

## STUDY EIGHT

# The Holy Spirit and Man As Person (2)

## The Holy Spirit and the Gift of Salvation

In 1 Corinthians 2:12 Paul says, ‘Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that *we might understand* [know] the gifts bestowed on us by God’. These gifts, or things freely given, in the context, pertain primarily to the ultimate matters of glorification. However Paul certainly refers to all gifts. Romans 1:21ff. tells us that in the past, man knew God but rejected Him and became unthankful, that is, he did not wish to see what he possessed as ‘the gifts of God’. He has an inbuilt objection to ascribing these to God. He would rather ascribe them to the gods! When the Spirit comes he reveals these gifts.

### THE GIFT OF CHRIST

The gifts of Christ (Eph. 4:7–10) are the gifts given by Christ, but the gift of Christ is all that God gives to us in Christ, no

## THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

less than Christ himself. In 2 Corinthians 9:15 Paul cries, 'Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!' Not even the disciples really understood the gift of Christ. At the birth of Jesus the angels spoke of God's great grace to man, and John later recorded, 'the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ', and of his fullness have we received, and grace upon grace. That however was on later reflection.

On the night of his betrayal Jesus said of the Spirit that he would teach and would bring into remembrance all that Christ had spoken, and finished by saying, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for *he will take what is mine* and declare it to you. *All that the Father has is mine*; therefore I said that *he will take what is mine and declare it to you*' (John 16:13–15).

Paul sums it up, so far as our personal gain is concerned. 'For the wages of sin is death, but *the free gift of God is eternal life in [through] Christ Jesus our Lord*' (Rom. 6:23). The gift of Christ contains all that is our salvation. That salvation comes to us by the agency of the Spirit. He must show us the gifts; he must evoke us to receive the gifts.

### **THE GIFTS WHICH ARE, AND WHICH BRING, LIFE**

Paul asks apropos of a certain matter, 'What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?' (1 Cor. 4:7). This could well be applied to the gift of eternal life, and would include the gifts by which the gift is received. Ephesians 2:8–9 shows clearly

that grace and salvation are gifted, not earned. How could they be earned?

How does a man see the salvation of God? Jesus told Nicodemus that new birth by the Spirit was essential to see and enter the Kingdom. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul says the natural (psychical) man does not receive the things of the Spirit for they are foolish to him, being only spiritually (not psychically) discerned. Here John 16:7–11 is pertinent. Jesus said the Spirit would convince the world of sin, righteousness and judgement. Hebrews 6:4–6 seems to speak of a ministry of the Word and Spirit which *brings a man up to the place of true repentance*. If, having been illuminated, he deliberately refuses what he knows to be the truth, then his case is hopeless. The Spirit gives the gift of illumination and conviction, but *man must respond*. It is logical to expect a positive response, but man does not necessarily respond. His refusal brings judgement. He has been proffered the gift, but he rejects.

### **Repentance**

In Acts 5:31–32 Peter seeks to explain the significance of the ascension: ‘God exalted him [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, *to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.’ In Acts 2, Peter says that God raised Christ up to the throne to shed forth ‘this which you [now] see and hear’. He means the coming of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Holy Spirit and the gift of repentance are bound together. In Acts 2:38 Peter commands repentance and baptism and promises forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit. In Acts 10–11 the Gentiles have the Spirit come upon them and obviously receive the forgiveness of sins. Later this is

described as, 'to the Gentiles also God has granted [the gift of] *repentance unto life*' (11:18). Repentance then is a gift of God which comes via the Holy Spirit.

Something we must recognise is that repentance is evoked by a sight of God and a knowledge of what He has done for man (or, has given man) in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who brings this revelation.

### Faith

Theologians debate whether faith or repentance comes first. It does not much matter; 'Repent and believe' or 'Believe and repent' both seem appropriate. Ephesians 2:8–9 and Philippians 1:29 suggest that faith is a gift. Romans 10:14–17 enunciates the principle that without proclamation how could one have faith. The conclusion is that with proclamation faith can come, so faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Whatever this means it must include the fact that the word *preached in the power of the Spirit* (1 Cor. 2:5; 1 Thess. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:12; cf. Gal. 3:1–3) evokes faith. The mystery of response or rejection, as we have suggested, is beyond our knowledge or ability to discern.

What is clear is that there is no true word without the Spirit, any more than there is true Spirit without the word. The Spirit of truth so works in man that the word is known as true, and man must do something, either by way of response or rejection. It is difficult for us to trace the psychological elements, the interior working of the Spirit. In the events of repentance and faith he alone knows the true nature of man, even fallen man, and the interior requirements to effect his results. He is, of course, at once both the Spirit of grace and the Spirit of judgement. Jesus spoke of 'remitting sins' and 'retaining sins'. This for us is mostly a mystery.

