not only believed that I could not pray without divine help, but I felt in my very soul that I could not. Then I could not even feel aright, or mourn as I would, or groan as I would. I longed to long more after Christ; but, alas! I could not even feel that I needed him as I ought to feel it. This heart was then as hard as adamant, as dead as those that rot in their graves. Oh, what would I at times have given for a tear! I wanted to repent, but could not; longed to believe, but could not; I felt bound, hampered and paralyzed. This is a humbling revelation of God's Holy Spirit, but a needful one; for the faith of the flesh is not the faith of God's elect. The faith which justifies the soul is the gift of God and not of ourselves. That repentance which is the work of the flesh will need to be repented of. The flower of the flesh must wither;

only the seed of the Spirit will produce fruit unto perfection. The heirs of heaven are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of man, but of God. If the work in us be not the Spirit's working, but our own, it will droop and die when most we require its protection; and its end will be as the grass which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven.

4. You see, then, the universality of this withering work within us, but I beg you also to notice *the completeness of it*. The grass, what does it do? Droop? nay, wither. The flower of the field: what of that? Does it hang its head a little? No, according to Isaiah it fades; and according to Peter it falleth away. There is no reviving it with showers, it has come to its end. Even thus are the awakened led to see that in their flesh there dwelleth no good thing. What dying and withering work some of God's servants have had in their souls! Look at John Bunyan, as he describes himself in his "Grace Abounding"! For how many months and even years was the Spirit engaged in writing death upon all that was the old Bunyan, in order that he might become by grace a new man fitted to track the pilgrims along their heavenly way. We have not all endured the ordeal so long, but in every child of God there must be a death to sin, to the law, and to self, which must be fully accomplished ere he is perfected in Christ and taken to heaven. Corruption cannot inherit incorruption; it is through the Spirit that we mortify the deeds of the body, and therefore live. But cannot the fleshly mind be improved? By no means; for "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Cannot you improve the old nature? No; "ye must be born again." Can it not be taught heavenly things? No. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." There is nothing to be done with the old nature but to let it be laid in the grave; it must be dead, and buried, and when it is so, then the incorruptible seed that liveth and abideth forever, will develop gloriously, the fruit of the new birth will come to maturity, and grace shall be exalted in glory. The old nature never does improve, it is as earthly, and sensual, and devilish in the saint of eighty years of age as it was when first he came to Christ; it is unimproved and unimprovable; towards God it is enmity itself; every imagination of the thoughts of the heart is evil, and that continually. The old nature called "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other," neither can there be peace between them.

5. Let us further notice that all *this withering work in the soul is very painful*. As you read these verses do they not strike you as having a very funereal tone? "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." This is mournful work; but it must be done. I think those who experience much of it when they first come to Christ have great reason to be thankful. Their course in life will, in all probability, be much brighter and happier, for I have noticed that persons who are converted very easily, and come to Christ with but comparatively little knowledge of their own depravity, have to learn it afterwards, and they remain for a long time babes in Christ, and are perplexed with matters that would not have troubled them if they had experienced a deeper work at first. No sir; if grace has begun to build in your soul and left any of the old walls of self-trust standing, they will have to come down sooner or later. You may congratulate yourself upon their remaining, but it is a false congratulation, your glorying is not good. I am sure of this, that Christ will never put a new piece upon an old garment, or new wine in old bottles: he knows the rent would be worse in the long run, and the bottles would burst. All that is of nature's spinning must be unravelled. The natural building must come down, lath and plaster, roof and foundation, and we must have a house not made with hands. It was a great mercy for our city of London that the great fire cleared away all the old buildings which were the lair of the plague, a far healthier city was then built; and it is a great mercy for a man when God sweeps right away all his own righteousness and strength, when he makes him feel that he is nothing and can be nothing, and drives him to confess that Christ must be in all, and that his only strength lies in the eternal might of the ever-blessed Spirit. Sometimes in a house of business an old system has been going on for years, and it has caused much confusion, and allowed much dishonesty. You come in as a new manager, and you adopt an entirely new plan. Now, try if you can, and graft your method on to the old system. How it will worry you! Year after year you say to yourself, "I cannot work it: if I had swept the whole away and started afresh, clear from the beginning, it would not have given me one-tenth of the trouble." God does not intend to graft the system of grace upon corrupt nature, nor to make the new Adam grow out of the old Adam, but he intends to teach us this: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Salvation is not of the flesh, but

of the Lord alone; that which is born of the flesh is only flesh at the best; and only that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. It must be the Spirit's work altogether, or it is not what God will accept.

6. Observe, brethren, that although this is painful *it is inevitable*. I have already entrenched upon this, and shown you how necessary it is that all of the old should be taken away; but let me further remark that it is inevitable that the old should go, because it is in itself corruptible. Why does the grass wither? Because it is a withering thing. "Its root is ever in its grave, and it must die." How could it spring out of the earth, and be immortal? It is no amaranth: it blooms not in Paradise: it grows in a soil on which the curse has fallen. Every supposed good thing that grows out of your own self, is like yourself, mortal, and it must die. The seeds of corruption are in all the fruits of manhood's tree; let them be as fair to look upon as Eden's clusters, they must decay.

Moreover, it would never do, my brother, that there should be something of the flesh in our salvation and something of the Spirit; for if it were so there would be a division of the honor. Hitherto the praises of God: beyond this my own praises. If I were to win heaven partly through what I had done, and partly through what Christ had done, and if the energy which sanctified me was in a measure my own, and in a measure divine, they that divide the work shall divide the reward, and the songs of heaven while they would be partly to Jehovah must also be partly to the creature. But it shall not be. Down, proud flesh! Down! I say. Though thou cleanse and purge thyself as thou mayest, thou art to the core corrupt; though thou labor unto weariness, thou buildest wood that will be burned, and stubble that will be turned to ashes. Give up thine own self-confidence, and let the work be, and the merit be where the honor shall be, namely, with God alone. It is inevitable, then, that there should be all this withering.

