

## Living in the Spirit

### **INTRODUCTION: THE SPIRIT WHO IS PERSON**

In our fifteen studies on the person and work of the Holy Spirit we saw that he is person, that he is God, that he works in the unity of the Godhead with the Father and the Son, and that he has deep love for the humanity he helped to create, and the creation he helped to form and sustain. So deep is that love that it goes to the depths in the cross, death and resurrection of Christ, and then goes on to apply that work to the heart and mind of man until he is born anew, and becoming a new creation is empowered to bear the testimony of Jesus to the uttermost parts of the earth, and to the end of time. We are not simply dealing with a theological Entity, but with the person of the Spirit, God Himself, and to say it more truly, he is dealing with us.

We have seen that he is impassible in that passions do not control or manipulate him, but passible in that he is the very Spirit of the true affections such as love, joy and peace. Being the Spirit of goodness, holiness and righteousness he is perforce the Spirit of burning and of judgement, else there were no release for repentant man, and no righteous judgement for the finally impenitent.

## LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

What is most stunning is that all mankind passes through the hands of the Spirit. What is beyond belief is that where man is redeemed to God the great gift of the Spirit passes into man!

### **MAN UNDER THE SPIRIT**

It may seem a strange term to use, but we use it; man is processed by the Spirit. He passes through the hands of the Spirit in order to be a created being. Each person is created by the creative Spirit of life. In this sense he passes through the hands of the Spirit. It is not as though he is never touched by the Spirit. It is a daring phrase to use of true man, but true man is 'deep spirit', because that is what a man is meant to be. He is this because he is to reflect the fullness of the Father, and to be fully a son under Him. Without the Spirit he cannot be 'deep spirit', and so true that he can worship the Father in 'spirit and in truth'.

In new birth, being reborn, becoming a new creation, man must be regenerated by the Spirit. How deep this work must be is untellable. Man who is in sin is so far gone in depravity as to defy either analysis or description. Because the whole human race is in this condition, true objectivity regarding itself or its evil is impossible. At the best it can follow the revelation of God in Scripture, and especially in the living revelation of the Father and Jesus! It is not in a position to tell how far evil has gripped it. Jeremiah spoke of it (17:9), Jesus spoke of it (Mark 7:21ff.), and even Paul (Rom. 3:9-18), but even so we cannot hear their words without the Spirit. In the labyrinthine depths evil has run its terrible course and marred and scarred the original beauty and form of man, and impaired his vision of God, as also his true use of his faculties. There is

a bias and a twist, too terrible to be told, hence the need of the depths of the Spirit to restore or renew man to 'deep spirit'. In regeneration man again passed through the hands of the Spirit. This is a strong, yet tender and intimate processing of the chaos and confusion of the fallen spirit. Being in his hands we should know him, and the truth is we shall never have passed through his hands. We are always dependent upon him.

### **EXPERIENCING THE SPIRIT**

We have seen in Romans 8:9–11 that 'Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him'. The test of being a believer, a regenerated person, is not simply that we have believed Christ, but that we have received the Holy Spirit and he now dwells in us. In fact the order of the New Testament is to believe on Christ and receive the Spirit, meaning that Christ comes to us through the Spirit (cf. Eph. 3:16; Rom. 8:9–11). Whilst it is true that the Spirit leads us to believe on Christ and does this in an anonymous way, directing our attention to Christ, it is also true that the Spirit comes as God's gift at the point of repentance and faith. We have seen that repentance and faith are gifts, and their use is evoked by the Spirit through the word (Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:16–17; Gal. 3:1–3). The coming of the Spirit is 'the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit' (Titus 3:5).

This immense work of cleansing, bringing forgiveness, flooding the heart with love, renewing the person, giving a new mind, is often called conversion or justification, and summed up as regeneration. Others see this crisis as the beginning of regeneration and sanctification. It does not matter. It is a crisis with a view to a process, and a process with a view to a climax. To this magnificent work others add what they call

## LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

‘the baptism in the Spirit’. This, they say, is a baptism for power. Some see it is a baptism for entire sanctification. The debate rages endlessly around these points and the very mention of the term ‘baptism in the Spirit’ is most emotive for those who deny it is a second work, and those who claim it is.

No matter. One who has been processed into cleansing, forgiveness, freedom and love should also be a man filled with power, and free in the Spirit. If he is not then something is missing and has to be completed, call it what we will. Leaving aside the event of the 120 receiving the Spirit (being baptised in the Spirit), the 3,000 who repented and were baptised into Christ for the forgiveness of sins most surely received the gift of the Spirit. Chapters 8, 10, 11 and 19 of Acts must have one thing in common. The power of the Spirit’s coming made them vocal about Christ. If it did not then it was to little, if any, purpose. Acts 4:30ff. is another account of a great visitation of the Spirit upon the people of God, the outcome of which was a new surge of power.

