

CLARIFYING THE ISSUES REGARDING THE HOLY SPIRIT

When a person considers the implications of the above title, there are two things which immediately come to mind. The first thing is, Satan never quits. This brings us to the second thing, Wars never stay won. Divine truth wins battles, but the war will not be over until time, as we know it, is no more.

It is a fact, regardless of the degree of which we think we have won a spiritual battle in overcoming false doctrine, we need to realize Satan never gives up. He may retreat or even hoist the flag of surrender, but he never surrenders.

One of the major problems the Restoration leaders faced involved the work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of an alien sinner. Most of these men were raised in denominational groups which held "Calvinism" as a cardinal doctrine.

One of the foundation stones of this doctrine is "Total Hereditary Depravity." This doctrine holds that when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they became dead in sin, totally defiled in all their parts and faculties of body and soul. Not only is this corrupted nature passed to succeeding generations, but also the guilt of their sin is passed to their posterity. Now, if it is true that man is born totally depraved, completely opposite to all good, absolutely and completely inclined to evil, how could such a person ever be converted? In order to answer this inquiry, they formulated the false doctrine of "Irresistible Grace." This doctrine says that since man is so corrupt that he, of and by himself, could never respond to the gospel. Therefore, they invented the doctrine of "Irresistible Grace." This teaching advocates the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the alien sinner (the elect) in order to effect conversion.

The teaching I am to consider in this lesson is similar to Calvinism. However, there is one major difference: Wherein Calvinism affirms there must be a direct impact of the Holy Spirit upon the spirit of man to bring about conversion, some of our brethren are now affirming there must be a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the New Testament Christian to strengthen, to help the saint produce the fruit of the Spirit, to give wisdom, etc.

This doctrine, at least in part, is an outgrowth of the "Personal Indwelling" view of the Holy Spirit. Simply stated, this doctrine holds the "gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38) is the Holy Spirit Himself, actually and literally dwelling in the heart of the Christian; yet He does nothing separate and apart from the word of God. I want to be clearly understood: *It is not the case that every person who holds this Personal Indwelling view believes in this direct working of the Holy Spirit.*

The All-Sufficiency of the Scriptures

Paul wrote "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In short, Paul affirms God's word reveals everything a person needs to know to become a Christian and all one must know in order to live a life acceptable to God.

However, some contend this all-sufficiency is *information only*. In their view, man is incapable of taking this *information* and applying it in such a way he can live acceptably to God. They contend he can reach a certain level of producing the "fruit of the Spirit," but ultimately the indwelling Spirit must act directly upon the human heart to bring a person to the level of fruit producing needed to be "all that one can be."

Direct Strengthening

The Holy Spirit supposedly works in conjunction with the Word *within* the Christian to *strengthen* the child of God. The contention is this impartation of strength is directly from the Holy Spirit to help God's people to resist temptation.

Thus, the scenario goes something like this: There is a certain level of "strength" to which one can attain through the application of inspired Scripture ("information only" as some contend). Beyond this however, there is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the Christian to bring the saint to a higher and more powerful level of strength in resisting temptation.

Invariably one passage used to support this false doctrine is Ephesians 3:16 in which Paul wrote, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;" The argument is basically this: We are strengthened by the Holy Spirit Who is in the inner man.

Relative to this thought, brother Wayne Price¹ wrote:

Some would have the "eis" in v. 16 pale into nothing more than an "in" showing location. The word "eis" signifies "into" and there is no need to reduce it to an "in." In other words, the "inward man" is viewed as the recipient and/or object towards which the strengthening is directed.

The passage does not even address the issue of indwelling, saying nothing about the location of the Spirit whatsoever. What does it say? Merely that the Holy Spirit imparts a strengthening, directed toward the inner man, and how does that power come from the Spirit? Through his sword, the word of God (Eph. 6:17). See Fox, p. 106 (especially his points (a), (b), and ©) relating to the "riches of his power" clause. That the Spirit is working through the word is all that I can see here.

It does not require an in-depth knowledge of the original language to see that brother Price is absolutely correct. The location of the Holy Spirit is not even under consideration in this passage.

