

10. Life Through the Holy Spirit

Biblical material: *John 3:3-6; 15-17; Rom. 8:6-11; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 1:6, 7; Col. 2:6.*

Quotes:

- If it were possible to put the Holy Spirit into a textbook of pharmacology I would put him under the stimulants, for that is where he belongs. *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*
- The Holy Spirit is God's imperative of life. *A. W. Tozer*
- Receiving the Holy Spirit is the way that those who already believe in Christ are empowered to serve Him. It's more important to focus on how one lives the Spirit-filled life than on a rigid formula for receiving it.... Receiving the Spirit... is not a one-time event, but an ongoing way of life. *Larry Christenson*

Questions

What has the Holy Spirit to do with bringing us life? How would you describe the concept of being "born again" to someone who has never heard the idea? How are the Spirit's values different to ours? How does the work of the Spirit fit into God's winder plan in the great controversy? What is our part in all of this?

Discussion

"The crucial truth about Jesus is that He died as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. No matter how important everything else about Jesus is, in the end, they all culminate in His substitutionary death in behalf of humanity. Any theology that ignores or weakens this point is deviating from the work of the Holy Spirit, who is to guide us into "all truth" (*John 16:13*), and Christ on the cross as our substitute is the center of all truth (*1 Cor. 2:2*)." (Sunday's lesson).

It is interesting that this lesson begins here. The title is "Life Through the Holy Spiirt," yet the emphasis—one might even say over-emphasis—is on substitutionary death. Such repeated comments attacking "any theology that ignores or weakens this point" might seem to some to be trying to "shoe-horn" a preoccupation into subjects that have little do with atonement theories.

Be that as it may, the essential aspect of this lesson is the life-giving, regenerative aspects of the Holy Spirit. In his conversation with Nicodemus recorded in John 3, Jesus makes the point that believers are to be born of the Spirit. In contrast to our physical birth, we need to begin again as if through birth into the spiritual world, operating from a whole different set of values and principles. Only by this process of regeneration (the word means re-birth) can our sinful natures be transformed into the likeness of God, the way were made in the first place. As Romans 8 and Galatians 6 make clear, if we follow our sinful natures, then we are captive to such desires, but if we follow the Spirit then we set our minds on the things of the Spirit. It's as simple as that in essence, though the practical aspects are a continual challenge. The same Spirit that resurrected Christ will resurrect us from our dead spiritual state even now.

Part of the answer to the Devil's charges against God is to refute the claim that God's values are impossible to abide by. By the life of the Spirit, Christians demonstrate to the universe the validity of God's way, and that to live any other way only leads to sin and self-destruction. The fact that the Spirit reclaims and regenerates also demonstrates

that God is not the hostile, vengeful tyrant the Devil has portrayed, but rather the loving heavenly Father who always wishes the best for all his children. The very fact we are re-born by the Spirit to walk in newness of life demonstrates the kind of God we can love and admire.

Comment

“If you think it’s only Christ who’s so kind, look at Romans 8:26. How does the Holy Spirit feel about people who are struggling? How does He feel about sinners, even? ‘Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.’ We don’t even know how to pray. We come to the divine Physician and we don’t even know how to ask for help. ‘But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.’ He’s on our side.

“And then you come down to verse 28. ‘We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.’ So if God is for us, and Christ we know is for us, and the Holy Spirit is for us, you come to verse 31. ‘What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us?’ That’s a fair question. And if you know about the great controversy, you know the answer. Who is against us in this whole thing? ‘He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?’ So, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” Who does, by the way? “It is God who justifies.” Or, ‘It is God who declares them upright.’ Or however you want to translate that word. It’s God who sets them right, and declares them to be right. Who is there that would dare condemn? Could it be—my version has it as a question; either way it’s going to come out the same. Could it be Christ Jesus? You see, we know it isn’t the Holy Spirit, because He intercedes for us. And it isn’t the Father. He’s for us. Who’s left? Could it be Christ Jesus who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us also? The answer is obviously no.