### **Forgiveness of Sins**

Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 10:43, amongst many other passages, speak of the forgiveness of sins. In these passages forgiveness is a gift. In these passages also there is either the work or mention of the Holy Spirit. What we omitted to observe in regard to repentance was that the gift of repentance to Israel was a thought which enraged the Sanhedrin. Why should Israel have to have a gift of repentance? They had virtually asked this of John the Baptist when he had demanded repentance. It seems from the prophecies that repentance was to be a sign of the new heart, or the precursor to the change of the heart of stone to the heart of flesh. Repentance is of course (*metanoia*, Gk.) 'a change of mind'.

Likewise to speak of the gift of forgiveness for Israel was equally insulting. Did she not have her *cultus* of sacrifice for forgiveness? Had they not said Jesus blasphemed when he forgave? And so on. Yet forgiveness of sins was a very definite mark of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–28; etc.). Now it was a gift, not only for Israel but also for the Gentiles. If the former was amazing, the latter was stunning.

One thing is patent. The gift of forgiveness is the most humbling of all gifts, insisting as it does that man is so sinful as to need forgiveness, and God so gracious as to send His Son to die to effect that forgiveness. Paul's expositions on forgiveness are powerful. It takes not only a cross to obtain our forgiveness but a resurrection to seal that same forgiveness (1 Cor. 15:17; cf. Rom. 4:25). Forgiveness is costly and the spirit of man is set against such grace-obligation which ensues from actual forgiveness. This is why it is impossible to know forgiveness apart from the Holy Spirit.

Let us look at some cases. The first is that on the day of Pentecost Peter had the advantage of the remarkable events of

the coming of the Spirit and the transformed understanding and expression of the recipients of the Spirit who told ‘the wonderful works of God’. Since they had been led into the truth, they were able to speak with truth and conviction. When Peter spoke powerfully of: (i) the resurrection of Christ; and (ii) his (now) evident Lordship, seated as he was at the right hand of God, many of the hearers knew Christ had defeated death and so had defeated sin, and so was Lord and so ought to be obeyed. Peter gave them the wonderful promise that if they repented and were baptised in (to) the name of Christ they would receive forgiveness. Already they had cried out, ‘What shall we do?’ and here was the answer. The Spirit had brought conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement and now they were ready for repentance and forgiveness. The Spirit, in depth, had shown them the wonder of grace through the cross and resurrection.

This is virtually what happened in the case of the Gentiles at their ‘Pentecost’. Acts 10 shows Peter preached the Lordship of Christ: ‘he is Lord of all’ (v. 36). Then the promise of forgiveness is made, if and when they believe, *which they do*. Immediately the Spirit falls on them and, we assume, they receive forgiveness. Again the Spirit reveals forgiveness in depth and *applicates it*. The third example (among many) is that of Saul of Tarsus. He is confronted by the Lordship of Jesus on the road to Damascus. Seated for three days in blindness he must have ‘put it all together’; that is, his own understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, what he had heard Christians say, and what Jesus had said. Ananias came in with a compound message, namely: (i) what are you waiting for? Arise and be baptised, washing away your sins; and (ii) you are to be filled with the Spirit (Acts 9:17; 22:6–16). Again, forgiveness and the Spirit, or the Spirit and forgiveness. The Spirit gives interior understanding. The Spirit helps us to know the gifts that are freely given of God. As we have said, and as is

indicated in Romans 8:26–27, the interior work of the Spirit is very deep, very tender, very intimate. If, according to 1 Corinthians 2:11–12, a man's own spirit knows the things of a man, and the Spirit the things of God so that he searches 'even the depths of God' (v. 10), then how much better can he search our deeps, he who is the Spirit of truth whereas our spirits are not, of themselves, such? None will ever be able to gauge or calculate the deeps of man into which the Spirit penetrates and in which he works.

### Cleansing

The deepest humiliation of man must lie in his pollution. Created to be pure, and to have purity as his habitat, impurity brings him to deep shame and inferiority, albeit he refuses to objectivise this shame. David did when he cried, 'Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow' (Ps. 51:6–7). We saw in Isaiah 4 that the Spirit would come and cleanse. We saw in Ezekiel 36 that he would wash them from all their idols and all their filthinesses, when the new heart and the new spirit would be internalised.

The great debate amongst the Jews concerning the Gentiles was that they were impure. God had to give Peter a special vision and tell him that what He had made clean, Peter was not to call unclean or impure. Peter had understood this, and knew that when the Holy Spirit visited them they were now clean. He explained to the Jews in Acts 15:8–9, 'And God who knows the heart bore witness to them [the Gentiles], giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but *cleansed their hearts by faith*'. Ananias had told Paul to be baptised, *washing away his sins*, and to *be filled with the Spirit*. First Corinthians 6:11 speaks of being washed

by the Spirit of our God. This accords with Titus 3:3–7 where there is ‘the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’.

