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Integrity

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Marks of a God-Starved Community

Almost twenty-five years ago J.B. Phillips challenged the Christian churches of western Europe and America with his enlightening little book, *God Our Contemporary*. In painting the backdrop for his thesis that our present world, including the church, is rather alienated and devoid of God, Phillips said, "Our society today bears all the marks of a God-starved society . . . Without the Spirit of the living God the public conscience is capricious and ill informed . . . The whole situation cries out for the restoration of real religious faith."

But what about the restoration of real religious faith? If the maxim is true that "Like produces like," then such a revival of religious faith must somehow have the presence of the Spirit of God at its heart. In no way does this minimize the Word of God, yet the presence of Bibles and church buildings and church-going peoples does not really assure true religious revival. God's Word and God's Spirit must be in the lives of His people, as Jim and Dorothy Warren plead for so fervently in their article on "The Holy Spirit in Everyday Life."

Not only is it vital to have Bible knowledge from the written Word to saturate our lives, but we must be enlightened from revealed truth; and Elton Higgs leads us into a reconsideration of that function of the Spirit which we have so carefully skirted— that the Spirit not only reveals and preserves truth, but enables the believer's mind to understand it, to be truly illuminated by God's truth as the Spirit opens both the truth to us, and our minds to the truth.

Personal and congregational revival brought about by the Word and His Spirit fervently at work will bring us to a new sense of mission and evangelism, and at the heart of evangelism is the glorious gospel of His dear Son. The present writer attempts to clarify anew the intimate relationship between Spirit and Gospel, and having our hearts stirred with new fire, hopefully our churches will again become radiating centers for the gospel of grace which is God's power to save sinners.

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The Holy Spirit In Everyday Life

JIM AND DOROTHY WARREN
Troy, Michigan

Does the Holy Spirit involve himself in our everyday lives? Many would answer yes, but their actions might display a different conviction. In the same way that one can say he believes in prayer but fails to pray, one can say that he believes in the Holy Spirit yet fail to acknowledge his participation in every day decision making. It is easy for us to believe in the miracles of the Bible and even those unique, and sometimes miraculous circumstances, that happen to others but it is extremely difficult for us to genuinely believe that the Holy Spirit can be involved in our everyday lives. Does the Spirit of God really concern himself with the schedule of my day, or the problems that occur at work, at home, or in the neighborhood?

Attention to Detail

If we encounter an event that demonstrates our mortality such as illness or tragedy we do not feel the least bit bashful about pouring our hearts out to God and asking for his intervention. Yet there is an entire sphere of decisions, thoughts, and activities that we sometimes keep to ourselves. It is not that we are rebellious and refuse to allow God to be a part of these decisions; it is that for some reason, we believe that God is only concerned with the big issues and leaves the small items for us to worry about; on these matters we must fend for ourselves. I would dare to say that many of

us have even heard this reasoning before and yet we still do not apply it to our lives. Why is it? Have we been innoculated against any real involvement of the Holy Spirit or is it that we are just apathetic or perhaps the devil clouds our thinking when we come close to the subject.

Imagine what life would be like if we could call God on the telephone and ask him about any decision or circumstance before us? We would know that we were living life to its fullest and that we would experience a happiness that can only be obtained by living in the will of God. Romans 12:2 tells us that the will of God is good, acceptable and perfect. A friend once told me that if you are in the will of God that there is no better place on this earth than the one he has selected for you, no better job, no better marriage partner, no better anything for you other than God's selection. Anything else is just second best. When I heard that comment I got really excited and determined that living in the will of God was an essential ingredient to happiness. Certain passages of scripture seemed to stand out in neon lights for me as I read them. For example Psalms 127: 1-2.

Unless the Lord builds the house those who build labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise early and go late to rest eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved rest.

When you read this passage it sounds like God is saying that unless he is involved in your activity it will be doomed for failure no matter how hard you work or sincere your efforts. Ephesians 5:17 says,

“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” This command from Paul to the Ephesians also applies to Christians today.