“Who is against us? Who is the accuser of the brethren, who accuses us day and night before God? (Rev. 12:10) Who accused God as an untrustworthy, untruthful liar? Who accused Job? You see, God’s enemy is man’s enemy too. God has won His case, and the universe has recognized it. Now who defends us if He can, before the family? Look at God defending Job, and Job says, ‘I didn’t deserve to be defended.’

And God says, ‘On the contrary, you said of Me what is right.’ That’s what He picked, by the way. And God loves to defend His children. He defended Abraham before the heavenly counsel. Look at other places in the Bible. Joshua the High Priest. (Zech. 3) God loves to defend His children if there’s anything to defend. Does God defend us because we’re perfect? Or because we trust Him? Because if we trust Him, that means our whole hearts have been changed. We have new hearts and right spirits. We’re willing to listen. We’re sick. ‘What must I do to be saved?’ He says, ‘Trust Me. But I mean *really* trust Me.’”
A. Graham Maxwell, Romans tape, Picture of God in All Sixty-Six.

Ellen White Comments

Make your explanations clear; for I know that there are many who do not understand many of the things said to them. Let the Holy Spirit mold and fashion your speech, cleansing it from all dross. Speak as to little children, remembering that there are many well advanced in years who are but little children in understanding. {Ev 175.1}

The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, can work upon the heart, influencing, directing, so that he enjoys spiritual things. He is “after the Spirit...”{SpTA01b 22.2}

11. The Restorer

Biblical material: *Genesis 1, Jer. 17:9, John 15:13, Rom. 1:21, 5:10-19, 1 Cor. 13:4-7, Titus 1:15, 2 Pet. 1:2-8.*

Quotes:

- Before Christ sent the church into the world, he sent the Spirit into the church. The same order must be observed today. *John R. W. Stott*
- Grace is power as well as pardon. *Gabriel Fackre*
- The Holy Spirit establishes the righteousness of heaven in the midst of the unrighteousness of earth, and will not stop or stay until all that is dead has been brought back to life and a new world has come into being. *Karl Barth*
- If Pentecost is not repeated, neither is it retracted... This is the era of the Holy Spirit. *John Murray*

Questions

What needs to be restored? How does the Holy Spirit work to convict us of sin? How is this different from seeing God as condemnatory and hostile? Why cannot God just “fix” things? What happens if we reject the pleadings of the Spirit and definitively choose our own way? If we give up on God, what then? Which God do we give up on?

Discussion/Comment

Romans 1 provides a wonderful insight into the problem God faced in dealing with sin. While earnestly wanting to save and heal, he also respects the freedom and individuality of each of his created beings. So without a positive response, God cannot intervene. In the end, if the resistance is complete and persistent, God can do nothing else than to give up. In this chapter we read three times of God giving up on rebellious children, allowing them to experience the end results of their choices since that is what they have unalterably decided.

This is the challenge for the Holy Spirit—to convince us of sin, to plead with us to respond, and to work the life-giving changes with our permission. Without our agreement, the Spirit will not violate our freedom, but will allow us to choose and experience the consequences of those choices.

But we should never see God as hostile or unwilling to help us. As Jesus told his hearers:

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” Luke 11:11-13 KJV.

“The gospel isn’t just salvation; it isn’t just a change in our legal status before God. The gospel is also restoration. We were originally made in the image of God; the plan of salvation is the process to bring us back to that state. This isn’t just something that will happen at the Second Coming: It’s a process that begins now. The Holy Spirit is working in us to restore in us what has been lost through sin.” (Wednesday’s lesson). How would you react to such assertions? What happens if our first thought is about legal status? Does the message of restoration tend to be forgotten if we are preoccupied with making sure that we have our legal status fixed?

The essential aspect of this lesson is on the Holy Spirit as restorer. This image reflects well the truth concerning what God most wants to achieve—not some legal declaration that we are not guilty when we manifestly are guilty, or that we are sinless when clearly we are sinful—but the process of changing us from untrustworthy rebels to trustworthy friends. The Spirit's work is to work this change in us through our own decision to choose good over evil and right over wrong. By confirming the truth, helping us to understand, and convincing us through evidence of the trustworthy nature of God, the Spirit reverses the rebellious, evil choices and leads us back to the state God intended for his loving children. The choice of Adam and Eve to disbelieve God and accept the lies of the Devil is rejected; now we choose God and all that is good. The marred and distorted picture of God painted by the Accuser is healed and restored, and we see our Heavenly Father as he truly is—wholly righteous and admirable.