How, then, comes this cleansing by the Holy Spirit? If he can, of himself, cleanse the sinner, then why the cross? The answer is, ‘He applies the work of the cross; he cleanses by the blood of Christ’. Hebrews 1:3 has it, ‘When he had made purification for sins’, and Hebrews 9:14, ‘the blood of Christ purify [purge] your conscience from dead works’. The same verse speaks of the offering for sins being made through ‘the eternal Spirit’. In Hebrews 10:22 the writer, after quoting Jeremiah 31:31–34, speaks of its conclusion, ‘let us draw near [to God] with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water’.

The old indelible stains, the ingrained pollution, the shameful inner filthiness—all of this has gone in the amazing work of Christ, applied deeply and intimately by the Spirit. We are those who have made our robes white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14), but not without the aid of the Spirit of holiness who had once aided Christ to bear the iniquity of us all. Though our sins were as scarlet, they have become whiter than snow; though they were once red like crimson, they are now as white as scoured wool.

Now man is back in his natural habitat, the very holiness of God. Such pure spirit can have affinity with God who is Spirit; can worship him in spirit and in truth.

### **Justification**

Justification can be looked at from various angles. It can be understood as the non-imputation of (the guilt of) sin (Ps. 32:1–2; Rom. 4:1–8; 2 Cor. 5:19), or the acquittal from guilt



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(Rom. 5:18; 6:7; 8:1), and from another point of view as the accounting of Christ's obedience as righteousness (Rom. 5:12–21; Phil. 3:9). It relates to law and its demands for (legal) righteousness. Paul's statement in Acts 13:39, 'every one that believes is freed [justified] from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses', and his Romans 6:7, 'he who has died is freed from sin', mean, in accordance with 2 Corinthians 5:14, 'we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died', meaning that every believer has died for his sin in Christ, or Christ for him, and he is now justified from sin, that is, cannot (and need not) die again for his sin. Christ has borne this guilt (1 Pet. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21; etc.). Such justification is by the amazing grace of God.

Also, apart from the Spirit men cannot know justification. Romans 8:1–3 has this message: We are no longer under condemnation. We were, but the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free (justified us) from the law of sin and death. The moral law, when we sin, becomes the law of sin and death to us. Man could not (and did not) keep the law. The gospel came in the cross, *but* it required the Spirit to make it real to us, and that is 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus'. This equates with 2 Corinthians 3:6 which says that the guilt of the law kills (cf. Gal. 2:19) but the Spirit (through the gospel) gives life. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, where those caught in the terrible slavery of sin are 'washed . . . sanctified . . . justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and *in the Spirit of our God*'. Again it is the gospel as applied by the Holy Spirit.

Nor does the Holy Spirit leave it there. Man now is *justified by faith*, that is, not at all by sight. The just shall live by faith, battle by faith, understand by faith. Hence 'through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness'

(Gal. 5:5). Our daily understanding of justification is contingent upon the Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:1–5). He gives the first-fruits as some tangible evidence for hope, and in verse 5 it is the actual and ever-present love of God, again based on the cross (vv. 6–10).

### CONCLUSION

‘Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (2 Cor. 3:17). The chapter gives us a contrast between the eras of law and grace, and bondage and the freedom of the Spirit. The same principle found in Romans 8:1–3 is in 2 Corinthians 3. In this chapter Paul points out that the law brings heavy legalism, but the gospel of grace brings freedom. It is, however, the gospel as ministered by the Spirit. Hence the discussion in Galatians 2:11–21 on not reverting to law, but living in grace. Also, in Galatians 3, Paul makes it clear that the blessing of the gospel is *justification*, but justification is *with a view to* the covenant blessing of the Holy Spirit. Both are intimately tied together.

There are many other themes under which salvation is spoken of in the New Testament, such as ransom, redemption, the term ‘salvation’ which we have scarcely considered, and so on. However these are aspectual ways of seeing the whole. We need not deal with them in detail. It is enough to say that their experience and appropriation by the believer is through the ministry of the Spirit. In this the Spirit does what is called a prevenient work. In John 16:7–11 this is the work of conviction of sin, righteousness and judgement. It may be over a period of time or it may be, seemingly, instantaneous.

It leads to the receipt of the Spirit’s gifts of repentance and faith. These gifts, received, must be exercised by the recipient.

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Then forgiveness, cleansing, justification and liberation come to the believer; again gifts exercised in faith, the Spirit meanwhile working in interior fashion within those he originally created, as he does his work of the 'washing of regeneration and renewal' of the person.

This brings what is called the liberty of the believer, and he consistently must be led by the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and so live the life of faith, and out of this the life of hope and, as we shall see, the life of love.