One of the first steps necessary in seeking the will of the Lord is to determine to do his will before he reveals it to you. This is an act of faith; it says in Hebrews 11:6 that it is impossible to please God unless we have the faith that he will answer those who diligently seek him. As one man described it, “God is not interested in curiosity seekers.” Many of us are interested in what God wants for our lives but we are not committed to agree to do it no matter what is revealed. I like the story of the man who walked the tight rope across Niagara Falls. After crossing the gorge three times he then took a wheelbarrow and filled it with rocks and wheeled it across the gorge. The crowd cheered him on and sung his praises. After reaching the other side he looked down at one of the spectators and said, “I’ve crossed this gorge three times by myself and twice with this wheelbarrow, do you think I can do it again?” An excited young man shouted, “Sure, I bet you could do it fifty times if you wanted to!” The tight rope walker then looked down at the man and said “If you believe that then get in.” The man stood speechless. Although we may profess to love the Lord and say we earnestly desire to follow his leading, do we trust him enough to get in the wheelbarrow and pledge to follow his directions in such things as selecting a marriage partner or making a career decision. If you commit to the Lord to follow his leading he will reveal it to you. God told David to “commit your way to the Lord; trust him and he will act.” (Psalms 37:5)

Wonderful Gifts

When I used to hear talk like committing everything to God, I mean everything, possessions, family, career, loved ones, etc., I used to get squeamish. I think a lot of individuals have had the same fear, God is going to ask me to give up so much and send such a fiery trial my way that I’ll be like John the Baptist and end up wearing animal skins and eating locusts and honey. After all, look what he said to the rich young ruler; he told him to sell all that he had, give it to the poor and follow him. Somehow I’ve never been ready to accept poverty. The problem with me was that somewhere I had picked up the idea that ‘real Christians’ are poor, destitute, and can never enjoy the luxuries of life. Over time I gradually learned that God does not take delight in making us miserable. In fact he enjoys giving wonderful gifts. “Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Mt 7:10-11) The real problem most of us have in surrendering possessions, or circumstances to the Lord is that we believe that we will be happier with our selection, instead of Gods choice. Again, do we believe that the Lord wants the best for our lives, that his will is indeed perfect, or do we act as if we think he wants to make our lives miserable?

Let the Spirit Lead

Perhaps this approach makes sense to you and you’ve decided to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you in your next major decision. The problem with this approach is that you will be inexperienced in allowing the Lord to lead. One of the most valuable strengths while in the throes of doubt is to

be able to look back on previous occasions when the Lord has led you through problems. But before you get into a position where the stakes are high, such as whom you should marry, where to go to school, which career to select, etc., you would do well to learn how to let the Lord direct your steps in lesser matters. Psalms 32:8-9 records the Lord’s instructions to David. “I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not keep with you.” God is telling David, don’t be like a stubborn horse that has to be jerked around with a bit and bridle. Just as a horse must become accustomed to being lead by another, we must learn how to let the Lord lead us. The best way to learn how the Holy Spirit leads is to allow him to lead you through the small decisions. If you want the Lord to help you select your marriage partner, then let him help you select who you are to date. If you want the Lord to help you with a career decision, then let him help you select the classes you’re going to take in school. If you want the Lord to lead you in your major financial decisions, then let him lead you in less important money matters. If you want the Lord to lead you through a business decision, then start by letting him control your calendar of appointments. Proverbs 16:3-4 says to “Commit your way to the Lord and your plans will be established.” Proverbs 3:5-6 tell us “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths.” After we have obeyed this verse the Holy Spirit has a responsibility to act.

Practical Avenues

How does he specifically lead individuals? In answering this question let me point out that this is no precise formula.

The Holy Spirit is not limited in ways and means of speaking to us, nor does he treat everyone alike. There are, however, some very practical avenues through which the Lord can direct our steps.

