

THE REALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on February 19, 1967
at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee.

In our day there has been an increased interest in discussions concerning God. His very existence has been questioned. Men have talked of the nature of God, the work of God and many other related matters. Men have also examined the teachings concerning Christ more minutely, being especially concerned about his virgin birth, his miracles and his resurrection. Also, our generation has been much more concerned to know about the Holy Spirit than many previous generations. It is concerning the Holy Spirit that we would speak today.

First of all, the Bible teaches us that he is a divine being, the third person of the Godhead. The Old Testament mentions him 88 times, while the New Testament mentions him 264 times. Always he is mentioned as a person. The pronoun "he" is always used, Never is the pronoun "it" used. The second century writer, Tertullian, spoke of the Godhead as "One substance in three persons." While this expression may not be fully satisfying, it does emphasize a basic truth: Divinity is made up of three persons. God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are distinct and yet one. Passages like Matt. 28:19-20 indicate that they are sharers in divinity, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

II Cor. 13:14 also indicates this unique divinity possessed by the three who make up the Godhead, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." In his sermon on Mars Hill in Athens, the apostle Paul spoke of the fatherhood of God at the beginning of his message and closed with a reference to the resurrection of Christ. Midway in his sermon he said, "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and the device of man." (Acts 17:29.) Our point is simply that the Holy Spirit takes his place within the circle of divinity along with the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit Promised

While Christ was here on the earth, in the last extended message which he gave to his faithful apostles, he spoke of his departure soon to be accomplished and then promised, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him: ye know him; for he abideth with you, and shall be in you...These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you." (John 14:16-17-25-26.) "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall bear witness of me." (John 15:26.) "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go I will send him unto you. And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment...I have yet many things to say unto you, but he cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." (John 16:7-8, 12-13.)

These clear-cut promises that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles in what they were to speak had been mentioned earlier. In Matt. 10:19-20, we read,

"But when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak, For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." The promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles in their speaking was borne out in actual fact during the early years of the church before the New Testament scriptures were written. The Holy Spirit continued to guide them into all truth, with even more lastingly beneficial effects, when they penned the inspired scriptures. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth, combining spiritual things with spiritual words." The apostle Paul wrote, "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21.) Both these statements indicate with complete clarity that the scriptures were the result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This had been a significant part of the meaning which Christ conveyed when he promised to send the Comforter to guide them into all truth.

Measures of the Holy Spirit

As we take a comprehensive look at the teachings of the New Testament concerning the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves speaking in the terms used by a number of the pioneers of the Restoration Movement. Although many decades have passed and many Bible students have spoken, I find no presentation to be clearer in conveying the sense of the scriptures than that which suggests three different measures of the Holy Spirit. Admittedly, the word measures is an adequate word, and some have suggested that the word degrees would be more nearly suggestive of the true situation. The word measure, however, will serve to convey the essential idea.

First of all, the New Testament describes the Baptismal Measure of the Holy Spirit. This occurred only twice. The first of the occurrences was on Pentecost and was preceeded by an announcement of his coming. In the opening chapter of the book of Acts, we read, "Being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, Ye heard from me: for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence. . . But ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost oart of the earth." (Acts 1:4-5,8.)

The apostles did remain in Jerusalem and in the opening verses of Acts 2, we read that the Holy Spirit did come upon them in this baptismal measure. "And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were altogether in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4.) There then followed the preaching of the first full gospel sermon, and the establishment of the Lord's church on Pentecost, with the addition of three thousand souls. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was to authenticate the preaching of the apostles. It established their authority as nothing else could have done. It proved to the people that they were speaking from God.

The second and final occasion of the baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit is found in Acts 10, where we read of the conversion of the household of Cornelius. This, too, needed divine authentication. This was the first occasion of bringing Gentiles into the church and would be suspect in the minds of Jews who had so strong a feeling of exclusiveness. In order that all men might know for all time that Gentiles were welcome, the Holy Spirit baptized the household of Cornelius in this same miraculous manner. The account reads, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Spirit fell on all them that heard the words. And they of the circumcision that believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also

was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ." (Acts 10:44-48.)

In Acts 11:15, we read Peter's explanation when he got back to Jerusalem and was questioned about this unusual occurrence. He explained, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on us at the beginning." Again, this baptismal measure of the Holy Spirit was to authenticate the action and message of the apostles at a crucial moment in time. I might add also that the household of Cornelius became Christians in the usual way. They heard the gospel preached, believed it, were willing to change the direction of their lives, and were baptized. The coming of the Holy Spirit was for a different purpose. They were saved through the same avenues of obedience to the Lord that all must follow to become Christians.

Miraculous Measure

The second measure of the Holy Spirit might be called the Miraculous Measure of the Holy Spirit for it refers to the power which was conveyed to some to work miracles. In Acts 8 we read the story of how some became Christians in Samaria. Then there follows, "Now when the apostles that were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: whom when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit: for as yet it was fallen upon none of them: only they had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus." Then laid they their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." (Acts 8:14-17.) You will recall that when the apostles Peter and John laid their hands upon some of the members of the church in Samaria, they did not convey this miracle-working power to all. As a result, Simon the Sorcerer offered to buy the power with money, which brought forth a severe condemnation from the apostle Peter. This second measure of the Holy Spirit came with the laying on of the apostles' hands.

Acts 19:6 also gives us an example of this power being conveyed by the apostles; laying on of hands. "And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came upon them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied." (II Tim. 1:6 finds the apostle Paul saying, "For which cause I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee through the laying on of my hands.")