Now, if Paul here teaches a direct infusion of strength into the Christian by the Holy Spirit (after the child of God reaches that level he can attain without Divine help), then if he does not overcome the temptation, where does the fault lie, with the individual or the Holy Spirit? The purveyors of this new doctrine among churches of Christ will respond that this strengthening does not overrule the free moral agency of God. However, such an argument affirms the child of God still has something to do with their obedience or disobedience, as the case might be, even after the Holy Spirit directly infuses strength into one.

Paul wrote "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). This verse raises some questions: (1) Is the action from Christ *direct* or *indirect*? (2) Is this strengthening from Christ before or after the direct activity of the Holy Spirit? (3) Is the strengthening from Christ of greater, lesser, or the same power as that of the Holy Spirit?

We are strengthened by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16), Christ (Phil. 4:13), and God (1 Pet. 5:10). Again we ask some questions: (1) When we are strengthened by one of these, will we know which One is performing the act? (2) Will the consequence of the action of one of these result in a greater strengthening than the others? (3) If the answer is "Yes," then will the strengthening follow the same chronological order every time for every person on every occasion? If the answer is "No," then would this not imply the results of the strengthening of each is the same? If that is the case, then why do these false teachers spend so much time emphasizing what the Holy Spirit does while neglecting to spotlight what the Christ does to us? The Psalmist said, My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word" (Psa. 119:28). Here the strength was by God's word. Concerning Jehovah he wrote, "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul" (Psa. 138:3).

Paul affirmed the Scriptures would furnish the child of God completely (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We are informed this is only *informationally complete*. This very argument denies the all-sufficiency of God's word. According to this doctrine, inspired information cannot be taken into our hearts and made to rule, reign, control, dominate our lives, even to bringing us victoriously through trials and temptation. We are told there must be a direct operation of the Holy Spirit to ultimately effect that strength God would have us to have.

Does it not seem strange that God inspired men to reveal His Divine Word, but once delivered, it still must have a direct working of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the Christian to bring us to the level sufficient to overcome any and all trials? Was He incapable of giving us nothing more than *information*?

Paul's desire for the Colossian Christians was that they "might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;" (Col. 1:10-11). His desire was they might increase in the knowledge of God. As their knowledge increased and they made proper application of that which they knew was God's will, they would be strengthened.

Jesus wanted Peter to "strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Would Peter do this "directly"? Paul "went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23). Was this a direct impact of his spirit on their spirit? Certainly not. Paul later affirmed "...the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (2 Tim. 4:17). Where is the proof this was a "spirit" upon "spirit" strengthening? The source of the "strength" might come from many places, but it is not "direct."

God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit all strengthen God's people. But the question first, last and always is: How does Deity strengthen the saints?

Direct Wisdom

Some affirm James promised us wisdom which comes directly from God to the saint. The proof text offered is "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). Now, what is clearly stated here is that God gives wisdom. However, one can comb the verse, extending the search to the context and he will not find one word that says anything about a "direct" operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man in giving the desired wisdom.

Just as Paul states in Romans 8:14 that as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, so this passage states that God gives wisdom. But just as Romans 8:14 does not state how one is led by the Spirit, so this passage does not state "how" the wisdom is given. It is an assumption to say that it is directly from God.

I do know the Bible reveals various ways in which "wisdom" comes. The wise man said:
 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 2:1-6).

A person has to have help to not see the close connection of "knowledge" and "wisdom."

In another place the wise man wrote, "Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth" (Prov. 4:5), adding "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths" (Prov. 4:11). The Psalmist penned "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom"

(Psa. 51:6). Now it is a fact that “wisdom” is the correct use of knowledge, but where is the passage stating “wisdom” comes directly from God? It cannot be found!

If this doctrine is true, then when one receives this “wisdom” from God (directly), is it infallible? For instance, let us say an eldership is confronted with a difficult problem. Each man believes this “direct wisdom from God” doctrine and prays to God for wisdom in handling this delicate situation. All come to the next meeting and all claim that God has given (directly) wisdom, and yet they do not agree – how can they determine which was from God? I know in the first century, there was a way to tell which was right: the miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, one of the spiritual gifts listed by Paul was the “word of wisdom” (1 Cor. 12:8). It is possible this is what James had under consideration. James certainly had the miraculous under consideration in the last chapter of his writing. He wrote, “Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14-15).