Through the Word

One of the most fundamental ways for the Holy Spirit to lead is through the word. Since he has already inspired the word of God we have a ready-made collection of books that describe his principles, truths, and directions. One thing for sure is that the Spirit will not lead us in a direction that is contrary to the truths he has already expressed in scripture. In order to be led by the word one obviously has to have contact with the word on a regular basis. If you know that you have decisions ahead of you then let this be a motivation to be regular in quiet time. Don’t put too much faith in being able to blindly open the Bible and randomly point to a passage that will give an answer to what is troubling you at the moment. The more of God’s word you know and have stored in your heart, the better equipped the Holy Spirit is to influence your conscience when you are making decisions or facing temptation. (Psalm 119:9,11)

While reading or meditating on the word you may find that certain passages stand out and seem to address your problem. Be especially sensitive to your thoughts and feelings while in the word, since this is one of the ways the Holy Spirit can lead us. I Cor 2:12-13 says “For we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the spirit.” Verses 14-16 go on to say that spiritual gifts cannot be understood by non-Christians for they are discerned through the Holy Spirit.

Lines of Authority

A second avenue of direction is through those in authority over us. God knew that man would not always want to do what was best for himself so he established a number of lines of authority in order to lead individuals and nations in the direction he wanted them to go. The New Testament is quite clear in telling the people of the day to be subject to the rulers of the land because they are controlled by God. He tells children to obey their parents, he tells slaves to be obedient to their masters, and he tells Christians to be subject to spiritual leaders. Our generation may be so sensitive to abuses by those in authority that we fail to see the intended purpose and blessing that can be gained from submission to it. Proverbs 21:1 states that "the King's heart is a stream in the hand of the Lord and he turns it wherever he wills". If God can turn the heart of a king, could he not also turn the heart of a spiritual leader, a parent, or a supervisor in order to direct our individual paths?

A number of years ago my company told me it was going to relocate our family to one of its new southern manufacturing plants. We were excited about moving south but at the last minute the company changed its mind and wanted us to move to one of the oldest plants located in the east. The town was dirty, the area was economically depressed, and my wife even cried when she first saw the town because it was so depressing to her. We were definitely not interested in moving to that area so I made sure my boss understood my disappointment and my unwillingness to go there. After much anxiety and a lot of praying we decided that the Lord could lead us through those in authority over me at work. After consulting with them they felt that the plant in the east was still the best location for me at this time. We had committed to do the Lord's will so we reluctantly moved to the east. As we look back on that period of our lives we cherish the friends we made,

the spiritual growth that the Lord was able to nurture because of some special Christians in that area, and the beautiful home that he blessed us with while living there. Had we followed our inclinations we would never have been enriched in those ways.

Another source of guidance is seeking the counsel of those knowledgeable in your area of concern. Proverbs 15:22 states that "Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed." If your concern is whether or not to go into a particular business then talk to individuals that are familiar with that particular business field and do all the research you can. Coupled with these actions you want to spend much time in planning and using your head. Dawson Trotman of the Navigators once said "The Lord gave us a lot of leading when he gave us a brain." Don't expect the Holy Spirit to take over in an area that he has already equipped us to handle.

Another avenue of direction is circumstances. God may open or close many doors in order to lead us through a maze of decisions. Circumstances are unique and can be a strong sign of direction from the Lord just as they were for Gideon with the fleece. (Judges 6) At the same time, circumstances can also come from Satan who offers a cheap imitation. Be sensitive to circumstances, but do not make your decision based solely on the situation.

Take Action

When you have discerned what you understand the Spirit's direction to be, make a firm decision to act at a specific time. For example, on next Tuesday you will tell your boss that you are going to leave the company for another job. After you have made the decision then evaluate your feelings over the next few days and see if you have an inner peace. My experience is that if you are still feeling yanked, tugged,

and jerked down inside then you are not being led by the Holy Spirit. One of the fruits of the Spirit is peace. Does it make sense that the Holy Spirit would lead you in a direction and then not give you peace if you are obeying his directions? Just as you wouldn't make a decision solely on circumstances you can't make a decision with only your feelings as a guide. However, when several sources are indicating the same direction, such as a passage of scripture, counsel from authority, circumstances, and an inner peace from the Holy Spirit, then you have a good indication of the Spirit's leading.

