

The Holy Spirit and Man As Person (3)

The Holy Spirit and the Gifts of Love and Holiness

INTRODUCTION

It is not always that we link love and holiness, yet it is axiomatic that God's love be holy love, and that His holiness be loving holiness, no matter how severe it may appear, even in that state, to man. For man the driving force for holiness is the love of God, and indeed his whole motivation comes from the love of God. Love, in its outworking, is holiness. For this reason we will see how the gift of love comes by means of the Holy Spirit, and then how it inspires to holiness.

THE GIFT OF LOVE

'God is love' is a statement made by John twice in the fourth chapter of his first letter. He explains, also, how it is so. In Romans 15:30 Paul comes close to saying the Spirit is love. He uses the term 'the love of the Spirit'. This will only be a

term to us until we go back upon the endless patient labour of the Spirit from creation until now, anticipating also the future, and seeing how tireless the Spirit has been in helping to effect our salvation and all the marvellous gifts of glorification. In fact what the Spirit has to do with primarily, is love.

In Colossians 1:8 Paul expresses his pleasure at hearing of their 'love in the Spirit'. Previously he has said that they have 'love for all the saints' which is quite a saying! He means that they walk in the Spirit and so express their love.

However it is the beginning experience which brings love. This is simply that 'We love, because he first loved us' (1 John 4:19). Love of course is seen at the cross (Rom. 5:6–10, where Paul speaks of our weakness, our ungodliness, our sinfulness and our enmity in spite of which and for which Christ died), and so when one recognises love, then one loves. How does one recognise love? By none other than the Spirit. This is why Paul says in Romans 5:5 that the love of God has been poured (or, flooded) into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

He does not mean that love is some quasi-metaphysical substance, some divine fluid or emanation which is inserted into our hearts, but he means a recognition (with response) of the love of God Himself. This is beautifully shown in Luke 7 in the story of the woman who was a sinner. 'She loved much', said Jesus, because 'her sins, which are many, are forgiven'. The principle of this is that only he who is *forgiven much* will *love much*. In fact a study of this passage along with Jeremiah 31:31–34 and 1 John 4:9–10 will show us that propitiation, or the removal of guilt and wrath, is what sets the heart free and beating with love. The grace of God is seen in its abounding measure. We are convinced that God loves us, because He has forgiven us.

Yet forgiveness is not merely a doctrinal fact but a dynamic and total experience. To know oneself to be free of

the penalty, the pollution, and the power of sin is to experience an incredible happening. There is an interior release. This is why, and this is how love is experienced. If in any way the grace of God, and the total forgiveness of God, including total release from penalty, pollution and power, is minimised, then love will be minimised. The Spirit never minimises, but maximises. Faith must rise up to that stunning maximum.

The gift of love is always contingent upon the Spirit. That is not to say that he withdraws the love at any point, but obviously when he is grieved, or vexed, or quenched (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19), or his leading is rejected (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16, 18, 25), or we fail to be 'aglow with the Spirit' (Rom. 12:11) or 'filled with the Spirit' (Eph. 5:18) or to go on in the Spirit to maturity (Gal. 3:3-5), then the tides of love must seem to recede, and its reality to dim, at least in our subjective appreciation. But as we are obedient to the Spirit and are not negative in the ways just nominated, then that love is a real matter to us. We can then walk in love (Eph. 5:2), and just as we have been forgiven, so we can forgive.

A matter with which we will deal more in the treatment of holiness is 'the fruit of the Spirit'. This 'harvest', mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23, is in contrast to the 'works of the flesh' where love is absent. When we look at the first of the fruit we see it to be love. In fact joy, peace, patience and the others are all constituents of love. In Colossians 3:14 Paul exhorts, 'Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony'.

We may now proceed to the gift of holiness, and then its outworking in and by love.

THE GIFT OF HOLINESS

We have already seen in the Old Testament prophecies that in place of the people of God who had pursued idolatry and abominations, God was to raise up a holy people for Himself, and we saw that Exodus 19:5–6 now comes to be applied to a people derived from both Jewish and Gentile origins. The Jews themselves, that is the Christian Jews, scarcely believed that God would include the Gentiles. The event at Caesarea, amongst others, convinced them. Hence Peter was able to say that God had ‘cleansed their [Gentile] hearts by faith’. This cleansing is sanctification, for it includes them in the separated people of God.