Ellen White Comments

True Christians are one with Christ as Christ is one with God. The quickening of the Holy Spirit brings life to the soul. When this is believed, understood, and known by experience, the character of God is revealed in the human agent. Christ abides in the heart. {ST, October 3, 1900 par. 13}

No other science is equal to that which develops in the life of the student the character of God. Those who become followers of Christ find that new motives of action are supplied, new thoughts arise, and new actions must result. But they can make advancement only through conflict; for there is an enemy who ever contends against them, presenting temptations to cause the soul to doubt and sin. There are hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil that must be overcome. Appetite and passion must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. There is no end to the warfare this side of eternity. But while there are constant battles to fight, there are also precious victories to gain; and the triumph over self and sin is of more value than the mind can estimate. {CT 20.2}

The Lord knocks at the door of your heart, desiring to enter, that he may impart spiritual riches to your soul. He would anoint the blind eyes, that they may discover the holy character of God in his law, and understand the love of Christ, which is indeed gold tried in the fire. There are old, yet new truths still to be added to the treasures of our knowledge. We do not understand or exercise faith as we should. Christ has made rich promises in regard to bestowing the Holy Spirit upon his church, and yet how little these promises are appreciated! We are not called to worship and serve God by the use of the means employed in former years. God requires higher service now than ever before. He requires the improvement of the heavenly gifts. He has brought us into a position where we need higher and better things than have ever been needed before. The slumbering Church must be aroused, awakened out of its spiritual lethargy, to a realization of the important duties which have been left undone. The people have not entered into the holy place, where Jesus has gone to make an atonement for his children. We need the Holy Spirit in order to understand the truths for this time; but there is spiritual drought in the churches, and we have accustomed ourselves to be easily satisfied with our standing before God. We say that we are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, while we are poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked. {RH, February 25, 1890 par. 1}

12. The Sin Against the Holy Spirit

Biblical material: *Matt. 12:22-31, Mark 3:22-30, 10:45, Luke 18:10-14, John 3:14-16, 1 Cor. 15:3, 1 Tim. 1:15, Heb. 2:9.*

Quotes:

- Without the Spirit of God we can do nothing but add sin to sin. *John Wesley*
- Nowhere is it written that the Good exists, that we must be honest, that we must not lie; because the fact is we are on a plane where there are only men. Indeed, everything is permissible if God does not exist, and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to. *Jean-Paul Sartre*
- In my experience most [people] are trash no matter whether they publicly subscribe to this or that ethical doctrine or to none at all. *Friedrich Nietzsche*

Questions

Why did Jesus speak so strongly about the sin against the Holy Spirit? How should we react? Is this a specific sin, or is it an attitude? How does this reflect upon God and the issues in the great controversy? What is the real problem with sin and its impact on our relationship with God? What does this reveal to the onlooking universe?

Discussion

In my pastoral experience I have come across several who believed they had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit. The fact that all these sins were different gives us at least a couple of perspective on this—that either they were completely wrong, or that that it is not one specific sin. As I counseled with these folks, it was also clear to me that since they were concerned over these sins, and that they wanted forgiveness, then it was unlikely that they had indeed committed the unpardonable sin. For a reading of Scripture reveals that the only sins that cannot be forgiven are the ones we do not want forgiven.

Jesus' words regarding the sin against the Holy Spirit should be read in their full context. We should be looking for the meaning of the whole passage, not taking one text out of its specific context and giving it whatever meaning we may think it deserves. For this reason read around the verses in Matthew 12 and Mark 3 to establish the main point that Jesus is trying to make.