Finally, move out on your decision. How will you ever know if this was the Spirit's leading unless you convert all the analysis into action. If doors begin to close, then you pull back and say to the Lord, "Thank you Lord, I guess that wasn't your will after all," and reevaluate your decision, on the other hand if it was the Spirit's leading then be ready to see things start to fall into place

and experience the joy that comes from being in his will.

Paul writes in Gal 5:16, "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature." Paul gives the Galatians a command to live by the Spirit. It doesn't just happen, but we must consciously decide to actively listen and submit to the Holy Spirit's leadership. When we respond to the Spirit's guidance our will is in harmony with God's will.

To submit wholeheartedly to the Holy Spirit's leadership we must—make a decision to be obedient to the scriptures, to consider carefully the advice of people God brings into our lives, and to accept the circumstances of our lives as under his control. The Holy Spirit will lead us specifically and continually if we depend not on our own reasoning and emotions, but rely on his power to first, help us know what to do, and then give us the strength to do it. (Phil 2:13) □

The Illumination of the Holy Spirit

ELTON D. HIGGS

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When Saul was on his way to Damascus to imprison Christians, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him," blinding him and striking him to the ground. Then a voice told him to go on into the city where he would be *told* what to do, instead of "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" according to his own zeal and wisdom. His sight was restored only when the Lord sent Ananias to him with

the words, "that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." At that, "immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight." This was the beginning of the greatest Christian ministry that the world has ever known, and it is worthy of attention as an example of the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Before Saul could see what God wanted him to see, he had to be made blind;

and the restoration of his sight (both physically and spiritually) came only when he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The point I want to develop is that if we are to see what God wants us to see as His children, we must allow Him to do away with the "scales" on our human eyes and let Him endow us with the eyes of His Spirit.

The nature of this vision through the Holy Spirit is best described by the "illuminated" Saul (now called Paul) in I Cor. 1:18-31:

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord."

This is an astounding statement. Paul, one of the best educated men in Israel and a

"Hebrew of Hebrews," rejects both the elite strictness of the Jews and the great intellectual achievements of the Greeks, and he embraces instead the "foolishness" of God. But this is not merely his own personal decision; it is the normal and necessary point of view that must be nurtured by any child of God. As he says in I Cor. 2:12, "We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God." It is not merely that seeing by the light of God's Spirit goes beyond the wisdom of men, but that God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world" and has chosen "what is foolish in the world to shame the wise . . . so that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

No Alternative

In seeking the illumination of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary at the outset to realize that if we are to see Him, there is no alternative to the purifying vision that God Himself gives: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). The writer of Hebrews refers to "the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). This purity is also referred to by Jesus as soundness (or "singleness") of the eye: "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:22-23). But purity of heart and soundness of eye are not achieved by any means open to the natural man: "The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14). If we pursue God through our natural gifts alone, we shall either be disillusioned or come to rest in conclusions that

tempt us to be boastful before God. There is much to be learned through the exercise of natural intellect, and it may be put to great use in the service of God; but it is not the avenue through which we gain the wisdom of God. That comes only through a direct action of His Holy Spirit.

Human intelligence emphasizes coming to an *understanding* of God; it seeks to reduce His nature and work to propositions, concepts, and formulas. Scientific inquiry quite properly imposes limits and boundaries within which meaningful conclusions can be reached; it does not address itself to questions or knowledge which go beyond the powers of the natural human intellect. The mind of man seeks to extend its boundaries, but only by continually reinforcing and calling attention to itself. The enlightenment that comes from God, even though it may make use of tools gained by human intellect (for any knowledge not evil within itself can be consecrated to God), does not lead to glorifying the mind of man, but to glorifying God. True knowledge and wisdom can lead only to an acceptance (or rather a joyful embracing) of God's absolute sovereignty in goodness and love. Human knowledge is self-conscious and tends toward pride; enlightenment from God causes one to be "lost in wonder, love and praise."