Let the argument of the initial experience of the Spirit go on, one thing is certain: he who having experienced the Spirit does not witness to Christ and live in power, service and proclamation has either denied the purpose of that initial experience, or it was never full enough. Why it should not be full is a matter for theological debate, but at the worst it is to do with the reluctant will of the object of the Spirit, man.

### **EXPERIENCING THROUGH THE SPIRIT**

We saw there are two most significant utterances that a man makes when visited by the Spirit in the manner described above. The first is ‘Abba!’ that is, ‘Dear Father!’ The second is, ‘Jesus! Lord!’ or, ‘Jesus is Lord!’ These two cries actually

## THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

determine (and reveal) how a man relates to God. In the first case he relates as a son; in the second as a servant of Christ, or a younger brother acclaiming the elder brother and being subject to him. It also reveals his understanding of creation, as flowing from the Father, and understanding redemption under the Lordship of Christ, as also the confrontation of evil in the great Messianic mission.

Through the Spirit we have come into the new and amazing experience of eternal life, and this life is *knowing the Father and the Son* (John 17:3), a relationship which is only possible through the Spirit (John 16:12–15; Gal. 4:6; 1 Cor. 12:3; cf. 1 Cor. 2:10f.). This peak of experience of knowing the Father and His Son (1 John 1:3) is kept alive by the Spirit. In the context of the kingdom ('righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit') we live in the fruitfulness of the Spirit, 'love, joy, peace', and so forth (Gal. 5:22–23). By the Spirit we know we abide in him, and he abides in us (1 John 3:24; 4:13), and by the Spirit Christ dwells in us (Eph. 3:16).

We could then talk of the experiences of prayer, unity, fellowship, exercise of the gifts, of the spiritual weapons, of inner power, and so on. We have dealt with these. What concerns us is what becomes real, permanent and continuous with us, not momentary experiences, nor even flashes of grace, but a steady build-up in, and to, maturity. We will seek to examine these.

### **GROWTH IN MATURITY: HABITUATION**

We have seen that Paul talked about 'beginning in the Spirit'. This is easy to define, especially in its context. It is seeing, knowing and living in the fact of the cross, God's forgiveness and the grace of God. This initial revelation by the Spirit of the

love of the cross launches us into life in the Spirit, that is, beginning in the Spirit. Under the heading of ‘The Flesh and the Spirit’ we saw that to seek to earn merit, justification or salvation by works of the law is a fleshly occupation. It belongs to the pride of man. True redemption is all of grace. Yet this is a revelation which has to break through the pride of man and humble him, which is something that will not happen apart from the Spirit.

We then saw that ‘going on in the Spirit’ must be the same—dependence upon grace in every way. If we seek to live by the principle of works, then we are again living according to the flesh. To ‘be matured in the Spirit’ is again to depend upon the Spirit who keeps bringing to us the grace of God. A little later we see there is a daily experience of the Spirit ‘at the stretch’ which should be the norm for each person, and the people of God in general.

### **Habituation in the Spirit**

In 2 Corinthians 4:13 Paul says, ‘Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we too believe, and so we speak’. In its context this verse shows that the obedient believer is not dismayed or crushed by constant and unrelenting opposition. One is not given, as a flash experience, ‘a spirit of faith’; but one has learned, by habituation, to bring this spirit of faith to every situation and contingency. Again, in Ephesians 1:16–19 Paul prays for the Ephesians that they may be given ‘a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him’. He is asking that they do not simply have a flash of revelation, but a steady and ongoing spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God which will build them up in hope and so give a stability to present life. Again, in Romans 8:15 Paul

says, 'For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship . . . we cry, "Abba! Father!"' It is not simply a once-for-all revelation, but a continuing relationship from this habituated spirit. Yet again, in 2 Timothy 1:7 Paul says, 'for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control.' The possibilities that lie even in a transient experience of power, love and self-control are good to contemplate. However, a life lived in an habituated spirit of these things would seem to be very rich.

How does this 'spirit' come? We need not think of such a spirit as a personalised spirit, any more than a 'spirit of slavery' or a 'spirit of timidity' should be thought to be demons or spirits. We develop such traits as the latter through negative thinking, and the former *through the Spirit himself*. He is the source of love, power, a sound mind (self-control, of faith, of wisdom and revelation). It would not be difficult to find Scriptures to support this claim. However, it is as we relate to the Spirit that we develop such 'spirits'. Romans 8:14 says, 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God . . . ' How easily are we led by him? How easily do we obey him, listen to him, walk in him? If not easily then we will develop habituation very slowly, if at all. This is 'the power at work within us' (Eph. 3:20), but when we are not subject to him, then we live our lives by works and flesh.