7. This last word by way of comfort to any that are passing through the process we are describing, and I hope some of your are. It gives me great joy when I hear that you unconverted ones are very miserable, for the miseries which the Holy Spirit works are always the prelude to happiness. *It is the Spirit's work to wither*. I rejoice in our translation: "Because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it." It is true the passage may be translated, "The wind of the Lord bloweth upon it." One word, as you know, is used in the Hebrew both for "wind" and "Spirit," and the same is true of the Greek; but let us retain the old translation here, for I conceive it to be the real meaning of the text. The Spirit of God it is that withers the flesh. It is not the devil that killed my self-righteousness. I might be afraid if it were: nor was it myself that humbled myself by a voluntary and needless self-degradation, but it was the Spirit of God. Better to be broken in pieces by the Spirit of God, than to be made whole by the flesh! What doth the Lord say? "I kill." But what next? "I make alive." He never makes any alive but those He kills. Blessed be the Holy Ghost when he kills me, when he drives the sword through the very bowels of my own merits and my self-confidence, for then he will make me alive. "I wound, and I heal." He never heals those whom he has not wounded. Then blessed be the hand that wounds; let it go on wounding; let it cut and tear; let it lay bare to me myself at my very worst, that I may be driven to self-despair, and may fall back upon the free mercy of God, and receive it as a poor, guilty, lost, helpless, undone sinner, who casts himself into the arms of sovereign grace, knowing that God must give all, and Christ must be all, and the Spirit must work all, and man must be as clay in the potter's hands, that the Lord may do with him as seemeth him good. Rejoice, dear brother, however low you are brought, for if the Spirit humbles you he means no evil, but he intends infinite good to your soul.

Now, let us close with a few sentences concerning THE IMPLANTATION.

According to Peter, although the flesh withers, and the flower thereof falls away, yet in the children of God there is an unwithering something of another kind. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever." "The word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." Now, the gospel is of use to us because it is not of human origin. If it were of the flesh, all it could do for us would not land us beyond the flesh; but the gospel of Jesus Christ is super-human, divine and spiritual. In its conception it was of God; its great gift, even the Saviour, is a divine gift; and all its teachings are full of deity. If you, my hearer, believe a gospel which you have thought out for yourself or a philosophical gospel which comes from the brain of man, it is of the flesh and

will wither, and you will die and be lost through trusting in it. The only word that can bless you and be a seed in your soul must be the living and incorruptible word of the eternal Spirit. This is the incorruptible word, that “God was made flesh and dwelt among us;” that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” This is the incorruptible word, that “whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.” “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” “God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Now, brethren, this is the seed; but before it can grow in your soul, it must be planted there by the Spirit. Do you receive it this morning? Then the Holy Spirit implants it in your soul. Do you leap up to it, and say, “I believe it! I grasp it! On the incarnate God I fix my hope; the substitutionary sacrifice, the complete atonement of Christ is all my confidence; I am reconciled to God by the blood of Jesus”? Then you possess the living seed within your soul.

And what is the result of it? Why, then there comes according to the text, a new life into us, as the result of the indwelling of the living word, and our being born again by it. A new life it is; it is not the old nature putting out its better parts; not the old Adam refining and purifying itself, and rising to something better. No; have we not said aforetime that the flesh withers, and the flower thereof fades? It is an entirely new life. Ye are as much new creatures at your regeneration, as if you had never existed, and had been for the first time created. “Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.” The child of God is beyond and above other men. Other men do not possess the life which he has received. They are but duplex— body and soul have they. He is of triple nature— he is spirit, soul and body. A fresh principle, a spark of divine life has dropped into his soul: he is no longer a natural or carnal man, but he has become a spiritual man, understanding spiritual things, and possessing a life far superior to any thing that belongs to the rest of mankind. Oh that God, who has withered in the souls of any of you that which is of the flesh, may speedily grant you the new birth through the Word.

Now observe, to close, wherever this new life comes through the word, it is incorruptible, it lives and abides forever. To get the good seed out of a true believer’s heart and to destroy the new nature in him, is a thing attempted by earth and hell, but never yet achieved. Pluck the sun out of the firmament, and you shall not even then be able to pluck grace out of a regenerate heart. It “liveth and abideth forever,” saith the text; it can neither corrupt of itself nor be corrupted. “It sinneth not, because it is born of God.” “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” You have a natural life— that will die, it is of the flesh. You have a spiritual life— of that it is written: “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” You have now within you the noblest and truest immortality: you must live as God liveth, in peace and joy, and happiness. But oh, remember, dear hearer, if you have not this, you “shall not see life.” What then— shall you be annihilated? Ah! no, but “the wrath of the Lord is upon you.” You shall exist, though you shall not live. Of life you shall know nothing, for that is the gift of God in Christ Jesus: but of an everlasting death, full of torment and anguish, you shall be the wretched heritor— “the wrath of God abideth on him.” You shall be cast into “the lake of fire, which is the second death.” You shall be one of those whose “worm dieth not, and whose fire is not quenched.” May God, the ever-blessed Spirit, visit you! If he be now striving with you, oh quench not his divine flame! Trifle not with any holy thought you have. If this morning you must confess that you are not born again, be humbled by it. Go and seek mercy of the Lord, entreat him to deal graciously with you and save you. Many who have had nothing but moonlight have prized it, and ere long they have had sunlight. Above all, remember what the quickening seed is, and reverence it when you hear it preached, “for this is the word by which the gospel is preached unto you.” Respect it and receive it. Remember that the quickening seed is all wrapped up in this sentence: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

The Lord bless you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen. ¶

Sermon No. 999 Vol 17 from the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

GEORGE MÜLLER ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

Depending entirely on the power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost to the church in her collective capacity, to abide with her forever, and has not been taken away, notwithstanding our many failings. Just as the fiery pillar was not taken from the Israelites, notwithstanding their many provocations, so the blessed Spirit of God has not been taken away from the church. Moreover God has given His Spirit to the individual believer—to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But though the Spirit dwells in the church of Christ as to her collective capacity, and in the individual believer, nevertheless it is fitting and suitable and right on the part of the children of God that they should ask God again and again, and with great earnestness, that He would work mightily by His Spirit.

We depend entirely on the power of the Holy Spirit for the conversion of sinners. There might be the most mighty preacher as to the knowledge of the scriptures and the clearness with which he sets forth the truth; yet if the Spirit of God is not pleased to bless the word, he may preach for months, and yet there will be no blessing.

Are you renewed by the Holy Spirit?