What can we see with God's eyes, then, that we cannot see without them? I would like to answer that question by reference to three passages of scripture:

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

(II Cor. 4:6)

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

(I Cor. 2:12)

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe . . .

(Eph. 1:16-19a)

If we combine these passages, all of which speak of the kind of knowledge and understanding imparted by the Spirit of God, it may be said that the wisdom of God enables us to see the glory of God, the gifts of God, the power of God, the hope of God, and the inheritance of God.

The Spirit Illumines Us

The glory of God is what makes Him the source of all light, which both literally and symbolically enables us to perceive things truly. That glory was reflected in Jesus, and in Him we know that even when the light reveals that which is painful to see, it is consummately good and worthy of praise. No mortal man can face God's glory without mediation, but the "glory of God in the face of Christ" is made accessible to us by the Holy Spirit, who gives us the compulsion to praise God for His wonderful perfection and His great works. As the Holy Spirit illumines us, it becomes natural and habitual to praise Him in song and prayer, and any glorification of ourselves or others becomes abhorrent; for to exalt the creature rather than the Creator is to walk in darkness, and not in God's light.

In that light, we see that the gifts of God are not like the gifts of man, for God works through things that are not valued by human wisdom. That is not to say that

God's blessings never coincide with man's view of what is positive; a natural talent often causes one to be called a "gifted" person, even if God is not acknowledged as the source of the gift. But without God's eyes, we are likely to see such natural gifts (and circumstantial ones, like wealth) as instruments for our own glorification and comfort. Even more to the point, however, is our response to those elements of our lives which the fleshly mind views negatively, such as handicaps, difficult personal relationships, illness, and financial difficulties. Our response to such things boils down to whether we have been made aware of the glory of our sovereign God, and whether we still cling to the "right" to regard ourselves as mistreated by life. Some of the bad things we endure are, like some of the gifts we enjoy, natural in origin, the results of living in a fallen and sinful world—those experiences generally regarded by the world as "bad luck." From the perspective of the Holy Spirit, however, these natural evils are just as much in the hand and power of God as are the things we regard positively; He can and will make them into gifts through His love for us and through His power and goodness.

There are in addition, of course, those events in our lives which He specifically sends to discipline and direct us, to improve our character and to make us more effective in His service. These we can embrace as heartily as we do our natural talents and our circumstantial advantages. Nor should we worry ourselves about differentiating between the natural evils that God has promised to turn to good and the "bad" things that He specifically designs for our instruction; if He does not choose to make that distinction always clear to us, we can still rest in the light of the knowledge of the Holy Spirit which enables us to *see* (not merely intellectually believe) that "in *everything* God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). What the mind of the flesh regards as gifts may well become

snare to our regenerated spiritual selves because of our pride in them; and a great hardship may be God's special gift to make us able to serve Him better and to glorify Him before others.

No Limit

Paul's reference to "the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe" is so emphatic as to seem exaggerated. What are we to understand, then, in the word "immeasurable?" The rational human mind seeks to "take the measure" of things: Where does something begin and stop? How can it be compared with other things? But the power God puts within us through His Spirit literally has no limit from His point of view; the only limit is in our perception of it. What God can accomplish through us has no bounds, for the power that He gives us is no less than that which raised Jesus from the dead: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). Satan wants to intimidate us by the display of his evil power in the world, and indeed we are often made faint by the seeming irresistibility of evil in everything from wars, to crime, to dissensions in our fleshly families and even in the family of God; but we are made to see by the Holy Spirit that "he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world" (I John 4:4) and that God "by the power at work within us is able to do far more than all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). In the eyes of the flesh, we see ourselves as always having to push God toward doing more for us; but the eyes of the Spirit open our eyes to the fact that our very requests usually put boundaries around what we are able to accept from God. It all works together: if we accept the vision of God's sovereign glory, everything that we experience becomes a gift from Him, and there is no limit to what

He can do through us in the power of the Holy Spirit; then the hope of victory and the assurance of our inheritance are firmly and joyfully fixed within our hearts.