The ability of the apostles to lay hands on certain ones conveying to them the power of working miracles--healing the sick, raising the dead, and speaking in tongues--constituted the second measure of the Holy Spirit. This measure of the Holy Spirit ceased with the apostolic age. Since the power could be conveyed only by the laying on of the apostles' hands, when the last apostle had died this power could no longer be passed on to others. The reason is simple. This miracle-working power which was conveyed to certain selected ones of the church of the first century was primarily to be used as an evidence that they were spokesmen for the Lord. In the day when the New Testament scriptures had not been written some kind of authentication was necessary, or else they would not have been believed by the people. When the full record of the scriptures was complete this miracle-working power was no longer needed. This was exactly what the apostle Paul said to the Corinthians in I Cor. 13:8-10, "But whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away."

Ordinary Measure

The third manifestation of the Holy Spirit may be called the Ordinary or Normal Measure of the Holy Spirit. Notice some passages that indicate this general measure. When the people had heard Peter's great sermon on Pentecost, they said, "Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38.) A little later we read, "And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him." (Acts 5:32.) In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul said, "Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye." (I Cor. 3:16-17.) To the individual Corinthian he wrote, "For know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body." (I Cor. 6:19-20.)

Just here I would like to make the comment that as these passages are suggesting that the Holy Spirit is to dwell in the Christian's person, so we also read that God and Christ are to dwell within us. In II Cor. 6:16 we read, "And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Col. 1:27 speaks of "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Now, notice in the Roman letter how interchangeably the apostle Paul uses the idea of God dwelling in the Christian, Christ dwelling in the Christian, and the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Christian. "But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. But if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ is 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 dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom. 8:9-14.) The New Testament plainly declares that God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are to dwell within Christians. The results of this indwelling are suggested in Gal. 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law."

The Pioneers

Just here I would like to present a few quotations from some of the pioneers of the Restoration Movement. While insisting that "we cannot separate the Spirit and the Word of God," Alexander Campbell said, "Christians are, therefore, clearly and unequivocally temples of the Holy Spirit; and they are quickened, animated, encouraged, and sanctified by the power and influence of the Spirit of God, working in them through the truth...To those, then, who believe, repent, and obey the gospel, he actually communicates of his Good Spirit." (Christian System, pp. 48-50.) Moses E. Lard wrote, "We need the Holy Spirit, then, to strengthen us with might in the inner man; we need it to help our infirmities; we need it to intercede for us..." He concluded that there is no Biblical ground "on which to deny the literal indwelling of the Spirit." (Lard's Quarterly, March 1864, p. 241.) J. W. McGarvey put it this way, while commenting on Acts 2:38 in his fine Commentary on Acts, "The expression means the Holy Spirit as a gift; and the reference is to that indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, and without church we are not of Christ."

Misconceptions

There are many misconceptions and mistaken ideas concerning the Holy Spirit in the world today. There are some who hold that the Holy Spirit guides and saves the sinner in a special, direct way. Often it is claimed that a person has been saved in some manner quite different from that outlined in the scriptures. This would make the Holy Spirit contradict himself and even, in a sense, make him a liar. We believe that the person who holds such a belief as this is mistaken in his understanding of the Holy Spirit. His feeling, or dream, or experience is not the result of a communication from the Holy Spirit, for this divine personage of the Godhead does not contradict himself. We are saved when we take seriously the directions given by the Holy Spirit in the inspired word of God and in no other manner.

Again, there are some who feel that the miracles worked by the power of the Holy Spirit in apostolic times can still be worked by men today. They believe that the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, and the speaking in tongues are still possible among men. As mentioned earlier the need for these miracles is no longer in effect, since the perfect declaration of God's will has been presented to us in the New Testament. Hence, the empowering of men to work these miracles has also passed out of existence.

Yet again, there are those who believe that Christians are guided directly and personally by the Holy Spirit today, as they were in apostolic times, apart from the Bible. This has led many to claim to be Holy Spirit guided, even while believing and teaching something contrary to the written revelation of the Holy Spirit. This is a position for which we know no defence. The Holy Spirit does not contradict himself. We do believe in prayer, for the Holy Spirit guided James to write, "If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5.) We do believe in providence, for Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose." A direct communication from the Holy Spirit, apart from the inspired word of God and often contradictory to that word, we do not believe to be authentic speaking of the Holy Spirit.

All that we know concerning the Holy Spirit, we have learned from the reading of the scriptures. All that we know about how a person should become a Christian, how we should worship, how we should live and work as a Christian, and how the church should be governed, we know from the scriptures. We must not under-rate or disregard the inspired word of God, which has been given to us by the direction of the Holy Spirit. We also know, through the promises in this inspired word, that God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are to dwell in the hearts of Christians. Whether the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts "representatively or influentially" or whether he dwells within us "personally" are matters about which the scriptures do not give us a specific answer. Let us, then, simply leave the matter as the scriptures teach it. We are not called upon to speak where the scriptures have not given us instruction and to do so often becomes a divisive force among brethren and contributes to the destructive work of Satan.

Finally, let us love God, Christ and the Holy Spirit with an ever deepening love. Let us read the scriptures to know them and their will for us more fully, and let us open our hearts to the indwelling of the Godhead. In this age when so many influences would pull us away from the spiritual, let us spend more and more time in communion with God in order that he may dwell in our hearts. May we live close to the Lord. May our relationship with the Holy Spirit be very real. God is not dead and neither is the Holy Spirit.