The other texts above are primarily making the point that Jesus died to save us. In the context of the unpardonable sin, this self-giving attitude of God makes even more sense: he so much wants to save us, heal us from the damage of sin, that if we refuse to come to him then he can do nothing for us. Like a doctor who weeps because a patient refuses to come to him for treatment, God weeps over all who refuse to come to him, the only one who can heal the disease of sin. This is the truth behind the concept of the unpardonable sin—not that God does not want to help us, but that we refuse his aid. The first EGW quote below is informative in this regard: by closing their eyes to the evidence, by being stubborn to the entreaties of God, by accepting the lies of the Devil, the Pharisees sinned against the Holy Spirit. The real sin against the Holy Spirit is the complete and total rejection of God—buying in to all the lies of the Devil.

Comment

“The Bible says all men are without excuse. Even those who are given no good reason to believe and many persuasive reasons to disbelieve have no excuse, because the ultimate reason they do not believe is that they have deliberately rejected God's Holy Spirit.” *William Lane Craig*.

Such a view is not uncommon. Because of the stress on legal justification, the implication is that if you do not follow the arbitrary requirements, you are doomed. Such a belief seems to assume that even if, due to your situation, you have not understood the truth about God, then you are still destined for hellfire because you do not believe. Such a view distorts the Scripture and leads to a perverted picture of God. For if God is to be considered right and true, then he must always act in the way—as Abraham argued over the impending destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The tragedy is that by such “arguments,” many right-thinking people are turned against the God of the Bible and away from his life-saving healing. Sadly it seems that more damage is done by mistaken believers than active atheists. If the view we have of God is correct, would he not be better pleased with someone who rejects a false picture of God than with another who willingly accepts a perverted and evil one? Is it not a greater sin against the Holy Spirit to twist the truth, misrepresent God, and cause others to fall—all in the name of God himself?

May we always seek to speak well of our true and trustworthy God.

Ellen White Comments

They [the Pharisees] attributed to satanic agencies the holy power of God, manifested in the works of Christ. Thus the Pharisees sinned against the Holy Ghost. Stubborn, sullen, ironhearted, they determined to close their eyes to all evidence, and thus they committed the unpardonable sin (RH Jan. 18, 1898). {5BC 1092.4}

In rejecting Christ the Jewish people committed the unpardonable sin; and by refusing the invitation of mercy, we may commit the same error. We offer insult to the Prince of life, and put Him to shame before the synagogue of Satan and before the heavenly universe when we refuse to listen to His delegated messengers, and instead listen to the agents of Satan, who would draw the soul away from Christ. So long as one does this, he can find no hope or pardon, and he will finally lose all desire to be reconciled to God. {DA 324-5}

The Lord sends warnings to His people, not to destroy them, but to correct their errors. I have never been given the testimony to bear to any one, "You have committed the unpardonable sin." God never told any one to say to a fellow being, "You have committed the unpardonable sin." He has not given Brother Nelson this message to bear to Elder Breed, Elder Irwin, or Elder A. T. Jones. {RH, July 30, 1901 par. 5}

I know that God never gave mortal man such a message as that which Brother Nelson has borne concerning his brethren. It is not like our God. After the disappointment of 1844 there were those who would say to others, "You are lost; you have gone too far to be saved." Then I was brought to my feet to bid them in the name of the Lord to cease their condemnation. God has never empowered one mortal to say to another mortal, "You are lost." We are all human beings. We are on this earth to form characters which will fit us to inherit eternal life. If we heed the word of the Lord, He will correct us and guide us. {RH, July 30, 1901 par. 6}

13. The Holy Spirit in the Last Days

Biblical material: *Joel 2:28, 29; John 1:9; Acts 2:14-24; Acts 3:19, 20; James 5:7; Rev. 14:6-16; 18:1-5.*

Quotes:

- It's called THINKING. You should try it sometime. *Lapel button*
- Never underestimate the power of stupid people in large groups. *Lapel button*
- Why do closed minds usually have open mouths? *Lapel button*
- If you believe everything you read, better not read. *Japanese proverb*
- I can explain it for you, but I can't understand it for you. *Texan proverb*
- Should a conflict arise between the witness of the Holy Spirit to the fundamental truth of the Christian faith and beliefs based on argument and evidence, then it is the former which must take precedence over the latter, not vice versa. *William Lane Craig*

Questions

What is so special about the work of the Holy Spirit in the last days? How do we expect it to be manifested? What are the possibilities for deception? How do we evaluate claims made "under the direction of the Holy Spirit"? What of others who make similar claims to us, but who believe differently? How do we judge? And what of the End-times?