Hope is a special illumination of the Spirit in our lives because it springs from our complete dependence on God. Faith is dependence on God for the present; hope is dependence on Him for the future, a continual reaffirmation that all of His work in our lives will culminate in His finally setting everything back to rights. Our bodies and the world we live in will be delivered once and for all from its "bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:21), and His hope convinces us that however long His timetable in our perception, He will do it. Indeed, spiritual hope may be described as seeing time with God's eyes; when we are able to do that, impatience and anger are done away with, and we see that, in the words of a popular saying, "God never hurries, and He's never late."

Seal of Guarantee

Finally, the Holy Spirit makes us see who we really are: not only children of God, but "heirs of God, and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). The Holy Spirit sets His seal of guarantee on our inheritance "until we acquire possession of it" (Eph. 1:14), and we are thus identified as those who are called by God's name and are protected, nurtured, and instructed by Him as befits our status as sons and daughters of the Sovereign of the universe. If we allow the Spirit to open our eyes to the reality of our adoption as God's children, we must see the value that He puts on us, and we are no longer victims of our sordid attempts to dress up trash as treasure. If we really believe we are children of the King, living in His reflected glory, we will not feel compelled to create a "glory" of our own to conceal our rags and wretchedness. How can we, who are to inherit a portion of the riches of God's eternal presence, act as if

we were spiritual orphans?

And that brings us right back to the beginning of the matter: the glory of God, where everything begins and ends, the source and the object of all spiritual enlightenment. There is no knowledge and no satisfaction apart from His glory, and all attempts to create a rival or substitute glory lead only to futility and destruction. Like Saul, we must submit to being blinded by that glory—struck down by its power and made defenseless—before we can be made to see by its light. The enlightenment of the Spirit is no ethereal, intangible experience; entwined with the word of God, it is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:12-13). The first and primary action of the enlightening Holy Spirit is to lay open the darkness of our hearts; but the result of this painful joy is the opening of our eyes to see God's glory, God's gifts, God's power, God's hope, and God's inheritance for us. Praise be to Him who purifies us so that the day may dawn and the morning star rise in our hearts! □

The Gospel and The Spirit

JOSEPH F. JONES
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Jesus stated His mission succinctly when saying, "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10) The life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus were all pointed toward this purpose so clearly defined. It was the eternal purposing of God that man should be saved, reconciled to Himself, and that the Son should be central in this divine planning.

So Jesus in the closing hours of his life continued to teach about God's plan to save. The growing awareness of His departure from them brought the disciples to fear and distress. Where would He go? What would happen to them? Was this three year venture with Him all a misguided tour doomed to end in tragic failure? Knowing these apprehensions of His disciples Jesus continued to teach and comfort them while still with them in body. The major source of comfort offered to these distraught disciples was the promise that upon His departure the Holy Spirit would be sent, He who is known as "the Comforter," "the Spirit," "the Holy Spirit" and the "Spirit of truth." It was a comfort to know of the promised Spirit because of the various functions He would perform.

Convicting Function of the Spirit

Now in delineating the multiple works of the Spirit, Jesus stated one primary thing He would do in (for) the world, and this, as

Leon Morris notes, "is the one place in Scripture where the Spirit is spoken of as performing a work in 'the world.'" The many other references refer to what He will do with believers. "And when he comes, i.e., the Spirit Counselor he will convince (convict) the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged." (John 16:8-11).

Since this passage of Scripture speaks of the Spirit's performing a work in "the world," then it must reflect His divine concern and compassion for the lost, and His involvement in bringing the lost to the Savior. What then is the Spirit's role?

