

The Holy Spirit and Man As Person (1)

WHAT IS MAN?

This is a very important question. On it depends understanding of the work of the Spirit, as also reciprocally the work of the Spirit helps us, then, to understand more of what and who man is.

Man Is Spirit

We can only understand the nature of man in the light of the nature of God, so that our starting point, then, is God. Man is made in the image of God. This must mean that he reflects God in who he is and what he does, by being in total contingency upon Him. Man is creature, in a way in which no other being is creature. None is in the image of God but man.

If man is an emanation or extension of God then he is divine. Man is not divine, the various references to his ephemeral nature—for example, ‘all flesh is as grass’—show that if we can speak about him essentially, then he is dust. However it is into that dust that God has breathed, and man has become ‘a

living being [soul; Heb. *nephesh*]. Unfortunately the prevalence of ‘Bible psychologies’ has sought to make man either bipartite (body–soul, with the spirit and the soul one) or tripartite (body–soul–spirit), whereas the Hebrew Scriptures think of man as a total being, without the kind of divisions we make in our analyses today. A. B. Come, *Human Spirit and Holy Spirit*,¹ and G. S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*,² as also Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*³ have made out a very good case for thinking of man primarily as ‘spirit’. One of the statements of fallen man—‘spiritually dead’—is probably a wrong statement. Probably ‘spiritually perverse’ would be a better statement, but anyway it points to the fact of man’s spirit-being. However, by ‘spirit’ we do not mean that which is immaterial or ethereal or merely unseen, but that which constitutes true personhood, having the element of discreteness. We mean having basic affinity with God who is Spirit. We seek to define, but with difficulty, what spirit is.

An example of this is the body of glory (cf. Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:51ff.). This can mean ‘a glorious body’, but now a body composed of (ethereal) glory. It will be a true body, a glorified body, but a body like that of Jesus’ having ‘flesh and bones’. The person will be ‘spiritual’ according to 1 Corinthians 15:45–50, yet we will be ‘spirits’, each being ‘spirit’. Hebrews 12:23 speaks of ‘the spirits of just men made perfect’, and 12:9 speaks of ‘the Father of spirits’, an obvious reference to Numbers 16:22, ‘the God of the spirits of all flesh’ (‘flesh’ here means ‘mankind’).

¹ A. B. Come, *Human Spirit and Holy Spirit*.

² G. S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, SCM Pr., London, 1957.

³ Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, John Knox Pr., Atlanta, 1977.

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Someone has pointed out that man can never really be just an animal. He may try to be so but cannot succeed. Nor can he succeed in being (as) God. He is neither. He is more than animal and less than God: he is human. He is spirit. Fallen man (cf. Ps. 8:3ff.; Rom. 3:23) is an anomaly, but a spiritual anomaly. He has to be consonant with being spirit but he will not. Jesus gave the clue when he said, 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him *in spirit and truth*'. Surely he meant, 'They must be spirit and be truth (i.e. live truthfully and live spiritually) and so have affinity with the Father who is the truth and who is Spirit'. That is, 'Deep calls to deep', or like calls to like. If this were not so then man could be permanently happy and contented with less than God. Some of this truth may be expressed in Ecclesiastes 3:11, God 'has put eternity [or, the world] into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out [by searching] what God has done from the beginning to the end'. Man cannot be contented with less than the *all* that has been given to him. Being spirit he needs God the Spirit. With God the Spirit he is truly man.

Man, As Man, Is always 'Becoming'

Passages such as Isaiah 43:6–7 and Ephesians 1:4–14 with 1 Corinthians 2:6–12 indicate that man, even as created, was not complete within himself, nor intended to be. Before creation God had planned man's glorification but had not glorified him at creation. In this sense man is created to grow into his fullness. Whilst the fall can be said to have 'set him back', man did not change, essentially, from being 'spirit'. Call fallen man 'bad spirit' if we will, but he was still spirit and could only essentially be contented with the fullness of God. Even if he does not seek God (Rom. 3:11; Ps. 14:1–2) he is driven to seek *something*. In fact idolatry—in some form or another—is his

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must. He must have a god, and a god, rightly understood, is not man.

