

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. David Anderson

Things which accompany salvation: Gift of the Holy Spirit

In the latter part of my professional career, I was involved in giving specialised training within the pharmaceutical industry. Part of this training was to prepare companies for regulatory inspections regarding the registration of new drug substances. These inspections were usually only arranged by the authorities with a company a few weeks in advance. I was therefore often called upon at short notice to give inspection-readiness training. I remember having to give one such training session at a company in Sweden sometime during May 2006. During the first morning tea break, I expressed my surprise that the delegates were the only personnel present on the premises that day. "Oh", they said, "That's because today's a national holiday. But we had to sacrifice it to receive this training!" "Thursday's an unusual day for a public holiday", I replied, "What's it for?" The delegates rather vaguely replied that it was a "religious festival" - something to do with "the national church". I knew that the country was predominantly Protestant but it took me a few more questions for them to tell me that it had "something to do with the formation of the Christian church"! Suddenly, I realised that it was the festival celebrating the Day of Pentecost. But their ignorance of its significance caused me to precede the start of the next session with a brief explanation of the Feasts of Jehovah from Leviticus 23; and of how Pentecost was when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Christian disciples and the Christian church came into being. I think they were impressed at my biblical knowledge! And, by the way, they did pass the inspection a few weeks later and so were able to launch their new drug.

That brings me to this morning's subject, 'The Gift of the Holy Spirit', which occurred at Pentecost as the Acts 2 narrative concerning Peter's preaching states:

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ... And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:32, 38, English Standard Version).

But the same happened again in Acts 10, Peter's first preaching of the Gospel to Gentiles in Cornelius' house: *"While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ... [And Peter said], 'Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?'"* (Acts 10:44-45, 47)

Later, Peter gave this explanation: *"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John the Baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit'"* (Acts 11:15-16). The Lord had said this to the disciples in Acts 1:5.

The gift of the Holy Spirit was promised by God the Father to the Lord Jesus. It occurred on the Day of Pentecost for those first Jewish believers and it was repeated for Gentile believers in Cornelius' house. In 1:5, this gift was identified by the Lord as being the baptism with the Holy Spirit. There's no doubt that these two occasions in Acts, at Pentecost and at Caesarea, on which the Spirit was poured out are what John the Baptist had foretold about Jesus baptising with the Spirit (e.g. see Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16 and John 1:33). Together they constitute what Paul calls in 1 Corinthians 12:13, *"the baptism in the Spirit"* for Paul included Gentiles (called "Greeks" in this verse) as well as Jews.

To paraphrase his important doctrinal statement: "By one Spirit all believers were baptized into one corporate body. For Jewish believers this occurred on the day of Pentecost; and for Gentile believers it happened when Peter preached in Cornelius' house at Caesarea. But all believers, whether then or now, individually partake or drink of, or imbibe, the one same Spirit and so have been incorporated into the one Church of God."

Yes, to go back to my experience in Sweden, Pentecost is an important day in Christian history because it was the Church's birthday. That day God gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit - another Person of the Godhead, another Helper/Comforter equivalent to the Lord Jesus Himself (as we shall see in due course). I suppose those Swedish delegates of mine would not have been prepared to forego their Christmas day holiday as they, like us, appreciate its significance - that it celebrates of the gift of God's Son. And many carols are sung, in which God is thanked for His

wonderful gift of the Saviour. But are we equally as thankful for His gift of the Holy Spirit? As believers, we should be! So, let's do this and join in thanksgiving to God for His Spirit as I quote a hymn jointly written by HP Barker and A Cutting:

*We praise Thee for Thy Spirit, Lord,
The blessed Holy Ghost.
The promised Comforter from heaven,
Who came at Pentecost.*

*We praise Thee for His sovereign grace,
That broke our darkness through;
And wrought within us by Thy word
A birth divinely new.*

*We praise Thee that He is the Seal,
Whereby we're marked as Thine,
Until redemption's day shall dawn,
And we in glory shine.*

*We praise Thee for the Earnest given,
Of blessings yet in store,
The great inheritance which we
Shall share for evermore.*

*We praise Thee that the Unction sent
Abides in us for aye,
To be our Teacher, Guide and Strength,
Along life's upward way.*