This is the momentous point, whether through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we are partakers of the Holy Spirit or not. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His. Whatever we have, if we have not the Holy Spirit, we do not belong to Christ. In whatever way we seek to resemble the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ—we may be in the habit of reading our Bibles, of bowing our knees, of singing together with them, of meeting together with them, of partaking with them at the Lord's supper, we may be reckoned among them as disciples—and yet with all this, far from God. With all this unregenerate. With all this, wanting the Spirit of Christ. With all this, not born again through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Talkers we may be, in outward appearance like the children of God, but if the heart is unrenewed, if there be no faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of our souls, through which we are born again and renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that the Holy Spirit takes our bodies and makes them His temple—if this is not the case, we are yet far from God and His kingdom.

Taken from: *The George Müller Treasury*, Edited by Roger Steer, (Crossway Books, Westchester, IL., c1987)

THE SPIRIT LEADING

A.W. Pink

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”—Romans 8: 14

This verse presents to us another aspect of the varied work of the blessed Holy Spirit. In addition to all His other functions, He performs the office of Guide unto the godly. Nor is this peculiar to the present dispensation: He so ministered during the Old Testament times. This is brought out clearly in Isaiah 63, “Where is he that brought

them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his Holy Spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep as a horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, *the Spirit of the Lord* caused him to rest; *so* didst thou *lead* thy people to make thyself a glorious name” (vv. 11-14). Moses was no more able by his own power to induce the Hebrews to pass between the divided waters of the Red Sea and to cross the trackless desert, than by the mere extending of the rod he could divide those waters. Moses was simply the human instrument: the Holy Spirit was the efficient Agent.

In the above passage we have more than a hint of *how* the Holy Spirit “leads:” it is by means of an inward impulse, as well as by external directions. Among his comments upon Romans 8:14 Matthew Henry says, “Led by the Spirit as a scholar in his learning is led by his tutor, as a traveler in his journey is led by his guide, as a soldier in his engagements is led by his captain.” But such analogies are inadequate, for they present only the *external* side, leaving out of account the internal operations of the Spirit, which are even more essential. “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). By nature we are not Only ignorant of God’s way, but reluctant to walk therein even when it is shown us, and therefore we find the church praying, “*Draw* me, we will run after thee” (Song of Sol. 1:4). Ah, we never seek unto God, still less “run after Him,” till we are Divinely drawn.

This humbling truth was well understood by David of old. First, he prayed, “Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes Give me understanding” (Ps. 119:33, 34). But second, he realized that something more than Divine illumination was needed by him: therefore did he add, “*Make me to go* in the path of thy commandments *Incline my heart unto* thy testimonies” (vv. 35, 36). By nature our hearts are averse from God and holiness. We can be worldly of ourselves, but we cannot be heavenly of ourselves. The power of sin lies in the love of it, and it is only as our affections are Divinely drawn unto things above that we are delivered from sin’s dominion. Moreover, our *wills* are perverse, and only as supernatural grace is brought to bear upon them are they “inclined” Godwards. Thus, to be “*led* by the Spirit of God” is to be *governed* by Him from within, to be subject to His secret but real impulses or strivings.

Not only are our hearts inclined *by nature* to temporal, material, worldly, and evil things, rather than to eternal, spiritual, heavenly and holy things, but they are by inveterate *custom*, too. As soon as we are born we follow the bent of our natural appetites, and the first few years of our life are governed merely by sense; and the pleasures begotten by gratifying our senses become deeply ingrained in us. Moreover, by constant living in the world and long contact with material things, the tendency increases upon us and we become more strongly settled in a worldly frame. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are *accustomed* to do evil” (Jer. 13:23). Custom becomes a “second nature” to us: the more we follow a certain course of life, the more we delight in it, and we are only weaned from it with very great difficulty.

Natural lusts and appetites, being born and bred in us from infancy, continue to cry out for indulgence and satisfaction. The will has become bent to a carnal course and the heart craves material pleasures. Hence when the claims of *God* are presented to us, when the interests of our *souls* and the things of *eternity* are brought before us, when the “beauty of *holiness*” is presented to our view, they find our wills already biased in the contrary direction and our heart prepossessed with other inclinations, which by reason of long indulgence bind us to them. The heart, being deeply engaged with a delighting in temporal and worldly things, is quite unable to respond to the dictates of reason and set itself upon that which is heavenly and Divine; and even the voice of conscience is unheeded by the soul, which prefers the insidious lullaby of Satan. Naught but the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit can turn (“lead”) the heart in a contrary direction.

Now the heart is *inclined* toward God when the habitual bent of our affections is more to holiness than to worldly things. As the power of sin lies in the love of it, so it is with indwelling grace. Grace prevails over us when we so love the things of God that the bent of the will and the strength of our affections is carried after them. When the course of our desires and endeavors, and the strength and stream of our souls, runs out after holiness, then the heart is “inclined” Godwards. And how is this brought to pass? How does God reduce our

rebellious hearts and mold them to the obedience of His will? The answer is, by His Word and by His Spirit; or putting it another way, by moral persuasion and by gracious power.

“And I will put my Spirit within you, and *cause* you to walk in my statutes” (Ezek. 36:27). This God does by combining together invincible might and gentle inducements. God works upon us morally, not physically, because He will preserve our nature and the principles thereof. He does not force us against our wills, but sweetly draws us. He presents weighty reasons, casting into the mind one after another, till the scales be turned and then all is made efficacious by His Spirit. Yet this is not a work which He does in the soul once for all, but is often renewed and repeated; and that because the “flesh” or sinful nature remains in us, unchanged, even after regeneration. Therefore do we need to ask God to *continue* inclining our hearts toward Himself.

This brings us to notice the intimate connection which exists between our present text and the verse immediately preceding it. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13). If we yield ourselves to the Spirit’s impulses to restrain our evil propensities and our proneness to indulge them, then Heaven will be our portion, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” Thus, Romans 8:14 is said in confirmation and amplification of verse 13; only those who are *ruled* by the Spirit give evidence that they are the “sons of God.” To be “led by the Spirit,” then, means, as the whole context clearly shows, to “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (v. 4), to “mind the things of the Spirit” (v. 5), to “through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body” (v. 13). Suitably did Calvin remark on Romans 8:14, “Thus the empty boasting of hypocrites is taken away, who without any reason assume the title of sons of God.”