Romans 8:17–25 indicates that redeemed man is waiting for full redemption. Philippians 3:21 shows the hunger of redeemed man for the body of glory, that is, full and mature spirithood. Second Corinthians 3:18 tells us that justified man is increasing in glorification even whilst on this earth, and 2 Corinthians 4:16ff. shows us that suffering is the mode or means of glorification and that the process is doubtless ensuing whilst the redeemed are living in this world.

What we need to see is the connection of the person and work of the Spirit with man in all his ‘ages and stages’, that is, in creation, the fall, the process of salvation history and the end-time. Does the Spirit leave fallen man to ‘un-becoming’ or does he undo this and bring man to full and proper ‘becoming’? If so, what is man at the end of time when he has fully ‘become’? Surely the answers to these questions, if demanding, must be some of the most thrilling a human being can know!

CREATED MAN AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of all creation. He is the Spirit of might and strength and through him everything has life. No less than the Word of God is the Spirit of God operating to bring all things into being, virtually out of nothing (cf. Heb. 11:3; Ps. 33:6; 104:29–30). However, the creating of life, and the sustaining of it, wonderful as that may be, is not the primary question. The primary question is, ‘What kind of life is created?’ Romans 1:19–20 indicates that it is that sort of life—in all its modes and forms—which indicates to us the *kind* of being God is, not merely a proof that He is, that He

exists. So when man is created, our understanding of the work of the Spirit (and so the person of the Spirit) will arise from the *kind* of person man is, as created. Some of this, of course, we have seen above.

That man is remarkable is an understatement. Elihu made the statement, ‘The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life’. That is profound enough, but the question is: What kind of life? The answer to that is seen in Genesis 1:26ff. It is also seen in Psalm 8, Ecclesiastes 3:11, 7:29 and 1 Corinthians 11:7, amongst other passages. If we understand man to be spirit, and then understand what is spirit—especially man-wise—then we recognise the brilliance of man, his amazing powers and capacities, especially in comparison to other creatures, and we see one who if left to himself can accomplish almost anything (Gen. 11:6). Man’s brilliance is not matched by an essential moral power to accomplish great things in the moral realm. In this sphere man can do nothing except he be contingent upon God. Romans 7:13–25 is probably the most famous passage ever written in describing man’s moral impotency.

If we look at man-remarkable, and add to that picture the insights we have seen as to his appointed end (glorification) and his present ‘becoming’, then we see the measure of the Spirit’s creative powers. What we began to see in John 4:23–24 of God being Spirit and man having to be spirit is linked with the wider truth of God being Father, and of course Christ being Son. Man is by nature a son of the Creator–Father. He has come to created being by the Spirit, but then the Spirit is, eternally, the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, simultaneously. However, having touched upon this point we will leave it for later amplification.

MAN AND THE SPIRIT OF HOLINESS

We have stated, often, that the Spirit has, as it were, nothing of his own. He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, of Yahweh, of Jesus, of Christ, and so on. The term Holy Spirit is not really used to distinguish him, say, from ‘unholy spirit’, but is really ‘the Spirit of Holiness’. This is the thrust of Psalm 51:11—‘take not thy holy Spirit from me’, is really saying: take not away the Spirit of holiness, that is, the Spirit who creates in me a clean heart and puts a new and right spirit within me (cf. v. 10). Hence, as we have seen in Isaiah 4:4, the filth of Zion’s daughters and the bloodstains of Jerusalem are washed away by the Spirit of judgement, and the Spirit of burning. Our section on cleansing by fire (above) shows us the same principle.