*We praise Thee for those ties divine
That bind Thy saints to Thee,
As members of Thy body one -
The Spirit's unity.*

*We praise Thee for the work which He
Hath in our souls begun,
To form in us a transcript here
Of God's beloved Son.*

Now, I must stress that the Holy Spirit is a gift from God. I've already mentioned God's other supreme Gift, His Son. *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God"* (John 3:16-18). These verses remind us that we must never despise, nor neglect to accept, this expression of the love of God. For if we do, we perish and suffer the total loss of well-being forever! There are also these other amazing gifts from God:

- *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God"* (Ephesians 2:8).
- *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

As we are confronted with the God who gives and gives, we must exclaim, with Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:15, *"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift[s]!"*

For the rest of this talk, I'll comment upon why the gift of the Holy Spirit was so necessary by taking up some of the points made in the hymn I've quoted. (The hymn is about praise for the Spirit being the Seal, the Earnest, our Teacher, Guide and Strength, the one who formed the body of Christ, and the One who transforms us to be like Christ.) But, before I do, let me say that I see two main reasons for the gift of the Holy Spirit from God.

- a. The Lord Jesus said He was needed to give us the power and ability to be witnesses to Him in the world which doesn't want to know Him; and
- b. The Holy Spirit brought life from God so that we can live in communion with Him.

a. The Lord Jesus said He was needed to give us the power and ability to be witnesses to Him in the world which doesn't want to know Him.

He said to His apostles that they were to “*stay in [Jerusalem] until you are clothed with power from on high*” in the certainty that “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Luke 24:49 with Acts 1:8). Accordingly, they later said, “*we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to [us]*” (Acts 5:32). In the twenty-first century, when Christians receive much training in methods of evangelism, it's necessary to remind ourselves that the power for witnessing comes entirely from the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus emphasised this to the apostles, “*When [the Helper] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged*” (John 16:8-11).

b. The Holy Spirit brought life from God so that we can live in communion with Him.

Just as He breathed natural life into Adam, so the Lord Jesus imparted spiritual life to the apostles on the day of His resurrection. “*He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'*” (John 20:22). The Lord had promised spiritual life to the woman at Sychar's well when He said, “*If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water*” (John 4:10). The “*living water*” symbolises the Spirit. In John 7:38-39, John comments about Jesus' claim, “*Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'*” that He said this about the Spirit, “*whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*” It was at Pentecost that the disciples received this kind of new life - a life characterised and dominated by the Spirit, the meaning of which I'll now talk about using the points from the hymn.

1. The gift of the Holy Spirit enables believers to be true worshippers of God - to worship Him “*in spirit and in truth*”;
2. Second, the gift of the Holy Spirit is God's way of claiming us for Himself;
3. The Holy Spirit is in our hearts as the Guarantee, or the Earnest, of all of our blessings in Christ;
4. The hymn called the Holy Spirit “*our Teacher, Guide and Strength*”;
5. The hymn spoke of the Spirit's unity - the way in which all true believers are joined together in one fellowship of spiritual life;
6. The Holy Spirit works within each of us to produce Christ in the spiritual part of our beings.

1. The gift of the Holy Spirit enables believers to be true worshippers of God - to worship Him “in spirit and in truth” (see John 4:23)

Returning to John 4, where the Lord first spoke of the “*living water*” as that which satisfies the deepest needs of every human being, He told the woman, “*Everyone who drinks of [natural] water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*” (John 4:13-14). Eternal life is to “*know the Father, the only true God*” (John 17:3). It's to be born into His family and, as His children, experience His love. Here, I pick up on an idea in the hymn that it was the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit to produce in us, by God's word,

“a birth divinely new”.

The Lord Jesus explained the necessity and meaning of new birth in John 3:1-12, which introduces us to those “*heavenly things*” of divine family life.

2. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God's way of claiming us for Himself

As the hymn said,

“Whereby we're marked as Thine”.

