

Word Study

THE EARNEST OF THE SPIRIT

(Ian S. Davidson, Motherwell)

We read: **"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, is God; who also has sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."** (2 Corinthians 1:21,22). **"Now He who has wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."** (2 Corinthians 5:5) **"In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory."** (Ephesians 1: 13,14).

The word "earnest" is a translation of the Greek word *arrabon*, which originally referred to earnest-money deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed. It was probably introduced into Greece from Phoenicia. 'In general usage it came to denote a pledge or earnest of any sort.' (W.E.Vine). A.M.Hunter, for example, has written: "From the Hebrew *erabon* we can trace it through the Latin *arra* to the Scots 'arles' (the 'arles penny' was the advance payment you made when you were hiring a servant). Always the basic meaning of the word is a foretaste, a first instalment and pledge that what is to follow will be of the same quality. (In modern Greek *arrabona* is an 'engagement ring'). Turn up the Greek papyrus letters, written about the time of Christ, which our archaeologists have been exhuming from the sands of ancient Egypt, and you will find it used there. Thus a man writes to a friend, 'I paid Lampon the mouse-catcher for you the sum of eight drachmae as earnest-money in order that he may catch the mice while they are with young'".

The Apostle Paul connected *arrabon* with the Holy Spirit. To him, the Holy Spirit was an instalment, a guarantee, a foretaste of the life to come – a life to be lived in the presence of God Himself. "The gift of the Holy Spirit is therefore a foretaste of the fulness of life which the Christian will one day live in the presence of God, a foretaste of the very life of God Himself, and a pledge and a guarantee that some day God will fulfil His promise and enable the Christian to enter into that life. He who is in the Spirit has, therefore, in Him the very life of God." (Barclay). Truly, the Holy Spirit is something "quite out of this world". His presence proves there is another world beyond this scene of time.

THE HOLY SPIRIT – A WHO OR WHAT?

But who or what is the Holy Spirit? I see Him as a personality of the Godhead or Godhood (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). Jehovah's Witnesses describe the Spirit as God's "active force". They do not see Him as a personality at all. I believe they are wrong on this. The Holy Spirit is not some kind of force or a mental concept. The Spirit is not a state of mind; He is a being with a mind. He can hear, speak, guide, teach, reprove, reveal, make intercession, etc. He can also be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). I suggest that these are all attributes of a living person. I also believe that the Spirit sustains the same relationship to God as the human spirit does to man. Only the inner man is aware of the thoughts, intents and purposes of man.

Likewise, no one outside knows or comprehends the thoughts of the infinite, except the Spirit of God. Martin Luther once wrote: "*Pneuma* (spirit) is the highest and noblest part of man, which qualifies him to lay hold of the incomprehensible, invisible, eternal things; in short, it is the house where faith and God's word are at home."

ALL IN NEED OF THE SPIRIT

Without the Spirit of God, we are not going to make it to the heavenly shore. We need Him every step of the way, every minute of the day. His presence is truly vital. Paul wrote to the Romans: "**Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, He is none of His.**" (8:9b). One writer has said: "The Spirit lives in us, abides with us, shares with us as a friend, a help, a comforter and a counsellor. The trusting heart which accepts this as a fact, will be blessed." Jesus, of course, described Him as "the Comforter". (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The Greek word is *Parakletos* and refers to one who pleads another's cause, an intercessor, an advocate. In the widest sense, the word signifies a succourer and a comforter. This title reveals much of what the Holy Spirit does for the believer in his walk and talk for Jesus. In fact, Jesus described the Spirit as "another Comforter". (John 14:16) There are two Greek words for "another". They are *allos* and *heteros*. The former speaks of another of the same sort and the latter, another of a different sort. Not surprisingly, *allos* is the adjective that is found in John 14. So Jesus requested the Father to send another Helper like Himself, who could encourage, strengthen and support the saints during the age when He was absent.

THE SPIRIT UNDER THE OLD COVENANT

The "earnest of the Spirit" is a phrase that is not found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The question is often asked: "Was the Holy Spirit given under the Old Covenant?" My answer is: "The Spirit was bestowed upon certain select individuals under the Old Covenant, but not upon the community as a whole". Let me name some of those individuals: Joseph (Genesis 41:38); Bezaleel (Exodus 31:3); Moses and the seventy (Numbers 11:25); Joshua (Numbers 27:18); Othniel (Judges 3:10); Gideon (Judges 6:34); Jephthah (Judges 11:29); Saul (1 Samuel 10:10); Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:1); prophets (Nehemiah 9:30); Isaiah (48:16); Ezekiel (2:2; 11:5). Truly, the age of the Messiah is a greater age in every way.

FINAL THOUGHTS

There is only one Holy Spirit, but He functions in seven ways (Revelation 1:4; 3:1): in creation, revelation, incarnation, inspiration, confirmation, incorporation and transformation. He transforms our lives completely. He destroys the works of the flesh and produces in us the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 16-26). Paul also wrote: "**Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.**" (2 Corinthians 3: 17, 18). J.W. McGarvey has written: "However, none of the ministers of Christ, not even the apostles (ch.5:16), continually beheld Christ glorified as an objective reality, for it is only in our future state that we shall thus look upon Him, and that look will fully effect the transformation into His likeness which our knowledge of Him in the gospel has been slowly working out within us during our earthly life (John 17:24; 1 John 3:2; Col. 3: 3,4; Rom. 8:17; Phil. 3:12-14; Col. 1:27)."