



December 7, 2022

### THE INDWELLING HOLY SPIRIT

Contemplating the work of the third person of the Trinity evokes disturbing thoughts. Consider three. 1) I can find little, if any, evidence that NT saints are more godly than their OT counterparts. 2) Most Christians today neither know nor consciously use their spiritual gifts. 3) If the scripture had not told me, I am not sure that I would know that I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit. You may believe this to be an overly pessimistic understanding and you may be right. I am only reporting the very limited perspective of a sinful man.

Adding to my perplexity are Christ's own words about John the Baptist in Luke 7:28, "I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." John was from the old dispensation and all Christians, who comprise the kingdom of God, are greater than John. How can that be? It doesn't appear to be so. This judgment of our Lord causes me to believe that my understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit is deeply flawed and needs re-evaluation.

Let's begin by reminding ourselves of the fruit of the Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control..." (Galatians 5:22-23) It is noteworthy that the fruit occur naturally and in varying degrees in all people.

It has been said that wisdom is common sense to an uncommon degree. Might the same be true, of not just the fruit itself, but also the power

producing the fruit. All of us have some capacity for the fruit as energized by human motives and power. But only the Holy Spirit can motivate for divine reasons and by divine power. On Earth an act of kindness from human motives will look very much like an act of kindness generated by the Holy Spirit. Since God accepts only that which is done for Him, the difference may not be apparent on Earth but will be in Heaven.

Varying natural degrees of patience, kindness, self-control, and gentleness mean that some non-Christians will appear to have more “fruit” than Christians. A great act of self-control for a Christian might be effortless for a non-Christian. But again, the issue is divine or human agency. And this awaits the judgment of God.

From this we learn that the Holy Spirit (like the Father and Son) works in and through the very common and ordinary things of life but with an infusion of divine power. I am inclined to believe that this is because these ordinary earthly things are shadows of the more substantial spiritual reality which is our true home and for which we are being prepared to live. Ordinary human virtue must become divinely empowered and enriched. And this is not easily discerned.

Additionally, not all that appears virtuous is virtue. Happy circumstances may produce acts that closely mimic the fruit of the Spirit. The love, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control of a blissful courtship may erupt into anger and reprisal in the throes of a rocky marriage. What at first appeared virtuous was really the expression of happiness. Happiness then may be a kind of counterfeit virtue. What sometimes passes for love may only be happiness. So, again our ability to identify the genuine article from the fraud is limited. The real test comes when circumstances are not to our liking. Because different people have happy circumstances to varying degrees, our judgment of the fruit is necessarily limited.

The endowment of ordinary virtues, in hopefully extraordinary ways, makes the Holy Spirit appear less powerful than He really is. It may be difficult to discern ordinary human virtue from that of divine origin. Compounding this is how easily we mistake happiness for virtue.

But our own sloth and faithlessness further compound the problem. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world is mitigated by our devotion to the world and lack of it toward Christ. And this is the real threat to our souls.

Romans 8:5, “For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.” Every waking moment of every waking hour presents us with this binary choice. The human mind can entertain only one thought at a time (multi-taskers move quickly back and forth but even they can think only one thing at a time).

Without the active enlistment of the Holy Spirit’s power, magnetic North for my mind is the flesh. Might it be that the true fruit of the Spirit are so scarce in me because my mind is so seldom set on Him and that at the deepest level of my soul this is willful?

Romans 6 speaks to the role of the will to direct the mind to Christ rather than sin (“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”)

Romans 8 speaks to the work of the Holy Spirit in putting to death the deeds of the body (“for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”)

Our will is necessary in the process of sanctification, but it is not sufficient. Our will directs the mind to spiritual things and away from fleshly things, but the Holy Spirit alone can put to death the deeds of the flesh. This is the process of sanctification for which the Holy Spirit was sent. In this process the deeds of our sinful flesh die and are replaced by the Holy Spirit, and we slowly become Christ-like. As Peter puts it, we “become partakers of the divine nature” as the precious Holy Spirit becomes part of our souls.

What percentage of time is my mind set on the Spirit? This is the part of the sanctification process in which I am active. The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, is infinitely powerful and will surely do His work in me. But not before I do my part. We are all becoming either

more Christ-like or more like our sinful selves. And where our minds are set is the determinative factor.

His sanctifying work may be obscured because His fruit so closely resembles ordinary human virtue or even that which is not virtue. Or it may be hindered because I allow my mind to roam freely. Correct that and the power of the Holy Spirit will no longer be a carefully guarded secret. The quality of our eternity depends on it.

One final thought. I have written this admonition to myself. An admonition well known to me and one I fear I will not long heed. Our spiritual forebearers, the Puritans used to pray to the Holy Spirit and I conclude with a portion of one of those prayers, "Spiritus Sanctus."

*O Holy Spirit, as the sun is full of light, the ocean full of water, Heaven full of glory, so may my heart be full of Thee.*

*Vain are all divine purposes of love and the redemption wrought by Jesus except thou work within, regenerating by thy power, giving me eyes to see Jesus, showing me the realities of the unseen world.*

*Give me thyself without measure, as an unimpair'd fountain, as inexhaustible riches.*

My discernment of such things is imperfect, but I sense evil enveloping us from every direction I look, except up. I am further inclined to believe that we have not been good stewards, either of the Word or of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We must covenant before Christ to rectify this. Jesus warned us that prior to His return, the "love of most would grow cold" and "will He find faith on earth?" Both love and faith are fruit of the Spirit. He will do His part, but we must do ours.

Gail and I thank you all for your love, prayers, encouragement and support this past year! Your friendship is a constant demonstration of God's generosity and goodness to us. We wish you a very Merry Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus, God's greatest gift, and the indwelling Holy Spirit through whom we know Him.

Merry Christmas with love and gratitude,

Gail & Jerry