I do know that wisdom comes from God. But to say it comes “directly” is to say more than the inspired text says. I can show (and have shown) that wisdom comes from an understanding and application of the word of God. What one cannot show is the working of the Holy Spirit directly upon the spirit of man to give him wisdom.

Helping the Saint to Produce the Fruit of the Spirit

We are told the Holy Spirit directly helps the child of God to produce the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:19-21). But is this the case? Let us see.

The Hebrew writer penned:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, *by whom also he made the worlds*; 3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, *and upholding all things by the word of his power*, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb. 1:1-3; italics mine, tlb)

Why is it that He had the power in the physical creation to speak things into existence and they continue by the “word of his power.” However, in the spiritual realm, man becomes a Christian (new creation) by obeying the gospel of Christ, but then must have a constant and direct working of the Holy Spirit to bring him to eternity? This is strange reasoning indeed.

Another question for your consideration: Are Christians promised the *fruit of the Spirit* or are they commanded to have the *fruit of the Spirit*? Surely all would agree they are commanded. But notice this thought: (1) According to this novel doctrine, a person cannot have the fruit of

the Spirit without the personal indwelling and direct working of the Holy Spirit, (2) Supposedly the Holy Spirit is the promised gift of Acts 2:38. (3) Thus, the fruit of the Spirit is a promise.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

It is now affirmed when a person is baptized into Christ in obedience to the gospel, he is also baptized by the Holy Spirit. The argument is based upon the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3:1ff (the reader is asked to read the passage). Jesus said one had to be born of "water" and the "spirit. The argument is that the action involved in each element must be in the same fashion and to the same degree. Therefore, since "born of water" means an immersion in water, then "born of Spirit" means an immersion in the Spirit. If this is true, then we must now teach that baptism in the Holy Spirit is a commandment!

In Titus 3:5 Paul spoke of the same thing; he used different words but the thought is the same. He said, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Notice the similarity of the two passages: *Born of water and of the Spirit is equal to by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*. John's "born of water" is Paul's "washing of regeneration," and John's "of the Spirit" is the same as Paul's "renewing of the Holy Spirit."

In the Titus passage (verse 6), Paul said "Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." The argument is on the pronoun translated *which*. The New King James Version translates it *whom*. Now, it is the case the word under consideration could be either masculine (thus, *which* = *His mercy*) or neuter (*Whom* = *Holy Spirit*). It is more in keeping with the context to have reference to *his mercy*. But let us suppose for a moment it should be *whom*, thus referring to the Holy Spirit. It would therefore refer to the apostles and the spiritually gifted individuals in the first century, not to every person.

Furthermore, John's baptism presents a problem. John's baptism was "for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). But we are told one must have Holy Spirit baptism to cleanse the heart so the Spirit can take up personal residence therein. Those who were baptized with John's baptism and who died before Pentecost had "remission of sins," but they did not have the "new birth" (water & Spirit).

Those who were baptized with John's baptism and lived to see the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) present another problem. Their heart had not been cleansed so that the Spirit could take up personal residence – therefore, by implication, they needed to be re-baptized. Furthermore, unless the other apostles were re-baptized (as was one of the proponents of this new doctrine), then Paul was "baptized with the Holy Spirit" non-miraculously and then "baptized with the Holy Spirit" in a miraculous way – two baptisms with the Holy Spirit! However, the other apostles were only baptized with the Holy Spirit (miraculous).

The advocates of this doctrine appeal to Paul's statement "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). The phrase *by one Spirit* is taken to refer to one of the elements "in which" one is baptized, rather than the means "by which." This would thus affirm *two baptisms*, while Inspiration says there is *one baptism* (Eph. 4:5). The devotees of this doctrine respond that there is *one baptism* which is comprised of *two elements*. But again, unless they want to contend that all who received John's baptism had to be re-baptized, they have a problem which has no answer. As stated above, John's baptism was "for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4), just as is Great Commission baptism. Yet those receiving John's baptism did not receive "Holy Spirit" baptism. In other words, they received the same promise (remission of sins) but did not receive the same baptism.

Since this article is lengthy enough, let us close with these thoughts. It is our contention that every act the Holy Spirit performs upon the heart of a Christian or an alien sinner, it is always through the instrumentality of the inspired word of God.

Endnotes

1. Brother Price preaches for the church of Christ in McCloud, Oklahoma. He has his Master's Degree in New Testament Greek. None can doubt his scholarship.