Thus we are “led by the Spirit” both actively and passively: actively, with respect to His prompting; passively on our part, as we submit to those promptings; actively, by His pressing upon us the holy requirements of the Scriptures; passively, as we yield ourselves to those requirements. The Spirit is our Guide, but we must obey His motions. In the immediate context it is His *restraining* motives which are in view, moving us to the mortifying of sin. But His “leading” is not to be restricted to that: He exercises *inviting* motives, encouraging us to the perfecting of holiness. And this being guided and governed by the Holy Spirit is an infallible proof that we are living members of God’s family.

It is the office of Jehovah the Spirit in the covenant of redemption, after He has called the elect out of the world, to place Himself at their head and undertake their future guidance. He knows the only path which leads to Heaven. He knows the difficulties and dangers which beset us, the intricate maze of life’s journey, the numerous false routes by which Satan deceives souls, and the proneness of the human heart to follow that which is evil; and therefore He, in His infinite grace, takes charge of those who are “strangers and pilgrims” in this scene, and conducts them safely to the Celestial Country. O what praise is due to this heavenly Guide! How gladly and thankfully should we submit ourselves to His directions! How hopeless would be our case without Him! With what alacrity should we follow His motions and directions!

As we have already pointed out, the blessed Spirit of God “leads” both objectively and subjectively: by pointing us to the directive precepts of the Word, that our actions may be regulated thereby; and by secret impulses from within the soul, impressing upon us the course we should follow—the evils to be avoided, the duties to be performed. The Spirit acts upon His own life in the renewed soul. He works in the Christian a right disposition of heart relating to Truth and duty. He maintains in the believer a right disposition of mind, preparing and disposing him to attend unto the revealed will of God. He speaks effectually to the conscience, enlightens the understanding, regulates the desires, and orders the conduct of those who submit themselves to His holy suggestions and overtures. To be “led by the Spirit of God” is to be under His guidance and government.

The wayward child and the self-willed youth is guided by his own unsanctified and unsubdued spirit. The man of the world is controlled by “the spirit of the world.” The wicked are governed by Satan, “the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). But the Christian is to yield himself to “the still small voice” of the Holy Spirit. Yet a word of caution is needed at this point, for in our day there are many fanatics and impious people who do that which is grossly dishonoring to God under the plea that they were “prompted by the Spirit” so to act. To be “led by the Spirit of God” does not mean being influenced by unaccountable

suggestions and uncontrollable impulses which result in conduct displeasing to God, and often injurious to ourselves and others. No, indeed; not so does the Spirit of God “lead” any one.

There is a safe and sure criterion by which the Christian may gauge his inward impulses, and ascertain whether there proceeds from his own restless spirit, an evil spirit, or the Spirit of God. That criterion is the written Word of God, and *by it* all must be measured. The Holy Spirit never prompts anyone to act contrary to the Scriptures. How could He, when He is the Author of them! *His* promptings are always unto obedience to the precepts of Holy Writ. Therefore, when a man who has not been distinctly called, separated, and qualified by God to be a minister of His Word, undertakes to “preach,” no matter how strong the impulse, it proceeds not from the Holy Spirit. When a woman “feels led” to pray in public where men are present (1 Cor. 14: 34), she is moved by “another spirit” (2 Cor. 11:4), or if one claimed “guidance” in assuming an unequal yoke by marrying an unbeliever (2 Cor. 6:14), would prove conclusively that it was *not* the “guidance” of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit fulfills His office of Guide by three distinct operations. First, He communicates life and grace, a new “nature;” second, He stirs that life unto action, and gives “more grace;” third, He directs the action into performance of duty. Life, motion and conduct are inseparable in nature and grace alike. First, the Holy Spirit quickens us into newness of life, infusing gracious habits into the soul: “A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” (Ezek. 36:26). Second, He moves upon the soul and assists the new nature to act according to its own gracious habits and principles: He “worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Third, He *directs* our actions by enlightening our understandings, guiding our inclinations, and moving our wills to do that which is pleasing to God. It is the last two we are now considering.

Divine direction is *promised* the saints: “The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way” (Ps. 25:9): and this not only by general directions, but by particular excitations. “I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go” (Isa. 48:17). Divine guidance is *desired* by the saints as a great and necessary blessing: “Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day” (Ps. 25:4, 5). Mark the earnestness of this prayer: “show me, teach me, lead me.” Note the argument: “Thou art the God of my salvation,” and as such, pledged to undertake for me. Observe the importunity: “on thee do I wait all the day,” as if he would not be left for a moment to his own poor wisdom and power. Even the “new nature” is utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

Though the children of God are “light in the Lord” (Eph. 5:8) and have a general understanding of the way of godliness, yet much ignorance and darkness still remains in them, and therefore in order to keep a steady and constant course of obedience they need to be guided by the Holy Spirit, so that their light may be both directive and persuasive. Though Christians have a general understanding of their duty, yet to perform it in particular cases much grace from God is needed by them. If left to themselves, their own corruptions would blind and govern them, and therefore do they pray, “Order my steps in thy Word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me” (Ps. 119:133). The way to Heaven is a “narrow” one, hard to find and harder still to be kept, except God teach us *daily* by His Spirit. Wisdom from on High is continually needed to know how to apply the rules of Scripture to all the varied details of our lives. The Holy Spirit is the only fountain of holiness, and to Him we must constantly turn for directions.

But something more than knowledge is needed by us: the Spirit must persuade and incline our hearts, and move our wills. How strong are our inclinations to sin, how easily fleshly impulses override our better judgment, how weak we are before temptation! We know what we *should* do, but are carried away by corrupt affections to the contrary. It is at *this* point the Holy Spirit governs from within. First, by His restraining motions, bidding us to avoid and mortify sin; second, by His quickening motions, inviting us to the pursuit of holiness. And just so far as we *yield* to His “strivings” are we “*led* by the Spirit of God.” As moral agents we are responsible to cooperate with the Spirit and respond to His gentle sway over us. Alas, we so often fail to do so. But though He suffers this up to a certain point—for our humbling—yet by His invincible power He prevents our making shipwreck of the faith, and after many chastenings, conducts us safely to Glory.

