

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

The fourth lecture on the theme of the Holy Spirit
given at Hindley Bible School, 1956 by Leonard Channing

THE New Testament says much in regard to the Holy Spirit, especially in connection with the Christian life. Yet, strangely enough, we, as New Testament Christians, say comparatively little about the subject. This is not as it should be, for the work of the Holy Spirit is absolutely fundamental to the Christian life. We propose to consider the subject under three headings: (1) The promise of the Spirit; (2) The indwelling of the Spirit; (3) The work of the Spirit.

(1) The promise of the Spirit

The New Testament speaks of several different gifts of the Holy Spirit, and it is well at the beginning to make clear the distinctions between them. Firstly, we read of the gift of the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). Only the Lord could possibly have this, 'for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.' Secondly, there was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was also a gift (see Acts 11:17), not a general promise. It was given on but two occasions, both as signs: at Pentecost, to show that the king-

dom of Christ had commenced; and to Cornelius, to show that the kingdom had come to the Gentiles. Thirdly, we read of what may be called 'the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.' These gifts also were not given to everyone, even in Apostolic days. Paul, for instance, desired to visit Rome, one of the reasons being, ' . . . that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift.' Further, the gifts by their very nature could only be temporary, for they could only be imparted by the laying on of the Apostles' hands (see Acts 8:14-17). Their purpose was simply to confirm the Word, and when this was accomplished they passed away. (See Mark 16:17-20; Acts 2:16-20; 1 Cor. 13:8-13; Heb. 2:3-4).

But what of the ordinary Christian in New Testament times upon whom the hands of the Apostles had not been laid? And what of Christians to-day? Undoubtedly, there is a fourth promise of the Spirit, which, unlike the others, is general and abiding. The Lord promised this gift of the Spirit in John 7:37-38: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' John under inspiration explains the statement: '(But this he spake of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)' (v. 39).

Note, this promise is without limitation, for it is addressed to all who believe on the Lord. Peter, in fulfilment of this statement, makes the same promise on the day of Pentecost in even more definite terms (Acts 2:38-39). Peter repeats the same promise in Acts 3:19: ' . . . when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.' (See also Acts 5:22). Paul also speaks of the same promise in Titus 3:5-6, and many other scriptures refer to the same subject.

This gift is to all Christians, even to those in New Testament days who subsequently received special gifts of the Spirit. This is made clear in Acts 6. The Apostles directed the church at Jerusalem to select seven men to serve tables. One of the qualifications of the men chosen was that they were to be 'full of the Holy Spirit,' men who had received to a great degree the promise to all Christians, and who were living Spirit-filled lives. The Apostles then laid their hands on them, and two of them afterwards worked miracles. It is thus evident that they were given, in addition, the special miraculous powers of the Spirit.

But what is this gift of the Spirit promised to all Christians? Some extraordinary answers are given to this question. But the New Testament makes it perfectly plain, that it is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself. There are many scriptures that state this. We quote only two: Rom. 5:5: 'And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us'; Rom. 8:9-11: 'But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.'

Let us at this point emphasise that the Holy Spirit is a *person*, Deity, the Third Person of the Godhead. We deplore the speaking of the Holy Spirit as 'it,' as occurs in so much literature on the subject. It is as dishonouring to speak of the Spirit in this way as it would be to speak of Christ! And it is as a *person* that the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of a Christian. We have heard so much of the Holy Spirit working through the Word (rightly so, in the proper sense), that some are in danger of having

a mechanical and impersonal view of the Spirit's indwelling. We can talk of the power of the Holy Spirit, His influence, His working through the Word; and all this is true. But never confuse the Holy Spirit Himself with His instrument or agent.

(2) Indwelling of the Spirit

There are two ways in which the Spirit of God could come into our hearts: either by enveloping us, suddenly, mysteriously, directly from heaven; or by making His entry through an instrument, vehicle, or agent. The former idea is widely held in the evangelical world. Many will pray for and do all sorts of things in order to experience the supposedly sudden indwelling of the Spirit. But the second position alone has the support of scripture.

As to what this instrument or agent is the scriptures are equally clear. Jesus said in John 6:63 'It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.' Again (John 16:13) the Lord said to His disciples, 'Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.' Later He prays for them, 'Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.' Again, 1 Pet. 1:22-23 says, 'Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God.' The agent or instrument by which the Spirit dwells in the heart is therefore the Word of God.

This is in line with the Lord's original promise (John 7:38). Belief in Christ, through acceptance of His Word, means the indwelling of the Spirit in the heart. This is exactly in accord with what happened at Pentecost. The Word was preached, was believed, was obeyed, and the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. This is in line with what Paul says in Gal. 4:6, 'And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.' It is not to make us sons, but because we are sons of God, that the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart.

This may be illustrated another way. Paul says in 1 Cor. 6:19 'What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you.' Now would God have dwelt in the Temple of old, manifesting Himself in the cloud of glory, unless the right conditions had been present, His people obedient to His will, His priests consecrated, His temple cleansed? God actually withdrew His presence because these conditions did not prevail. Yet, how many of us are offering to the Spirit of God human temples in which there is little consecration, lives disobedient to His will, and hearts filled with the defilements of the flesh. The Spirit through His Word has laid down the conditions of His indwelling. Comply with these conditions in the first place, and the promise of His presence will be fulfilled. Continue to comply with His Word, and He will continue to dwell in the heart.

This is the very test that the Word of God gives us, that we might know whether we have the indwelling of the Spirit. The test is not emotional, mystical, miraculous, or spectacular. Rom. 8:16 says, 'The Spirit itself [himself, R.V.] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' Here are two witnesses. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit witnessing through the Word. On the other, my spirit witnessing through my life. When these two come together, when my spirit tells me that I have come into line, and am living in accordance with the Holy Spirit's Word, then I know that I am a child of God.

(To be continued)