

The Holy Spirit

Lesson 3: The Spirit Of God & Our Spirit

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.” (Ephesians 1:13–14)

Recently I reviewed some sermons on the Holy Spirit that I preached several years ago. They weren’t very good. They weren’t unScriptural, but neither were they completely Biblical. They fell short of simply acknowledging what the Bible says regarding the Spirit, that He is given to us. I’m saying this in order to acknowledge that my understanding of the Spirit has grown, and I hope will continue to grow. However, for my understanding of the Spirit to grow, so must my understanding of the Scriptures. This short series has been an attempt to grow our understanding of the Spirit by looking at the Scriptures. Even then, our understanding of the Spirit may be limited, because if God hasn’t revealed something to us then it isn’t for us to know (Deuteronomy 29:29). So, let it be enough for us to ascribe to the Spirit the attributes and the work that are credited to Him in the Scriptures.

In our first lesson we noted how God’s presence was among Israel in a holy sanctuary, but His Spirit departed from them when they broke His covenant. The future looked bleak, but God foretold a day when He would pour out His Spirit on mankind (Isaiah 44:3-4). Now, by the blood of Christ we can be washed and sanctified, becoming the temple where God’s Spirit dwells (1 Corinthians 6:11, 19). When we are baptized for the remission of our sins, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). The second lesson focused on the connection between the Spirit and the word. The two are not the same, but they are inseparable! We can only have the Spirit by following the word, and as 2 John 9 warns, when we depart from the revealed will of God, He is no longer with us!

The Spirit revealed God’s will to the apostles and prophets of the first

century, guiding them into all truth (John 16:13) until the revelation of God's will was completed (1 Cor. 13: 9-10). Does this mean the Spirit's work was complete as well? Not at all! The Spirit's work continues today, not through miraculous gifts or the revelation of God's will, but by being part of God's solution to our greatest need!

Our Need For A New Spirit

We are spiritual beings. Yes, we have a physical body, but the real person is spirit, not flesh. It's biblical to say that the "real you" is a spirit, just note these parallels found in Scripture:

- The spirit is synonymous with heart. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." (Psalm 51:17) Note also Exodus 35:21 and Hebrews 4:12.
- The spirit is synonymous with mind. "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;" (Philippians 1:27)
- The spirit is the inner man. "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man," (Ephesians 3:16). Note also Romans 7:22.

Gnostics in the 2nd and 3rd centuries perverted this truth to justify sinful practices in the flesh, reasoning that since we are really spirit, then any sinful activity is a product of the flesh and has no effect on the spirit. However, the Lord made clear that the sinful actions of our flesh originate from our inner man, "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders." (Matthew 15:18–19)

The importance of man being a spiritual being reaches back to the Creation account. In Genesis 1's abbreviated account of man's creation we see that man was created in God's own image (vs. 27), but in the fuller account of chapter 2 we see

just how man was made in His image: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being,” (vs. 7). God, who is Spirit (John 4:24) breathed spirit into man. Being created in God’s image has moral implications, for just as God is holy, righteous, faithful, etc., so was man who was created in His image. Thus, everything God created was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Yet, as we know man did not remain very good. Because of his sin, unholy man was separated from holy God. The very nature of God’s creation had changed!

While Adam’s sin corrupted his nature, it did not forever corrupt the nature of every descendant. This is what the doctrine of original sin claims, but it is not taught in Scripture (see Ezekiel 18; Romans 7). However, the course of human history has been one of each man and woman engaging in sinful practices, with terrible consequences for each person. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:1-3, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” By our sins our nature was corrupted into that of “children of wrath,” not the children who had been created in God’s image. We, each of us, needed a new spirit. Significantly, God promised that when His Spirit came His people would be given a new spirit: “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances,” (Ezekiel 36:25–27).

Summary Points:

1. Man is a spiritual being, the “real you” or “inner man” is spirit.
2. Each of us is created in God’s image, but because of sin our nature is changed to that of “children of wrath”

3. So, each of us needs a new spirit. God promised this would happen when His Spirit came.

Receiving A New Spirit

It cannot be stressed enough just how wretched each of us become. Even if our sins seem trivial or relatively minor compared to the horrific things that take place in our world, our sinful conduct corrupts our very nature (Eph. 2:1-3). What God created as holy, we make unholy. What God made as living and pure, we defile and bring down to death. Adding to the horror is the fact that while we have the power to defile our nature through sin, we are powerless to return to a holy nature on our own. For that, we require God's grace and aid. So, how would God create a new spirit within us?