In conclusion we will seek to supply the answer to the following question: *How* may Christians know whether

they be among those who are “led by the Spirit of God” (Rom. 8:14)? In general, those who are directed by this Divine Guide are moved to examine their hearts and take frequent notice of their ways, to mourn over their carnality and perverseness, to confess their sins, to earnestly seek grace to enable them to be obedient. They are moved to search the Scriptures daily to ascertain the things which God has prohibited and the things which He enjoins. They are moved to an increasing conformity to God’s holy Law, and an increasing enablement to meet its requirements is wrought in them by the Spirit blessing to them the means of grace. But to be more specific.

First, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we *led from ourselves*: from confidence in our own wisdom, from dependence upon our own strength, and from trust in our own righteousness. We are led from self-will, self-pleasing, self-aggrandizement. The Spirit conducts away from self unto God. Yet let it be pointed out that this weaning us from ourselves is not accomplished in a moment, but is a perpetual and progressive thing. Alas, at best God has but a portion of our affections. It is true there are moments when we sincerely and ardently desire to be fully and unreservedly surrendered to him, but the ensnaring power of some rival object soon discovers how partial and imperfect our surrender has been.

Second, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we *brought to occupation with Christ*. To whom else, in our deep need, can we go? Who so well-suited to our misery and poverty? Having severed us in some degree from ourselves, the Spirit brings us into a closer realization of our union with the Saviour. Are we conscious of our filth and guilt? The Spirit leads to the blood of Christ. Are we sorely tried and oppressed? The Spirit leads unto Him who is able to succor the tempted. Are we mourning our emptiness and barrenness? The Spirit leads to the One in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. It is the special office of the Spirit to take of the things of Christ and show them to us.

Third, just so far as we are governed by the Spirit of God are we *conducted along the highway of holiness*. The Spirit leads the Christian away from the vanities of the world, to the satisfying delight which is to be found in the Lord. He turns us from the husks which the swine feed upon to spiritual realities, drawing our affections to things above. He moves us to seek after more intimate and more constant communion with God, which can only be obtained by separation from that which He abhors. His aim is to conform us more and more to the image of Christ. Finally, He will conduct us to Heaven, for of it the Spirit is both the pledge and the earnest. ¶

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THE THINGS IN WHICH WE HAVE COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

John Owen

The first general work of the Holy Spirit is to bring to mind the words and promises of Christ

The first thing in which we have communion with the Holy Spirit is his work of bringing to mind the things that Jesus said (John 14:26). There are two promises in this verse. There is the promise of the Spirit’s teaching, which I will deal with under his work of anointing believers, and there is the promise of “bringing to remembrance all things that Jesus said.”

The work of bringing to remembrance things that Jesus said is the first general promise concerning the Spirit’s

work as comforter.

This promise first concerned the apostles. Christ promised his apostles that the Holy Spirit would bring back to their minds, by a direct work of almighty power, the things that he had said to them, so that by his inspiration they might be enabled to write and preach them for the good and benefit of his church (2 Pet. 1:21). The apostles had forgotten much of what Christ had said to them, or might possibly do so. And what they did remember by their natural ability was not a sufficient foundation for them to write an infallible rule of faith for the church. It would be by this work of the Spirit that they would be enabled to write such an infallible rule of faith.

This promise of bringing to remembrance all the things that Jesus had spoken is also for the comfort of believers. Christ had been speaking to his disciples to comfort them by giving them precious promises of his help and strength in this life. He told them of the love of the Father, of the glory he was providing for them, which was full of unspeakable joy. "But," Christ says, "I know how unable you are to make use of these things for your own comfort. The Spirit, therefore, will bring them back to your minds in their full strength, so that you will find that comfort in them which I intended." And this is one reason why it was necessary for believers that Christ's bodily absence should be more than made up for by the presence of the Spirit. While he was with them, what little effect his promises had on their hearts! But when the Spirit came, how full of joy did he make all things to them. He brings the promises of Christ to our minds and hearts to comfort us, to bring us the joy of them and that far beyond the joy the disciples found in them when Christ spoke to them on earth. The gracious influences of the promises were then restrained so that the dispensation of the Spirit might be seen to be more glorious than that of the giving of the law.

Christ told the disciples that the effect of the Holy Spirit's work in bringing things to their remembrance would be peace (John 14:27). They would be freed from worried, anxious minds and fearful hearts. It is stupid to rely on our natural abilities to remember the promises of Christ. But when the Comforter undertakes the work, then all is well. Our Saviour Christ, then, left to his Spirit the powerful effect of his promises which he personally gave his apostles in their great distress. We may therefore see where all the spiritual comfort we have in this world comes from, and so we may have fellowship with the Holy Spirit in this his work.

The Holy Spirit does his work powerfully. A believer may be in the saddest and darkest condition imaginable. Even so, the Holy Spirit is able to break through all this and bring to mind the promises of Christ. By this work, the Holy Spirit enables Christians to sit in dungeons, rejoice in flames and glory in troubles. If he brings to mind the promises of Christ for our comfort, neither Satan nor man, neither sin nor the world, nor even death itself shall take away our comfort. Saints who have communion with the Holy Spirit know this only too well. Sometimes the heavens are black over them, and the earth trembles under them. Disasters and distresses appear which are so full of horror and darkness that they are tempted to give up in despair. So how greatly are their spirits revived when the Holy Spirit brings the words of Christ to their minds for their comfort and joy. Thus, believers are not dependent on outward circumstances for their happiness, for they have the inward and powerfully effective work of the Holy Spirit, to whom they give themselves up by faith.

The Holy Spirit does his work sovereignly. The Holy Spirit distributes to everyone as he wills. So the believer may at one time be full of joy and, at another, full of distress. Every promise at one time brings great joy when troubles are great and heavy; yet at another time, when only suffering a little, he finds no joy in the promises, however much he seeks for it. The reason is simple. The Holy Spirit distributes as he wills. So there are no rules or course of procedure given to us to follow in order to get peace and joy in the promises. In this way, faith learns to wait on the sovereign will and pleasure of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works freely and without payment. Because much of the comfort which comes by the promises depends on the sovereign will of the Holy Spirit, so we find that comfort comes unexpectedly when the heart has every reason in the world to expect distress and sorrow. This is often the first means of restoring a backsliding soul who might justly be expecting to be utterly cast off.