Jesus suggests the Spirit will convince (convict) men of sin, and spells out three implications of this convicting work. The expression, "He will convince" (elegxei), expresses "a continuing activity in the future." The verb couches several meanings, such as, "to bring to light, to expose, to convict, to prove some one wrong." (See Frank Pack, Commentary on John, pp. 86,87) Jesus may well have meant to say that the function of the Spirit in this respect is to bring the light of truth to bear on the error and wrong of the world and thus prove to the world its guilt, and subsequent need of salvation. The wrong is particularly regarding the world's view of Jesus--then and now--concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Sin must refer to the unbelief of the Jews

primarily, but also the world's continued rebellion against Jesus as Lord and Christ. Concerning righteousness, a forensic term meaning to be vindicated in court and thus acquitted, describes Jesus after His conviction in a farcical court, His condemnation and death, and subsequent resurrection from death by the power of God, being then exalted to God's throne. He is now proclaimed and seen as the Righteous One through whom salvation is realized. Concerning judgment, the verdict of the unbelievers in pronouncing Him guilty and sentencing Him to death, is now to be completely reversed; and the judgment which they proclaimed He deserved has indeed become their own sentence. Rejection of Jesus as Lord and Christ, sent of the Father to bring salvation, and now witnessed to by the presence of the Holy Spirit, is man's ultimate folly and failing. "All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God," concludes Paul.

Spirit and Gospel

One of the theological battlegrounds of the centuries has been whether the Spirit does this convincing (convicting) work "separate and apart" from the Word, or "inseparably through the Word," frequently leaving the impression that the spirit has little or no function once the Word is preached. That spirit and Word (Message) are distinct realities would seem as obvious as to conclude that an author and his writings are distinct entities; yet one seems hardly complete without the other. What then can be concluded about the relationship of the Spirit in the process of convicting sinners and leading them to salvation?

The apostle Paul believed that when he and Silas went into Thessalonica and preached "the gospel," that it was the presence and convicting power of the Holy Spirit which brought results. "For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; for our gospel came to you not

only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." (I Thess. 1:4,5) The message of Jesus Christ--His life, death, and resurrection--was preached "in word"; but it was that presence and power of the Spirit, working in and through that message, which brought conviction to both Jews and Greeks (see Acts 17:1-4).

If we look momentarily at the events of Pentecost, it becomes evident that it was this divinely unique merging of Spirit as Jesus promised, the apostle Peter took the initiative to proclaim the consummate Good News in Christ. "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ. this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36) Those who heard were forcefully reminded that in unbelief and ignorance they had rejected the Chosen one of God, condemned and crucified Him. "By the hands of lawless men," the apostle cried, was this Jesus killed. But many of those present might have really felt that they were defending the Jewish faith in opposing this rabbi who claimed to be in such consort with the Father that He could say, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." How then did such words as Peter spoke really bring conviction, so that they were "cut to the heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" The comments of William Barclay are incisive:

"When you think of it, it is an amazing thing that men should put their trust for all eternity in a crucified Jewish criminal. What convinces men that this crucified Jew is the Son of God? That is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who convinces men of the sheer righteousness of Christ..."

The exhortation was Spirit-filled when Peter urged the throngs to "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." Those who received this convicting and converting message were responsive, were baptized, and numbered several thousand (Acts 2:40,41).

Spirit Source of New Life

But, in one sense, this unique combination of Spirit and Gospel to change lives ought not to have come with such surprise, yet it did then--and even continues so today. Jesus had taught His disciples so clearly that changed lives could not be wrought by special birth (i.e., descendants of Abraham or David), or even by a second effort at physical birth, but only by the presence of God's Spirit. Nicodemus, ruler of the Jews (likely referring to his status as a member of the Sanhedrin) came by night for conversation and clarification with Jesus, and learned though he was, appeared baffled at the response of the Lord. "Truly, truly, I say to you. Unless one is born anew or from above (anothen), he cannot see the kingdom of God." Searching for some kind of appropriate response Nicodemus resorted to the possibility of a second try from his mother's womb! Why? Because in his understanding of life, coupled with the wistfulness couched in his response, it is obvious that Nicodemus is saying that man is the product of all his past, that we are where we have been. A conclusion of present day behavioral scientists, as we say to one so muddled in his life, "You are the product of all your past experiences, coupled with what nature gave you to start with." Now from Nicodemus' viewpoint, his question is not so much hopeless as wistful. Can human nature and past experience all be changed? Impossible, Nicodemus reasoned, without a second try at physical birth and better knowledge of how to live after that second physical birth.