Discussion/Comment

We are told that in the last days deceptions will come: false Christs, spurious signs and wonders, counterfeit spirituality. If we know this to be true, how do we prepare ourselves to guard against such deceptions?

Is not the greatest mistake to rely on great signs and miraculous manifestations, since these are the very things we are told will be used as Satan masquerades as Christ? So why do so many Christians today look for the amazing and astounding, as if such experiences were proof of their divine origin?

More than anything else, we should be running far *away* from such extravaganzas, and focusing on the inner truths revealed by the Spirit through reason and evidence. Otherwise we will be "sitting ducks" when the Arch-deceiver arrives.

For example, look at the William Lane Craig quote above which I have included since I *disagree* with it so much! How would we even know whether it is the Holy Spirit that is speaking unless we test the ideas against Scripture using argument and evidence? It is not enough to believe mere claims—even by the most respected Christian leaders. The Holy Spirit values truth so much that he willingly *invites* the closest scrutiny.

Others also make claims of how the Holy Spirit will endorse their views. For example: "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost." [*Moroni 10:4* (Book of Mormon)]. How do you answer such an assertion of the Spirit's endorsement?

How do we evaluate end-time "dreams and visions" and decide whether they are to be followed or not? Or since it is the last days, does every dream and vision count? I

had a dream this week that Ana asked me to steal a train. Not rob it, just steal the whole thing. Since I am a minister of the gospel, am I supposed to follow such a suggestion? (And no, I have no idea what she could do with a whole train!)

“Though we saw at Pentecost a powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we believe that in the last days we will see something even more powerful. The whole world needs to know the truth about the Lord Jesus in the context of the three angels of Revelation 14, as opposed to the false doctrines of Babylon that lead to the mark of the beast. And, quite simply, who else, at this point, but Seventh-day Adventists are preaching this distinctive message? And yet, what Adventist, looking at the task ahead, believes we can do it without a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

“Thus, we believe that in the very end the Holy Spirit will bring His gifts to the church in a remarkable way. He will have to; otherwise, final events, as portrayed in prophecy, will never happen.” (Thursday’s lesson).

While we can perhaps accept the enthusiasm for witness, what possible difficulties do you see in some reactions to the above quotation? Is it likely that God will act “out of character” just because it is the last days? What would it take to convince everyone—even of the existence of God? A blazing sign in the sky? A worldwide sound and picture show? A whole host of miracles? Is it power we need, or something else?

The truth is (as Jesus mentioned in his parable of Lazarus) that even if people came back from the dead, people still would not believe. In fact, the graciousness of God and his desire to give us freedom is demonstrated especially in the fact that God has given us “evidence to believe but has not removed the possibility of doubt.”

If it were simply a question of power, then God could have won the argument long ago. Even the Devil concedes that God is more powerful. That’s not the issue. The question is over God’s position and his use of power. The Devil charges God with mismanagement, deliberate abuse of power, and arbitrary exercise of authority. The reason Jesus came was to refute such charges, and in Jesus we see the true right-being and right-doing of God.

Ellen White Comments

The flock of God is to be fed with pure provender, thoroughly winnowed from the chaff. The minds of those who have mixed truth and error, presenting fables as truth, need to be purified and elevated, that they may grasp the immortal truths which concern the soul's salvation. The work for these last days is a most solemn, important work. No man has a right to give the people of God a message not indited by the Holy Spirit. Those who do this are doing a work which must be counter-worked. {20MR 339-40}

We are living in the last days, when error of a most deceptive character is accepted and believed, while truth is discarded. The Lord will hold both ministers and people responsible for the light shining upon them. He calls upon us to work diligently in gathering up the jewels of truth, and placing them in the framework of the gospel. In all their divine beauty they are to shine forth in the moral darkness of the world. This cannot be accomplished without the aid of the Holy Spirit, but with this aid we can do all things. When we are endowed with the Spirit, we take hold by faith of infinite power. {RC 216.6}

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