The life and soul of all our comforts are treasured up in the promises of Christ. They are the breasts from which we suck the milk of godly comfort. Who does not know how powerless these promises are in the bare letter,

even though we may meditate long on them, as well as how unexpectedly they burst in on the soul, bringing great comfort and joy. Faith deals especially with the Holy Spirit. Faith considers the promises themselves, looks up to the Spirit and waits for the Spirit to bring life and comfort into them. No sooner does the soul begin to feel the life of a promise warming his heart, freeing him from fear, worries and troubles, than it may know, and it ought to know, that the Holy Spirit is doing his work. This will add to the believer's joy and lead him into deeper fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

The second general work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ (John 16:14)

If the work of the Spirit is to glorify Christ, then we may see what sort of a spirit that is who sets himself up in the place of Christ, calling himself "the vicar of Christ" or "another Christ." The work of the Comforter is to glorify Christ. So any spirit that claims to be of Christ and does not seek to glorify that Christ who spoke to his apostles is clearly a false spirit.

But how will the Comforter glorify Christ? "He," says Christ, "shall take of mine." What these things are is told us in the next verse. "All things that the Father has are mine, therefore I said he shall take of mine." Christ is not speaking of the essence and essential properties of the Father and the Son, but he is speaking of the grace which is brought to us by the Father and the Son. This is what Christ calls "my things," because they are the "things" purchased by his mediation. They are also the "things of the Father," because in his eternal love, he has provided them to be brought to us by the blood of his Son. They are the fruits of his election. "These," said Christ, "the Comforter shall receive. They shall be committed to him so that he may bring them to you for your good and for your comfort in trouble. So he shall show, declare and make them known to you." As Comforter, he reveals to the souls of sinners the good things of the covenant of grace, which the Father has provided and the Son has purchased. He shows to us mercy, grace, forgiveness, righteousness and acceptance with God. It is vital to know that these are the things of Christ which he has procured for us. They are shown to us for our comfort and establishment. These things the Holy Spirit effectively conveys to the souls of believers, and makes them known to them for their own good; that they were originally from the Father, prepared from eternity in his love and good will; that they were purchased for them by Christ and laid up for them in the covenant of grace for their use. In this way, Christ is magnified and glorified in their hearts and they then fully realize what a glorious Saviour and Redeemer he is. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that a believer glorifies and honours Christ for the eternal redemption he has purchased for him. "No-one can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

The third general work of the Holy Spirit is to "...pour the love of God into our hearts" (Rom 5:5)

That it is the love of God to us and not our love to God which is here meant is clear from the context. The love of God is either the love of his purpose to do us good or the love of acceptance and approval by him. Both these are called the love of God in Scripture. Now, how can these be poured into our hearts? This can be done only by giving us a spiritual understanding of them. God pours the Holy Spirit abundantly on us and he pours out the love of God into our hearts. That is, the Holy Spirit so persuades us that God loves us that our souls are filled with joy and comfort. This is his work and he does it effectively. To persuade a poor, sinful soul that God in Jesus Christ loves him, delights in him, is well pleased with him and only has thoughts of kindness towards him is an inexpressible mercy.

This is the special work of the Holy Spirit and by this special work we have communion with the Father in his love, which is poured into our hearts. So not only do we rejoice in and glorify the Holy Spirit who does this work, but in the Father also, whose love it is. It is the same in respect of the Son, in taking the things of Christ and showing them to us. What we have of heaven in this world lies in this work of the Holy Spirit.

The fourth general work of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness with our spirits that we are the children of God (Rom 8:16)

Sometimes the soul wonders whether it is a child of God or not, because so much of the old nature still remains.

So the soul brings out all the evidences to prove its claim to be a true child of God. To support this claim, the Holy Spirit comes and bears witness that the claim is true.

The picture is that of judicial proceedings in a court of law. The judge being seated, the person concerned lays his claim, produces his evidences and pleads his case. Then a person of known and approved integrity comes into the court and testifies on behalf of the claimant. This stops the mouth of all the adversaries and fills the man that pleaded with joy and satisfaction. It is the same with the believer. The soul, by the power of his own conscience, is brought before the law of God. There the soul puts in his plea that he is a true child of God, that he does indeed belong to God's family, and to prove this, he produces all his evidences, everything by which faith gives him a right and title to God. Satan, in the meantime, opposes with all his might. Sin and the law add their opposition also. Many flaws are found in his evidences. The truth of them all is questioned and the soul is left in doubt as to whether he is a child of God or not. Then the Comforter comes and by a word of promise or in some other way, overwhelms the heart with a sure persuasion, putting down all objections, showing that his plea is good and that he is indeed a child of God. And therefore the Holy Spirit is said to "witness with our spirits that we are children of God."

At the same time, he enables us to show our love to the Father by acts of obedience to his will, which is called "crying Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). But as the Holy Spirit works sovereignly of his own will and pleasure, the believer may be kept in doubt for a long time. The law sometimes seems to prevail, sin and Satan to rejoice and the poor soul is filled with dread about his inheritance. Perhaps by his own witness, from his faith, sanctification and previous experience, he keeps up his claim with some life and comfort. But the work is not done, the conquest is not fully won, until the Spirit, who works freely and effectively, when and how he wills, comes in with his testimony also. Clothing his power with his promise, he makes all parties concerned listen to him and so puts an end to the whole dispute.

In this, he gives us holy fellowship with himself. The soul knows his voice when he speaks. There is something too great in that voice to be only the voice of some created power. When the Lord Jesus Christ at one word stilled the storm, all who were with him knew there was divine power at work (Matt. 8:25-27). And when the Holy Spirit with one word stills the storms in the soul, bringing calm and assurance, then the soul knows by experience that divine power is present and so rejoices in that presence.

The fifth general work of the Holy Spirit is His work in sealing us (Eph 1:13; 4:30)

To seal something is to impart the image of the seal to the thing sealed. The character of the seal is stamped on the things sealed. In this sense, the effective communication of the image of God to us should be our sealing. The Spirit in believers, really communicating the image of God in righteousness and true holiness to the soul, seals us. To have the stamp of the Holy Spirit as an evidence to the soul that he has been accepted by God is to be sealed by the Spirit. In this sense, Christ is said to be sealed by God (John 6:27). He had impressed on him the power, wisdom and majesty of God.