Habituation is, of course, practice. It is like the athlete training, dieting, running and exercising. The 'naturalist' Christian lives by the foolish notion that if everything does not happen, fall into place, come of itself, then it is not spiritual because it is unnatural. They see the use of the mind and of habituated effort as being 'carnal'. Spiritual is something which is almost permanently supernatural or, as some say, 'spooky'. It does appear that those who buffet their bodies, who toe the line with the

## LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

Spirit, who test things, who make haste slowly and wisely, avoid the pitfalls of non-habituation. Just as a practised player seems to play a game so effortlessly, so one habituated will have practised in faith, power, love, and so on. The Spirit is there to teach and to habituate and (so) to mature us.

### LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

Above we have seen some of the elements of living in the Spirit—the initial and powerful act of conversion and cleansing, the new birth and the incoming of the Spirit himself. We saw that all of our living really comes through him. The great facts of worship, prayer, love, fellowship and witnessing flow from his presence, empowerment and teaching.

What then must concern us is always being filled with the Spirit. This is the command of Paul in Ephesians 5:18, to go on being filled with the Spirit. In fact it says, technically, ‘Go on being filled in spirit’, that is, in one’s own spirit. Ephesians talks a great deal about fullness, and being filled, even ‘with all the fullness of God’ (3:19). That is a great subject on its own.

A glance at Acts shows that certain men are spoken of as ‘filled with the Spirit’. In selecting those who were to minister to the widows they looked for men ‘full of the Spirit’ and found seven such. Stephen was one of these and he was ‘full of grace and power’. At the end of his speech we are told, ‘he, full of the Holy Spirit . . .’ There seem to be two emphases. He was habitually full, but at a crisis unusually filled for that eventuality. Barnabas (Acts 11:24) is said to be ‘a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith’. All are filled at Pentecost, but we assume that even those filled there have a further affusion in Acts 4 when a special eventuality arose. We must always go on being filled.



## THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There are other such references. In Romans 12:11 Paul says, 'Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord'. This needs no comment. In Romans 15:13 he speaks of abounding in hope by the Holy Spirit, but this means, firstly, abounding in the Spirit, and the Spirit abounding in one. 'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.'

In Philippians 1:19 Paul speaks of 'your prayer and the supply of the Spirit' (AV). It could mean, 'God goes on supplying the Spirit', but almost certainly means 'that which the Spirit supplies'. That is, when we are filled with the Spirit we are filled in ourselves, because the Spirit from his own fullness supplies what we need. In a slightly different vein, in Galatians 3:5 Paul speaks of God who 'supplies the Spirit to you'. The thought is not that he has come once, but that all the time God is making sure we have the Spirit. This must mean that we live consciously needing the Spirit and consciously living according to his presence and what he supplies.

These passages really tell us we should live continually in the Spirit and at the stretch. Paul may not mean that we must live at a continuous emotional 'high', always abounding emotionally, but he does not leave room for apathy, lethargy, somnolence, dullness and mediocrity. He knows the whole range of actions and operations of the Spirit, and we are called to be ready for all that 'the Lord the Spirit' has for us. This is his age. He not only applies the work of Christ, but enlivens for obedience and participation in what God is doing.

Negatively we can fail to be led by the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, and we can grieve the Spirit and quench him. These latter two will bring swift and sad consequences. We will know we have failed. However, it is just that sheer passive neglect of the Spirit which can bring us down into the doldrums and uselessness. Hence we are to be obedient and to be

## LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

filled, to be aglow, to receive the Spirit in continuing relationship, to receive his supply, to work according to his gifts, to be led, to follow him, to be empowered, to work in obedience. This is a decision of the will. This is an attitude of mind. We will be filled or we will not. We will live in the Spirit or we will not.

From one point of view the whole matter is very simple. It is one of obedience. Just to obey the Spirit means to be filled and aglow, and supplied and useful. Who, then, seeing the tireless ministry of the Spirit for man and creation, and knowing his ceaseless ministry to us, and on our behalf, who would not obey him? Who would not love this great Holy Spirit who has done so much, and does so much, who is so intimate and tender, so strong and protective, so vital and empowering?

If we really see and understand even a small degree of his great person and work we will be obedient, we will be constantly filled, and be habituated to those things which make for character, for being filled with all the fruits of righteousness, and which tend to our ultimate glorification.