Again, Paul, when speaking of the commission Jesus had personally given to him, described it thus: ‘the Gentiles—to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are *sanctified by faith in me*’ (Acts 26:17–18). If they are sanctified by faith, then it is not by works, and so is a gift. It reminds us of Paul’s statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 which has the same thrust, but says they are saved ‘through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth’. That is, they are cleansed by the Spirit and included in the holy people of God. It also reminds us that in God’s intention this sanctification by the Spirit—that is, this ‘setting apart’—has happened long before in the plan of God.

In addition we have looked at what we have called ‘the interior work of the Spirit’. The application of cleansing, the liberation from the tyranny of sin, the breaking of the bondage of Satan, his powers and his world-system, are dynamic facts and happenings. Now there is a hatred for evil, a distaste of sin, and a deep reluctance to be caught up in its bondage ever

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again. This is the thrust of Romans 6:2, ‘How can we who died to sin still live in it?’ The idea is ‘Perish the thought!’ We see then that the Spirit not only brings purification through the gospel, but also a power to oppose sin, and this is the basis of holiness.

To keep matters clear let us see the two elements or aspects of holiness. The first is that an interior work of cleansing has been done and simultaneously we have been made part of the people of God. Secondly there is a daily process of outworking on this act of the Spirit. We fight temptation, we reject uncleanness, we seek to live in positive obedience by all the means of grace at our disposal. The first aspect of holiness never varies. We have been ‘called to be saints’ and we are. This is motivation then to live in holiness. Even so this is not a heavy legalistic striving. Behind our endeavours is the whole of love, and where we fail from time to time grace covers the failure and keeps us free in grace and love to continue the endeavour. Holiness must never be seen as a series of negatives, and a dread of failure. It is not a remorseless drive of perfectionist accomplishing, any more than it is the flippant light-heartedness of an antinomian carelessness.

The basic fact to remember is that it is the person of the Holy Spirit (‘the Spirit of holiness’) who leads and guides in the matter of holiness. Being initially the sanctifier, he continually leads in the matter of practical holiness.

Practical holiness is simply obedience to the will of God. The work of the Spirit which we have to speak about—and this we will do later—is the work of bringing us to be sons of God. At this point we will assume the teaching of Romans 8:14–17 and Galatians 4:4–6. We remember that Christ said the Spirit would lead into the truth of the Son and the Father, that is, coming to the Father through the Son, and the basic fact about the Son who once cried ‘Holy Father!’ (John 17:11)

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is that holiness of life is that of sons under the Fatherhood of God. This is seen in 1 Peter 1:14ff., where, in invoking the Father (who is Holy), we too must be holy. This is also implicit in the Lord's Prayer. To ask the Father's name to be hallowed is to present ourselves to be holy, and to do His will on earth.

The great point here is that obedience as sons is superior to obedience, merely, as servants. One becomes a son through the work of the Spirit, then one is led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14). Galatians 5:16–18, 22–25 shows us the whole process of holiness, but shows it in the context of the believer being willing to be *led by the Spirit*, and so to *walk in the Spirit*. In Galatians 5:16–18 Paul sets out the principle that the believer is beset by two forces: (i) flesh; and (ii) the Holy Spirit. 'Flesh' stands for all that is evil and rebellious. It relates to 'the old humanity', that is, Adamic humanity, and its ways. Now one does not have flesh, so much as one is beset by flesh. Yet one is, rightly enough, beset by the Holy Spirit. In between we are, as it were, caught. The flesh would seek to hold us back from the ways of the Spirit. Also the Spirit would withhold us from the ways of flesh. If then we give over (as should be natural to God's children) to the Spirit and are led by him then we will not fulfil the strong desire (lust, drive) of the flesh. Also we will not be under law, that is, legalistic striving which will ultimately, anyway, land us up in fleshly living (cf. Gal. 3:1–5).