"Sealing" confirms or ratifies any grant or conveyance made in writing. In such cases, men set their seals to make good and confirm their grants. When this is done, the grants are irrevocable. Sealing also confirms the testimony that is given by anyone of the truth of anything. This is what the Jews did. When anyone had given true witness to any thing or matter and it was received by the judges, they instantly set their seals to it, to confirm it in judgment. So it is said that he who receives the testimony of Christ "sets to his seal that God is true" (AV) or "has certified that God is true" (John 3:33). The promise is the great grant and conveyance of life and salvation in Christ to the souls of believers. That we may have full assurance of the truth and the irrevocability of the promise, God gives us the Spirit to satisfy our hearts of it. So the Spirit is said to seal us by assuring our hearts of those promises and the faithfulness of the God who promised. But though many expositors take this line, I do not see how this accords with the true meaning of the word. It is not said that the promise is sealed, but that we are sealed. And when we seal a deed or grant to anyone, we do not say the man is sealed, but that the deed or grant is sealed.

Sealing denotes possession and assurance of being kept safe. The object sealed is separated out from unsealed

objects. Men set their seals on that which they possess and desire to keep safe for themselves. So quite clearly, in this sense, the servants of God are said to be sealed. They are marked with God's mark as his special ones (*Ezek. 9:4*). So believers are sealed when they are marked for God to be the heirs of the purchased possession and to be kept safe to the day of redemption. Now if this is what is meant, it does not denote the giving of assurance in the heart, but of giving security to the person. The Father gives the elect into the hands of Christ to be redeemed. Christ having redeemed them, in due time they are called by the Spirit and marked for God, and so they give themselves up to the care of the Father.

We are sealed for the day of redemption when, from the stamp, image and character of the Spirit upon our souls, we have a fresh awareness of the love of God given to us, with an assured persuasion of our being accepted by God.

So the Holy Spirit communicates to us his own likeness, which is also the image of the Father and the Son (2 Cor. 3:18). In this work of his, the Holy Spirit brings us into fellowship with himself. Our likeness to him gives us boldness with him. We look for his works. We pray for his fruits, and when any effect of grace, any awareness of the image of Christ implanted in us persuades and assures us that we are separated and set apart for God, then we have communion with the Holy Spirit in his work of sealing.

The sixth work of the Holy Spirit is His being an "Earnest" of "deposit" or "guarantee" (1 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13,14)

From these verses, we learn that the Spirit himself is the "earnest, deposit or guarantee." Each of these words denotes a pledge. A pledge is that property which anyone gives or leaves in the safe keeping of another, to assure him that he will give him, or pay him all that he has promised at some future date. But that which is meant by "earnest, deposit or guarantee" here is a part of that which is to come. An "earnest" is part of the price of anything, or part of any grant given beforehand to assure the person to whom it is given that at the appointed time he shall receive the promised whole.

For a thing to be an "earnest, deposit or guarantee," it must be part of the whole. It must be of the same kind and nature with the whole, just as if we have some money as an "earnest, deposit or guarantee" that the whole amount will be paid later.

It must be a guarantee of a promise. First, the whole is promised, then the "earnest" is given as a deposit or guarantee that the promise will be fulfilled. The Holy Spirit is this "earnest." God gives us the promise of eternal life. To guarantee this to us, he gives us his Spirit. So the Spirit is the "earnest, the deposit, the guarantee" of the full inheritance that is promised and purchased.

The Holy Spirit is an "earnest, deposit and guarantee" on God's part, because God gives him as the best part of the inheritance itself, and because the Holy Spirit is of the same kind and nature as the whole inheritance, as an "earnest" ought to be. The full inheritance promised is the fulness of the Spirit in the enjoyment of God. When that Spirit which is given to us in this world has perfectly taken away all sin and sorrow and has made us able to enjoy the glory of God in his presence, that is the full inheritance promised. So that the Spirit given to us to make us fit for the enjoyment of God in some measure whilst we are here is the "earnest or guarantee" of the whole.

God does this to assure us of the inheritance and to guarantee it to us. Having given us his Word, promises, covenant, oath, the revelation of his faithfulness and his immutability as guarantees, all of which exist outside us, he also graciously gives us his Spirit to dwell within us, so that we may have all the security and guarantee of which we are capable (*Isa. 59:21*). What more can be done? He has given us his Holy Spirit. In him we have the first-fruits of glory, the utmost pledge of his love, the earnest or guarantee of the whole.

The Holy Spirit is also the "earnest, deposit or guarantee" on the part of believers because he gives them an awareness of the love of God for them. The Holy Spirit makes known to believers their acceptance with God, that he is their Father and will deal with them as with children and so, consequently, the inheritance will be theirs. He sends his Spirit into their hearts, "crying Abba, Father" (*Gal. 4:6*). And what inference do believers

draw from this? “Now we are not servants, but sons, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ” (Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:17). So as children of God, we have a right to the inheritance. Of this the Holy Spirit assures us.

The Holy Spirit acquaints believers with their inheritance (1 Cor. 2:9, 10). As the “earnest” is the part of the whole, so by the “earnest” we get a foretaste of the whole. By the Holy Spirit, then, we get a foretaste of the fulness of that glory which God has prepared for those that love him and the more communion we have with the Holy Spirit as an “earnest,” the more we taste of that heavenly glory that awaits us.

The seventh general work of the Holy Spirit is to anoint believers (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:20, 27)

Of the many endowments of Christ which he had from the Spirit with which he was anointed, wisdom, counsel and understanding are the chief things (Isa. 11:2, 3). On account of this, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are said to be in him (Col. 2:3). So the anointing of believers is associated with teaching (1 John. 2:20, 27). The work of the “anointing” is to teach us. The Spirit who anoints us is therefore the Spirit of wisdom, of counsel, of knowledge and understanding in the fear of the Lord. So the great promise of the Comforter was that he should “teach us” (John 14:26). Christ promised that the Comforter would “guide us into all truth” (John 16:13). This teaching us the mind and will of God in the way in which we are taught it by the Spirit our Comforter is the chief part of our anointing by him.

The Spirit teaches by conviction and illumination. So the Spirit teaches the world by the preaching of the Word as promised (John 16:8).

The Spirit teaches by sanctification. He opens blind eyes, gives new understanding, shines into our hearts to give us the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and enables us to receive spiritual things in a spiritual light (1 Cor. 2:13). He gives a saving knowledge of the mystery of the gospel. All this is common to believers.