The Spirit and Holiness in the Old Testament

When we come to the subject of holiness itself in the Old Testament we are met with a dynamic confrontation of the holiness of God Himself. The Hebrew words *qodesh* and *qadosh* which have the idea of separation or an object set apart are the adjectives mainly used. Their use is prolific. God is holy, His people are holy, the tabernacle (temple) with its furniture is holy, Jerusalem is the holy city of God, the law is holy, worship must be holy, life must be holy. God is likened to fire, and this fire will destroy all that is not holy and purify dross away from that which is intended to be holy. God’s holiness is worshipful and God rejects ruthlessly anything not commensurate, in worship, with His holiness. Indeed His wrath is based on His holiness. Man’s fear of Him should also be based on His holiness. His holiness is dynamic, destroying that which is impure and evil.

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At the same time His holiness is known in simplicity and love. In Isaiah 57:15, God is at once ‘the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy’, but also dwells ‘with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit’. He dwells thus to ‘revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite’. Again in Hosea 11:9, He could easily destroy Israel but refuses to do so. He has always loved Israel. Hence He says, ‘I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, *the Holy One in your midst*, and I will not come to destroy’. He gives the compassionate warmth of His covenant love for Israel’s true security.

All through the Old Testament we see God zealous for His people, that they may be holy. Exodus 19:5–6 is the *locus classicus* of this, and it is related to many other passages. God teaches His people purity, both in ceremonial and ritual, as in law. However it is the *heart* which He requires to be pure, and this is where we see the work of the Spirit. As we have seen in our wider sweep of salvation history, the Spirit who has created us in purity wishes to keep us in purity, for that is commensurate with being a true human and, more so, with being the true people of God. That is why God is angry at anything that goes beyond or away from His created order in worship, righteousness, truth and love.

We have seen in Genesis 6:1–7 that mankind, from being ‘spirit’, had become ‘flesh’. Then God saw ‘that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually’. In this context the Lord said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in man for ever’. The meaning may have been that the Spirit would not dwell in man, thus abandoning him even more to ‘flesh’. It may have meant that the *ruach* which keeps man *alive as a being* would be withdrawn, or it may have meant that God

would give 120 years before this act of taking away the Spirit or ceasing to restrain man from ultimate evil. What is clear is that the Spirit relates to man's current living and his ultimate judgement. In 2 Thessalonians 2:6–8 the 'one who restrains' is considered by many to be the Holy Spirit.

When we come to *the story of David* we come to the fact that David had fallen into terrible sin. It was not as that sombre kind of sin which was Saul's. This king had a curious attitude which brought on fits of remorse but never good repentance. It was that of a stubborn heart. David was clearly fleshly in his sin of adultery and murder, but from Psalm 32 we gather that as he hid his sin it festered within him, bringing him to retributive forms of anguish and destruction. The word of the prophet to him, 'Thou art the man', really liberated him to repentance. Psalm 51 is the classical passage of repentance in the Scriptures. Not without cleansing and forgiveness can his guilt be destroyed—and it is! It is cleansed by 'the Spirit of holiness'. David sees that God 'requires truth in the inward parts' and asks, 'Teach me wisdom in the secret heart'.

In *the story of Israel in the wilderness* we see the Holy Spirit leading the people to the promised land. In Isaiah 63, we read, 'they rebelled and grieved his holy Spirit'. This means, they were unclean. They were not consonant with the true spirit of holiness man must have, and especially the people of God must have. A study of Ephesians 4:26–5:2 gives us a New Testament parallel of the same kind of sin, the sin which grieves the Spirit.

Finally *we come to the prophets*, by whom, as we have seen, the Spirit expresses himself richly. They point to a holiness Israel lacks. Its polluting idolatry, its abominations and its unrestrained immorality are so often castigated. The concept of a pure people living wholly to the Lord changes to the recognition that under Israel in the bulk is the true Israel,

the elect remnant, the *holy seed*. This is Israel's true hope, and in fact the truth of God's election. Had there not been left this stock, this stump, this holy seed, then Israel would have been no more. But God has kept for Himself such a people.

