

The Work of the Holy Spirit

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Introduction.

- A. In our lives, we like things to be simple, cut-and-dried, and all one way or the other. We are either Ford buyers or Chevy buyers. We are either Democrats or Republicans. We are either Sox fans or Cub fans.
- B. This tendency to see the world in terms of black and white also carries over into the spiritual realm, where sometimes, things don't fit as neatly into the lines we've drawn as we want them to. This is perhaps most evident in the way we consider the lives of the characters of the Bible. We want those folks to either be all bad or all good, so we struggle with the times when the bad guys do good things, or, worse still, when the good guys do bad things. "How could Abraham lie like that?" we ask incredulously.
- C. Of course, the reality is that life, and so naturally God's word, is not as simple as we would like it to be. It's important for us to understand that things don't have to be all one way or the other. For instance, we recognize from our study of the Scripture that we no longer have reason to look for the miraculous spiritual gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit. The word that they were given to confirm has already been confirmed, so they are unnecessary. However, too often we take that Biblical truth and try to run the Holy Spirit out of our lives altogether. If we were to ask a lot of the Christians out there what the Holy Spirit does today, they would answer "Nothing!" and look at us suspiciously, like we were going charismatic or something.
- D. The problem is that such a pat answer is as far from the truth as those who profess today to speak in tongues. The Holy Spirit hasn't abandoned us today anymore than the Father Himself has abandoned us. There are a number of ways in which He continues to work in our lives, and we need to understand these things if we are to understand our faith. Let's turn our attention, then, to the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

I. The Holy Spirit During Conversion

- A. As we consider this topic, though, we first need to understand the difference between the direct work of the Holy Spirit and the indirect work of the Holy Spirit. Let me give you an example. At the end of this month, I'm supposed to preach a gospel meeting where my friend Cary Rasberry preaches, in Merrillville, Indiana. Because this is so, Cary is naturally interested in what my sermon topics are going to be, and he's said to me, "Let me know what you're going to be preaching on." There are a couple ways I could accomplish this. First, I could hop in my car, drive over to the church building in Merrillville, knock on Cary's office door, and tell him. Second, as I've actually done, I could send him an e-mail containing my subject matter. In the latter case, even though I've done what Cary wanted, I haven't directly told him. It was the words of my e-mail, rather than me myself, that answered his question. I acted in his life not directly, but indirectly.
- B. In the same way, the Holy Spirit often acts in our lives in an indirect rather than in a direct fashion. When the Bible says "the Holy Spirit does thus-and-such," He may well be accomplishing that work indirectly through the word, just like I accomplished my work indirectly through the e-mail. This is important for us to understand.
- C. We see the importance of this when we consider the way in which the Holy Spirit **CONVICTS** us today. We learn that this conviction is part of the work of the Holy Spirit in John 16:7-8. Now, what does this mean? Does this mean that the Holy Spirit pops up inside my head when I've sinned and says, "Matt, you've been a bad, bad man?" Or is it talking about something else? We can answer this question by looking at the story of David, Bathsheba, and Nathan in 2 Samuel 12. How is David convicted of his sin against Bathsheba? Does the Holy Spirit talk to him directly? Not at all. Instead, what happens is that He speaks to David indirectly, through the lips of the prophet Nathan. That's the way that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin today—through the words of the prophets of the first century that are recorded for us in the New Testament.
- D. In the same way, the Holy Spirit also **TEACHES** us today. He tells us not just what we have done wrong, but what we need to do that's right. Now there are folks out there who claim to be "led by the Spirit," that is, they claim that the Holy Spirit will help them to pick the right stocks in the stock market and so on. In reality, though, the teaching of the Holy Spirit is something quite different. Consider Paul's discussion of this in 1 Corinthians 2:12-13. Although it is certainly true that the Holy Spirit has something to say to us about our financial decision-making, our relationships, and our plans for the future, this advice is dispensed to us not directly, but indirectly, through the inspired authors of the word. According to John 16:13, only the apostles had the promise that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. The rest of us must rely on the Bible.
- E. As we continue to consider this topic in chronological fashion, next we see that the Holy Spirit **BEGETS** us as Christians. Interestingly enough, this is something that we can best understand by considering the role of the Holy Spirit in the begetting of Christ. This role is discussed when Gabriel first informs Mary that she is going to be the mother of the Christ, in Luke 1:34-35. Mary was going to be the actual mother of Jesus, but she was not going to be the only parent. Instead, God, through the Holy Spirit, was going to be its father.