The Spirit teaches by comforting. He makes sweet, useful and joyful to the soul that which he, as the Spirit of sanctification, reveals of the mind and will of God. Here the oil of the Spirit is called the “oil of gladness,” because he brings joy and gladness with his teaching. And the name of Christ is experienced as sweet “ointment poured forth,” that causes souls to run after him with joy and delight (Song 1:3). We see it in daily experience that very many have little taste and relish in their souls for these truths which they believe for salvation. But when we are taught by this “anointing,” how sweet is everything we learn of God!

The Spirit teaches us of the love of God in Christ. He makes every gospel truth like well-refined wine to our souls and the good things of the gospel to be a rich feast of good things. He gives us joy and gladness of heart with all that we know of God, which is the great way of keeping the soul close to the truth. By this anointing, the soul is kept from being seduced into error. Truth will readily be exchanged for error when no more sweetness and joy is to be found in it than is to be found in the error. When we find any of the good truths of the gospel coming home to our souls with power, giving us gladness of heart and transforming us into the image and likeness of it, the Holy Spirit is then at his work. He is pouring out his oil.

The Spirit is also the “Spirit of supplication” (Zech. 12:10). It is he who enables us to pray rightly and effectively.

Our prayers may be considered as a spiritual duty required by God. So they are wrought in us by the Spirit of sanctification, who helps us to perform all our duties by exalting all the faculties of the soul.

Our prayers may be considered as a means of keeping up communion with God. The soul is never more lifted up with the love of God than when by the Spirit it is taken into communion with God in prayer. This is the work of the Spirit as comforter.

Here, then, is the wisdom of faith. Faith looks for and meets with the Comforter in all these works of his. Let us not, then, lose their sweetness by remaining in the dark about them, nor fall short of the response required of us in gratitude.

The Holy Spirit and the Hearts of Believers

The Holy Spirit comforts and strengthens the hearts of believers (Acts 9:31)

This is the chief work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. He brings the troubled soul to rest and contentment by getting the believer to think of some spiritually good thing or actually brings some spiritually good thing to him. This spiritual good is such that it completely overcomes that trouble which the soul has been wrestling with. Where comfort is mentioned, it is always associated with trouble or suffering (2 Cor. 1:5, 6).

This comfort is everlasting (2 Thess. 2:16). It does not come and go. It abides for ever, because it comes from everlasting things, such as everlasting love, eternal redemption and an everlasting inheritance.

This comfort is strong (Heb. 6:18). As we experience strong opposition and trouble, so our comfort or consolation is strong and so unconquerable. It confirms and strengthens the heart under any evil. It fortifies the soul and makes it able cheerfully to undergo anything that it is called to undergo. This comfort is strong because he who brings it is strong.

This comfort is precious. So Paul makes it the great motive to obedience to which he exhorts the Philippians (Phil. 2:1).

The fellowship we have with the Holy Spirit lies, in no small part, in the comfort or consolation we receive from him. This teaches us to value his love, to look to him in our troubles, and to wait on him for his everlasting, strong, precious comfort.

The Holy Spirit brings peace to the hearts of believers (Rom. 15:13)

The power of the Holy Spirit not only refers to “hope” but also to our peace in believing. When Christ promised to give the Comforter to his disciples, he also promised to give them his peace (John 14:26, 27). Christ gives his peace by giving the Comforter. The peace of Christ lies in the soul’s assurance of being accepted by God in personal friendship. So Christ is said to be “our peace” (Eph. 2:14). He slays the enmity between God and us, “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us” (Col. 2:14). Being assured of our justification and acceptance with God in Christ is the foundation of our peace (Rom. 5:1). To know that we are delivered from eternal wrath, from being hated, cursed and condemned, fills the soul with joy and peace.

Nevertheless, this peace of heart is by the sovereign will and pleasure of the Holy Spirit. A man may be chosen in the eternal love of the Father, redeemed by the blood of the Son and justified freely by the grace of God so that he has a right to all the promises of the gospel. Yet this person can, by no reasonings or persuasions of his own heart, by no considerations of the promises of the gospel, nor of the love of God or grace of Christ in them, be brought to that peace until it is produced in him by the Holy Spirit. “Peace” is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22).

The Holy Spirit brings joy to the hearts of believers

The Spirit is called “the oil of gladness” (Heb. 1:9). His anointing brings gladness with it (Isa. 61:3). “The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). The Thessalonians received the word with joy in the Holy Spirit (1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:8). To give joy to the hearts of believers is chiefly the work of the Holy Spirit. He enables believers to “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2). This joy is produced by the Spirit pouring into our hearts the love of God and so carrying them through every kind of tribulation (Rom. 5:5).

The Holy Spirit produces joy in the hearts of believers directly by himself without using any other means. As in sanctification he is a well of water springing up in the soul, so in “comforting” he fills the souls and minds of men with spiritual joy. When he pours out the love of God in our hearts, he fills them with joy, just as he caused John to leap for joy in Elizabeth’s womb when the mother of Jesus approached. This joy, the Holy Spirit works when and how he wills. He secretly injects this joy into the soul, driving away all fears and sorrows, filling it

with gladness and causing it to exult, sometimes with unspeakable raptures of the mind.

The Holy Spirit produces joy in the hearts of believers by his other works with respect to us. He assures us of the love of God and of our acceptance with God and our adoption into his family. When we think about this, the Holy Spirit brings the truth home to us with joy. If we consider all the things the Holy Spirit does for us and in us, we will soon see what a strong foundation he lays in our hearts for our continual joy and gladness.

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit works joy in us as and when he pleases according to his sovereign will and pleasure. This way of producing joy in the heart, David describes as “having his head anointed with oil” (Psa. 23:5, 6). And the result of this anointing, David says, is, “surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” In Isaiah we have a wonderful description of the work of the Comforter. (See Isaiah 35.)

The Holy Spirit brings hope to the hearts of believers (Rom. 15:13)

The great hope of the believer is to be like Christ and to enjoy God in Christ for ever. “And,” says John, “everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). By showing “the things of Christ” to us and by “glorifying Christ” in our hearts, the Holy Spirit arouses our desires to be like Christ and so we grow and increase in our hope, which is one way by which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us.

These are the general works of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, which, if we consider them and all that they produce, will bring joy, assurance, boldness, confidence, expectation and glorying. We shall then see how much our whole communion with God is enriched and influenced by them. ¶

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