It was not going to be through law. Granted, if Israel had followed God's Law they would have been "holy, for I am holy," (Lev. 11:45), but the problem was that no one followed the Law! Paul addressed this problem in Romans 7, reminding Christians that we have died to the Law so that we could be joined to Christ. Paul placed no blame on the Law, saying that "the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good," (vs. 12). The Law served the purpose of defining what is right and what is wrong in the eyes of God. Man needs to know what kind of behavior God wants, but the problem is that once it's defined man desires to break the holy commandment! Paul said this was true of him and coveting (vs. 7-11). Note: Paul was not born in sin. He was once alive, but when he understood God's law and violated it, he died! The remainder of the passage (vs. 14-25) shows Paul's internal struggle. He wanted to do good (note: he was not totally depraved as Calvin taught), but he found himself continually giving in to the desires of the flesh. What could be done? "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (vs. 24-25). Paul could not redeem himself, but in God there was hope!

The solution was not law, it was a new spirit. Don't misunderstand me, this

is not to say that law, the word of God, is not necessary. As we will note later, the word of God is essential! But the new covenant is not simply a new law replacing an old law, but as God promised in Ezekiel 36:25-27 it is replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh, the giving of a new spirit. This is the solution described in Romans 8.¹ The spiritual conflict of Romans 7 was remedied when God sent His Son, who although He came in the “likeness of sinful flesh,” did not sin and provided the offering that “condemned sin in the flesh,” (Romans 8:3). Now it is possible to not be “in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you,” (vs. 9). Again, the solution isn’t simply to get a new law, a law that can be broken like any other law. The solution is to get a new spirit: God’s Spirit! Now, let’s look at some interesting synonyms found in the text that will aid our understanding of exactly what this means.

Group 1:

- The Spirit (vs. 9)
- The Spirit of God (vs. 9)
- The Spirit of Christ (vs. 9)
- Christ is in you (vs. 10)

Does Christ literally live in you? I don’t know many people who think that, but Paul’s use of these terms show that the Spirit can be used synonymously with God and Christ. Perhaps we get caught up with the idea of the Spirit dwelling in our body, when in reality the Spirit is said to dwell in our spirit (2Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 3:17). However, the point here is that to have the Spirit within us is to have the Father and Son as well.

Group 2:

- Walk according to the Spirit (vs. 4)
- The mind set on the Spirit (vs. 5)
- In the Spirit (vs. 9)

To be “in the Spirit” is not to have the Spirit invade you and take over. It is to

be guided by the Spirit, to make the Spirit's ways our ways. Our walk (manner of life) is now one that follows the Spirit, rather than the course of this world (see again Ephesians 2:1-3). This does not happen without my concurrence, but by setting my mind on the Spirit rather than the flesh.

Group 3:

- The Spirit of God dwells in you (vss. 9, 11)
- Have the Spirit of Christ (vs. 9)
- Christ in you (vs. 10)
- Led by the Spirit of God (vs. 14).

What does it mean to have God's Spirit dwell in me? It's the same as having His Spirit lead me! To put it simply, it's not God's Spirit dwelling alongside my spirit, it's my spirit being conformed to God's Spirit! Consider again the promise in Ezekiel 36:25-27, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances." The "new spirit" God would put within us is His Spirit! This idea is conveyed throughout the New Testament:

- "For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust." (2 Peter 1:4)
- "that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." (Ephesians 4:22-24)
- "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of

the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:17–18)

What would be the purpose of God’s Spirit merely dwelling alongside my spirit? He wouldn’t be revealing new things to me, for as we studied in our last lesson, revelation came through the Spirit to the apostles and prophets of the first century. He wouldn’t be overpowering my will, for to have God’s Spirit in me requires setting my mind on the Spirit (Romans 8:6). No, the purpose is for my spirit to become new, to become like or in the image of God’s Spirit!

Consider Paul’s words in 1Corinthians 6:17, “But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.” I recently conducted the funeral of a sister in Christ who had been married to her husband for 60 years. While they had distinct personalities, they embodied the “one flesh” concept that is God’s ideal for husband and wife (Genesis 2:24). In many ways it was hard to tell where one ended and the other began. That is God’s intent for us. We are joined to Christ, we are to become one with Him... we are one spirit with Him! Consider Jesus’ illustration of the vine and the branches in John 15:4-5, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” Where does the vine end and the branch begin? Where does Christ’s influence in me end, and where do I begin? If I’m one spirit with Him, there is no beginning and ending. The same thought is implied in Romans 8:16, “The Spirit Himself testified with our spirit that we are children of God.” It is the joined testimony of the Spirit and my spirit that confirm I’m God’s child. This is oneness, this is having God’s Spirit in me. No wonder the Spirit can help with our weakness and intercede for us (Romans 8:26-27), because my spirit is now one with Christ. He’s in me and I’m in Him!