There are the promises, as we have seen them, of the covenant, and the new heart. Ezekiel 36 speaks of a new heart, a heart of flesh, a heart of obedience and a new spirit. The new spirit in Israel comes from the Holy Spirit within them. God will have punished and purified Israel, and will restore their fortunes before their eyes and bring them back to their land *for the sake of His holy name!* In Ezekiel 37 Israel is totally renewed from its entire loss as a people.

What is clear from the covenant promises is that with the *new heart* there is *new obedience*. This is consonant with Deuteronomy 30:6–10, where the circumcised heart loves God and keeps His commandments (cf. John 14:15). In the Psalms (see Ps. 19 and 119 especially) obedience follows the 'enlarging of the heart'. We can sum all this up by saying that God insists on having a holy people who are consonant with their holy God. The Spirit works at this holiness in man, and is grieved when the demands of God are rejected and his own efforts (seemingly) thwarted. Prophetically he promises a rich redemption which will purify and warm the heart of man and make him true 'spirit' again. In that day there will be a holy people.

The Spirit and Holiness in the New Testament

We have to admit that so far we have not described true holiness in its full meaning. The idea behind *qodesh* and *qadosh* which is thought to derive from the verb 'to cut' seems to be that of separation. Man is not intrinsically holy, but contingently holy. If he lives obediently in contingency

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then he is living in holiness. Such holiness is not merely refusing to do evil, or seeking legalistically to keep with the law, but it is dynamic, negating evil on the one hand and warmly espousing true obedience on the other. True obedience is not simply moralistic operations, but participation in God's world and God's purposes.

When we come to the New Testament we find the Holy Spirit in powerful overt operations. These concern the birth and ministry of John the Baptist, the conception, birth, life, baptism, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is greatly at work in the years of Jesus' ministry, and, if possible, even more in the early church. His shaping of the work of redemption through Christ, so that the gift of redemption can come to man, is the story of the gospels. His giving of that gift is the story of the Acts. The significance and outworking of all this is the thrust of the epistles. It is fair to say, then, that we must first speak of the gift of redemption coming to man before we speak of holiness coming to him.

Two things are before us. The first is Jesus' constant anger at the working of evil. He rebuked the foul infestation by demons of human persons. To him it was an affront to his work of creation, and a caricature of what a person was to be before his Father, God. He liberated people from binding diseases, and even death. He freed some from the intolerable burden (and effects) of guilt. Finally he sealed the liberation from pollution by going to the cross. In this first operation the Spirit is present. It is *by the Spirit* that Jesus exorcises, heals, raises from the dead and forgives sins. This, then, is a work of holiness by the Spirit.

The second matter concerns various Scriptures which make *sanctification* precede salvation, and even justification. In 1 Peter 1:2, Peter addresses those who are 'chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to

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Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood'. This 'obedience to Jesus Christ' is actually belief in the gospel and, so, redemption. Here sanctification precedes this. It means that as the Father has chosen out, prior to redemption, so has the Spirit set apart. The same idea is repeated in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 'God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth'. Again in 1 Corinthians 6:11, 'you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God'. This latter is somewhat different from the former two, but at least shows sanctification by the Spirit precedes justification. All of this is contained, although not explicitly, in 1 Peter 2:9–10 where the Old Testament holy people are now the new true people of God, 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people'.

Since in experience, repentance, faith and forgiveness follow in that order and add up to sanctification, we will deal with them that way. We may observe here that by the end of the New Testament it is seen who are the holy people of God. Their course is followed in the Acts, and they are spoken of much in the epistles, but the Revelation shows their suffering and trials, and their ultimate emergence, at the end of time, as the holy people of God. He is not ashamed to dwell with them. What are these people? They are those who *have* or *hold* or *bear* 'the testimony of Jesus'.