In Romans 8:11–14 Paul outlines a principle. He says that because of the gospel and the Spirit we are under no indebtedness to the flesh (cf. Col. 2:11–15), but if anything, he says by inference, we are indebted to the Spirit to live after the Spirit. He says, 'if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live'. Notice he does not say 'the deeds of the flesh', but 'of the body'. Whilst body is flesh in one sense, it is not flesh in the sense of which we have been speaking. The

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body has right and natural desires such as eating, drinking, seeing, hearing, pleasure, sex, etc. None of these is wrong, but each can be used wrongly, say to excess, or for wrong reasons. When one is about to be dominated by such a deed of the body, then it is the Spirit who aids us in putting to death that deed. If we do it out of our own wills we will finish up with 'will-worship' and this will be another form of 'flesh' or 'self-achievement'.

It is in this sense that Paul speaks in Colossians 3:1–10. He makes the point that we have died, with Christ, and are risen again (cf. Rom. 6:1–10; Eph. 2:5–6), and because this is so, we can 'put to death' elements which appear in us. We have put off the old humanity. We live in the new humanity, Christ, and are being renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created us. Holiness then is not so much an achievement as it is living consonant with the new life and context which is ours, albeit we are deeply opposed by forces of evil.

We conclude then that holiness is a gift of God, ministered to us through the Spirit. At the same time it is a process which follows the initial crisis of sanctification, but proceeds towards the ultimate climax. F. F. Bruce,¹ in his commentary on Romans, has said, 'Sanctification is glory begun; glory is sanctification completed'.

HOLINESS THROUGH LOVE

We could equally say, 'Love in holiness'. Unholy love is no love, and loveless holiness is a dreary matter. It is, again, the Spirit who is present to make both as they should be. Both

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, Inter-Varsity Pr., Leicester, 1983, p. 178.

love and holiness in the experience of the believer are contingent upon the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit, and that means, upon the willing obedience of the believer, being led by the Spirit and walking in him.

Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments'. He means that love will motivate to obedience. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:14, 'the love of Christ controls [constrains] us', meaning that it is God's love which controls us in (or, to) obedience. We know from human experience that this is what love accomplished. Notice it is not so much love for God as God's love for man which controls and motivates man. We have already seen in Deuteronomy 30 that the circumcised heart is the heart that loves God and obeys Him. In Jeremiah 31:31–34 it is the heart of the forgiven person which has the law written within it, and so obeys. We have seen in Ezekiel 36:24–28 that it is the heart that is cleansed, which is of flesh, which now keeps God's commandments and His ordinances. In other words, holiness in action proceeds from love. This must surely be equated with Romans 5:5, 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us'. It also links up with the numerous verses which speak of the Spirit dwelling in the believer, for example, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Romans 8:9–11, Ephesians 5:18 and 2 Timothy 1:14.

On the obverse side, not to love is certainly not to live in obedience. In 2 Peter 1:3–11 the writer speaks of those who grow and flourish in maturity, step by step. At the same time he says, 'whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and *has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins*' (v. 9). His holiness of life is blurred or missing because he has denied the wellspring of love and forgiveness. Likewise in Ephesians 4:26–5:2 the thrust is that what we did under the old humanity we no longer do, or we grieve the Spirit. Not to

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be tenderhearted, kind, loving, forgiving is to grieve the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 he who does not love the Lord is anathema. In 1 John 4:20 he who does not love his brother cannot love God. Likewise he who hates his brother is a murderer.

We conclude then by saying that holiness is the way of life of the true believer, but it is holiness prompted, motivated, and enabled by love. In 1 John 5:3 we read, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments'. We have seen that obedience is motivated by love. Now we see the very deep truth that *obedience is love itself*. Elsewhere we read that the law, that is, the keeping of the law, is summed up in love to neighbour. True law is simply the way and manner of love, but in the era of the Spirit the law which was formidable when written on tablets, external to man's person, is now internalised, written on the heart. It is the Spirit who internalises such law. To be led by the Spirit and to walk in him is to understand the true nature of law at every point of experience and at every point where moral choice has to be made.

Such obedience, simply understood, is true holiness.