- F. The same is true for us as Christians, not in our physical birth, but in our spiritual rebirth. John defines this in John 3:4-5. Just like Jesus was born of Mary and the Holy Spirit, we today are born of water and the Spirit. We understand the water part here. It's baptism. However, the role of the Holy Spirit is equally well defined. Look at what Peter has to say about this in 1 Peter 1:23. Just like the Holy Spirit implanted seed from God into Mary, causing her to give birth to Jesus, so too the Holy Spirit implants seed from God into us, which causes us to be reborn. We don't know what the seed implanted into Mary was like, but we do know what the seed implanted into us is. It's the word of God. The Holy Spirit through the word conceives in us the desire to serve God, and we bring that desire to term when we are born again in the waters of baptism.

II. The Holy Spirit After Conversion.

- A. Once we have been saved, the work of the Holy Spirit continues in our lives. Next in chronological order, we learn that **HE BEARS WITNESS** to our salvation. This is the point that Paul makes in Romans 8:15-16. Now, there are folks who love to take this passage and misuse it. They love to say that we should expect to speak in tongues because that's a sign to ourselves and others that we've been saved. However, to place that interpretation on the text completely misses the point of the passage.
- B. Here's what's really going on: Once we have been born again, we know enough that we want to establish a relationship with our Father. We cry out to God, saying, "We're Your children; help us." The Holy Spirit then bears witness alongside us to God, saying with us that we are not impostors. The witness of the Holy Spirit is not directed at us and those around us; instead, it is a witness directed to the Father, for which speaking in tongues would seem unnecessary. However, there's another passage still that poses an even bigger problem for the charismatic interpretation of this passage, and that's 1 John 5:6. This passage makes clear that the Spirit testifies not through some miraculous sign, but through the truth. It works like this: I say I'm a child of God because I have believed, repented, confessed, and been baptized. The Holy Spirit bears witness to my claim because it says that anyone who has believed, repented, confessed, and is baptized is a child of God.
- C. Next, we learn how the Holy Spirit works in us because **HE INDWELLS** us. Once again, this is a Scriptural concept that sends a lot of people off on some strange tangents. They claim that the Holy Spirit literally, personally dwells in them in the same way that we might dwell in a house. However, indwelling does not have to be personal. It is equally legitimate to speak of a force or a principle indwelling us, and we need to turn to God's word to figure out whether the Holy Spirit indwells us personally or by means of influence.
- D. The first passage we should examine in this direction is Romans 8:9, 11. The fascinating thing about this passage is that within a three-verse context, it speaks interchangeably of an indwelling of the Holy Spirit, of the spirit of Christ, and of the spirit of the Father. Now, there are two possible ways to understand this. First, it is possible to take this as saying that every Christian is personally indwelt by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all together at the same time. Now, this interpretation might make us wonder if we need to build some spare bedrooms to house all our spiritual occupants, but it is possible. The other way to understand the passage, though, is to look at it in terms of principle and influence. It may just be that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all indwell us because the same principles of love, holiness, and so forth that define their character also define ours. They indwell us because their righteousness influences us to be righteous also.
- E. The best way to settle this dispute is by looking at the context of the verse. We find all the help we need just a chapter earlier, in Romans 7:19-20. Here, Paul speaks not of the good indwelling of God, but of the evil indwelling of sin. The way that Paul is logically constructing his argument, these two ideas are parallel with each other. What is true of the indwelling of sin must also be true of the indwelling of God. Now, the Scripture says many things about sin, but nowhere in the Bible is sin ever described as having a personality. Sin is an action, not a being. Because this is so, it is impossible for sin to personally indwell us. Paul here is simply talking about the control that sin exerts over his life, even when he doesn't want it to. Similarly, then, Romans 8 is not talking about the Holy Spirit personally indwelling us. Instead, His point is just that if we are controlled by the principles of the Holy Spirit, we will receive life from the Father. This isn't something that just happens to us. Instead, we receive this indwelling by learning about God's will for our lives from the word and then living in accordance with it. Here again, we see the Holy Spirit working in our lives indirectly.
- F. Finally, though, the Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit **INTERCEDES** in our lives. We see this once again in Romans, in Romans 8:26-27. Alone of all the things we've looked at this morning, friends, this passage describes something that the Holy Spirit does directly, rather than indirectly. After all, if the groanings that this passage describes cannot be uttered, they can't very well be uttered in the word of God, can they? However, just as this passage sets this forth as a personal action of the Holy Spirit, it makes clear that this action is being carried out in heaven. This is not the Spirit causing us to speak; this is the Spirit Himself speaking, acting as a go-between between us and God. Even when our prayers are not all they should be, the Holy Spirit helps us by considering our condition and pleading before the throne of God for us, which is precisely what God wants Him to do. This is something done for every Christian, and it is done for us today.

Conclusion. However, the blessings of the Holy Spirit will only be ours if we pay attention to His revelation.