But Jesus' second response to him perhaps boggles the Pharisee's mind while clarifying at the same time. The man who would enter the kingdom of God must be born in a radically new fashion, from heaven, from above. Human striving is not the route into the Kingdom, but transformation by the power of God. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of

God." (John 3:5) The maxim of physical science is so clearly demonstrated in the spiritual realm: like produces like. Only Spirit can actually change sinful human beings into spiritual beings, make saints of sinners, and men of darkness into spiritual beings, make saints of sinners, and men of darkness into men of light! Even the human requirements which God places upon us in response to His working must be infused with spiritual power to give any effectiveness. His demand that I believe, that I repent, that I be baptized in water (Acts 8:36-38) can remain efforts of human striving, or they can by His Spirit become His means of radical transformation.

Washed and Renewed

The apostle Paul pulls together the work of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Good News, and human responsiveness in a remarkable passage in writing to his colleague Titus. Man is reminded of his sinful and helpless predicament, hearing the apostle say, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another." (Titus 3:3) A growing awareness of my own life, forty years plus as a Christian preacher and teacher working with churches and individuals, and many years as a professional psychologist and marriage counselor, have led me to conclude that the apostle has not overstated his judgment of human plight! Given our human nature and all that unregenerated living can effect, there is no possible way that man can change simply by his good works, church going, moral strivings, and religious lifestyle. Only a birth or transformation effected by the Spirit of God working through the glorious Good News of Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection can work such a miracle. So the apostle Paul also believed. Having stated his case and conclusion against sinful man, he con-

tinues: "but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:4-6) There it is all summarized: man's sinfulness, God's mercy and loving kindness in the gospel, and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. To that motley crowd in ancient Corinth the apostle said the same thing, that some of them were immoral, idolators, adulterers, sexual perverts, thieves, greedy (covetous), drunkards, revilers, robbers: "and such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." (I Cor. 6:10,11)

Against this dark background of man's sinfulness and impotence to self-correction, Paul offers the absolutely unselfish and undeserved grace of God as the source of salvation. It is effected through God's chosen means of the "washing of regeneration," and "the renewal of the Holy Spirit." Commentators have variously considered this expression, "washing of regeneration." The word *loutron*, used sparingly in the New Testament has been variously rendered "washing" or "laver"; but support for this latter rendering is slight and as Simpson suggests, probably "colored by the dogma of baptismal regeneration." But in the limited use of this term in the Septuagint, occurring only three times, it is used "to represent not the receptacle but the washing itself." (Guthrie, Commentary on Pastoral Epistles, p. 205). This seems to be the use which Paul also makes of the only other New Testament reference, in Ephesians 5:26, "washing of water by the word." Guthrie suggests that "Most commentators take this washing to refer to baptism and connect the regeneration with John 3:5." (p. 205)

The Greek word *palingensia* (regeneration), "current in Stoicism for periodic restoration of the natural world," seems here to take a new meaning in view of the Christian's new birth. "The renewing of the Holy Ghost specifies the resultant renovation accompanying the regeneration. The one points to the act of entering, while the other marks the quality of the new life." (Guthrie, p. 205) It would be better to render "renewal, renewing" as "making new," since the former term might suggest a restoration of powers previously possessed by the sinner, whereas the believer through the work of the Spirit lives on a higher plane than before. He is refashioned, made fit for the Kingdom of God. (John 3:5)

How marvellously God has noted all needs and prepared accordingly to meet them. Inadequate and failing, dead in sin and trespasses, hating and hateful, life seemed despairing and hopeless, But through the Gospel of grace, "the washing of regeneration," the "making new" power of the Holy Spirit, we have been brought into newness of life now, made into the likeness of Christ, and assured that we have "become heirs in hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:7) □