The Spirit is God's Seal upon us - we're identified as His. In Paul's day seals were used to authenticate ownership of property. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise when we believed the Gospel. It was an immediate consequence of our faith in Christ (see Ephesians 1:13). In 2 Corinthians 1:20-22, Paul exults in the established position we have in God's purposes for us “*in Christ.*” But associated with our sealing is the fact that God has anointed us (2 Corinthians 1:21). In this respect, John wrote in his first letter that we have been anointed by the Holy Spirit and that He abides within us forever (1 John 2:20, 27). In the Old Testament, kings, prophets and priests were all anointed with special oil to be sanctified, or to be set apart, from the other Israelis, for God. Nowadays, believers are set apart for God and claimed by Him through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. He's both the Seal and the Anointing. The

Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us so that we are consecrated for God and His service. But we've also received the Holy Spirit in His fullness inwardly. Or rather it's God's love which *"has been poured [or deluged] into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"* (Romans 5:5).

3. The Holy Spirit is in our hearts as the Guarantee, or the Earnest, of all of our blessings in Christ.

"The Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of [God's] glory" (Ephesians 1:14 - see also 2 Corinthians 1:22). We're familiar with the idea that a guarantee is the down payment of an intended purchase. In 2 Corinthians 1:20 we're told, *"For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."* Through the Gospel, God offers people a full and complete life here upon earth. But to those who believe the Gospel, He also promises the blessings of heaven, which are called *"our inheritance"* in Ephesians 1:14.

Elsewhere these promises are stated in these ways: *"so that [through the Gospel we], being justified by his grace ... might be heirs according to the hope of eternal life [and live] in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began"* (Titus 3:7, 1:2).

It's by the Spirit we experience and enjoy the blessings of heaven here and now! *"As it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him' - these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God"* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Let me provide you with an example of this on-going ministry of the Holy Spirit. Just as I was writing this paragraph, a friend phoned to say that her dad had died quite suddenly in hospital. She reported that, as he was about to pass into the presence of the Lord, he opened his eyes and looked at his wife with a beaming smile. Then he directed his eyes heavenward and went! The Spirit gave him that special immediate foretaste of heaven in his deepest moment of need upon earth. Yes, the Spirit is indeed the Spirit of promise - *"the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"* (Ephesians 3:6). That is, He's the promise of better things - as well as the Spirit who was promised (Galatians 3:14 and Ephesians 1:13).

4. The hymn called the Holy Spirit "our Teacher, Guide and Strength"

John identified Him as Teacher in his first letter: *"The anointing that you received from [God] abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie - just as it has taught you, abide in him"* (1 John 2:27).

This wonderful gift from God enables all believers to discern, and distinguish, truth from error (1 John 2:20). How valuable that is today with all the confusion that exists in Christendom! I suppose, like me, you have heard or read something at sometime or other about Christ and Christianity and immediately thought, "That's not right", even though you may not immediately be able to explain why. That's the preserving work of the Spirit in your heart! The Lord Jesus promised these things when He said: *"The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. ... When the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come"* (John 14:26 and 16:13).

And the truth is made good to each of us as we're *"strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being"* (Ephesians 3:16). That is, we're strengthened to combat deceit and error; we're strengthened to witness to Christ.

5. The hymn spoke of the Spirit's unity - the way in which all true believers are joined together in one fellowship of spiritual life:

"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). This is what the promised Holy Spirit did when He was given at Pentecost. He made us *"all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28). Yes, there's only one true Church, called the body of Christ, because there's only one Spirit and Christ cannot be divided! Even though it's outwardly divided, we must always be *"eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3). Again, like me, you've probably experienced the immediate bond and fellowship you have with believers when you meet them for the first time, in whatever place or in whatever circumstances. Not only does the Spirit indwell each of us, He also is with, or among, all of the Church - see John 14:17.

6. The Holy Spirit works within each of us to produce Christ in the spiritual part of our beings

Last of all, I finish with the thought that the hymn finished with - that the Holy Spirit works within each of us to produce Christ in the spiritual part of our beings. The Lord said: *"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you"* (John 16:14-15).

Paul expounds how that becomes effective with everyone of us: *"But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit"* (2 Corinthians 3:18, Revised Version [1881]).

Let's sign-off with praise and exult anew: "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift of the Holy Spirit!"

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