Now we must turn our attention back to the word, for if my spirit is to become new, if my spirit is to become God’s Spirit, then I must have His word. Jesus said, “the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life,” (John 6:63). His words

have spiritual properties, they give life! No wonder that our spiritual life is credited to both the Spirit and the word: we are saved by both (Titus 3:5; James 1:21), we are born of both (John 3:5; 1 Peter 1:22-23) and we are sealed by both (Ephesians 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:19). No, the Spirit and the word are not the same, but they are connected! If my spirit is to be fashioned according to God's Spirit, then I must take in Spirit. I must take in the words of my Lord (John 6:63) and set my mind on Spirit (Romans 8:6).

Summary Points:

1. Christ's offering makes it possible for us to have God's Spirit.
2. Having the Spirit in me is the same as being led by the Spirit, walking according to the Spirit and having my mind on the Spirit.
3. Having God's Spirit in me is not a matter of His Spirit existing alongside of my spirit, but of my spirit becoming one with His.
4. For my spirit to become one with His spirit, I must take in His words because they are spirit.

The Results

How glorious the thought that by the Spirit and the word we become one with God, that our spirits become new, they become His! The results of this transformation are found throughout the New Testament. As we conclude this series consider the ramifications of our becoming one spirit with the Lord:

1. **If I've become one spirit with the Lord, then I am truly His temple, the place where God now dwells among men.** Remember, if we've joined ourselves to the Lord, we've become one spirit with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17). Significantly, it's just two verses later that Paul states, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you..." (vs. 19). We are God's sanctuary because our spirits have become one with His Spirit!
2. **If I've become one spirit with the Lord, then I am truly His child.** "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you

have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him,” (Romans 8:14–17). If I’m being led by the Spirit (setting my mind on the Spirit, making His will, my will) then I have the assurance that I’m God’s child, the Spirit bearing witness with my spirit because they are united! I’m now a partaker in the divine nature (2Peter 1:4), I’ve returned to being in His likeness. As Jesus says in John 3:5, I’ve been born of both water (baptism) and the Spirit (my spirit transformed).

3. **If I’ve become one spirit with the Lord, then I am fruitful.** Since I am being led by the Spirit, I will naturally bear the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,” (Galatians 5:22-23). Since I’m in the Lord, and He is in me the natural thing is for me to bear His fruit (John 15:4-5). This is where a Christian’s intuition, conscience and feelings play an important role. No, the Spirit doesn’t lead us through these (there’s no support in the Bible for such a notion), it’s much better than that! Since our very nature, our spirit, has become one with God we begin to think how He thinks about things, feel about people the way He feels about them. Yes, we can still stumble at times (consider Peter’s stumble in Galatians 2), but since we have set our mind on the Spirit, it’s little wonder we begin to feel and act differently than we once did.
4. **If I’ve become one spirit with the Lord, then I am sealed.** “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation— having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,” (Ephesians 1:13). An ancient seal was a mark of authentication. A king would place his seal on a letter or legal document, authenticating it as belonging to him. How do we know that we belong to the Lord, what

authenticates us? Having His Spirit as our spirit shows that we belong to Him!

5. **If I've become one spirit with the Lord, then I have a pledge.** “(The Spirit) is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory,” (Ephesians 1:14). How do we know that heaven is our inheritance? By becoming one spirit with Him, we are in His image and of His nature (2 Cor 3:17-18; 2 Peter 1:4). And it is those who are like God who will ultimately be in Heaven with Him.

I will not be so bold as to claim that this will answer all questions about the Spirit. Can I explain all the Spirit does? Certainly not, for even our Lord said, “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit,” (John 3:8). I do not know how it all transpires, but how I praise God for the knowledge that as I set my mind on His Spirit, allowing Him to guide my life, I become one spirit with Him! What a gift (Acts 2:38)!

¹ I am indebted to David McClister in coming to a better understanding of this passage. I heartily recommend his essay “Sealed With The Holy Spirit” found in Blessed Be God: Studies in Ephesians. The Kindle version can be found at amazon.com