



“Jesus answered. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

The Spirit's Work in Salvation

Central Truth: The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner and gives him eternal life when he believes.

L396. Date: January 1983. **Text:** John 16:8-11; 3:5-8, 14-16.

Topic: Holy Spirit; Salvation.

The time period which began at the Christian Pentecost (Acts 2) and continues until the return of the Lord Jesus is properly called “the dispensation of the Holy Spirit.” During this period, every contact man has with God is through the agency of the Holy Spirit.

As no one can be saved apart from the redemptive deed of Jesus Christ, neither can anyone be saved apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It is imperative, therefore, that we understand the work of the Holy Spirit in the saving of sinners. Salvation is to be “*born of the Spirit*” (John 3:5, 6), to experience the “*renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5), to receive “*the Holy Ghost*” (Acts 10:47). Let us praise the third person of Holy Trinity as we review New Testament teaching on “The Spirit's Work in Salvation.”

The aim of the study is to find Bible teaching which substantiates this statement: “The Holy Spirit convicts the sinner and gives him eternal life when he believes.”

I. WHY MUST THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK IN SALVATION?

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of

God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8).

A. Man is totally depraved and cannot be saved apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Because he commits sin, man is “*the servant of sin*” (John 8:34). He is by nature a child of the devil and follows the lusts of his father (John 8:44). He lives under the control of a “*carnal mind,*” and being “*in the flesh*” he cannot “*please God*” (Romans 8:7, 8). No wonder he needs the help of the Holy Spirit.

B. Man is unable and unwilling to change from sin to holiness. The leopard can change the spots of his hair and a black man can change the color of his skin as easily as the sinner can change the nature of his wrong ways (Jeremiah 13:23). Jesus said, “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him*” (John 6:44). The sinner cannot come to God without the ministry of the Holy Spirit. But on the other hand, the sinner does not want to come to God apart from the wooing of the Spirit (John 5:40). Man is unable and unwilling to come to God until the Spirit draws him.

C. Salvation is God's gift, not man's accomplishment, and must be conferred by the Spirit of God. “*Salvation belongeth unto the LORD*” (Psalm 3:8). It is effected by the “*renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5). The sinner is “*born again*” when he is saved (John 3:3, 5). He is born “*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:13).

Salvation is a spiritual birth (John 1:13; 3:3, 5, 7), a spiritual resurrection (Ephesians 2:1, 5), and a spiritual creation (II Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10). Only God can effect such miraculous changes. So the Spirit must work.

II. HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK IN SALVATION?

“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11).

A. The Spirit restrains sin by convicting men of its error. He was striving with men before the judgment of the flood in Noah's day (Genesis 6:3). He continues that ministry today. God's people are “*salt*” and “*light*”

which manifest God and reveal sin in the world (Matthew 5:13,15). The Holy Bible is a witness of the Spirit which shows men their sin (Psalm 119:11; II Timothy 3:16). Man is spiritually blind and can never know his true spiritual condition without the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

B. The Spirit enlightens men to an understanding of spiritual need. By nature man has his *“understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God....because of the blindness of their heart”* (Ephesians 4:18). Whence came that blindness? *“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them”* (II Corinthians 4:3, 4). *“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God....because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthians 2:14). The Holy Spirit enables a sinner to “spiritually discern” the things of God.

C. The Spirit convicts men and draws them to Christ (John 16:8-11). He does not depend on human logic, fickle human emotions, the principles of mass psychology, or the demands of religious rituals. He deals with sinners personally and intimately. The Spirit uses two means to call sinners to the awareness of their sins. (1) He uses the Word of God which is *“quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword”* (Hebrews 4:12). The convert to Christ is *“born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”* (I Peter 1:23).

(2) He uses the people of God as His messengers to testify the truth of the gospel (Ephesians 5:11, 13; I Corinthians 14:24, 25; Acts 11:13, 14). That is why every Christian is to be a witness. Notice that every conversion related in the book of Acts came through the witness of a Christian to a sinner.

The subject of which the Holy Spirit convicts sinners is threefold: *“sin, righteousness, judgment”* (John 16:8-11).

1. He convicts the sinner of the sinfulness of unbelief. That is the sin which condemns the soul (John 3:18, 36; 8:24).

2. He convicts the sinner of the kind of righteousness which is acceptable to God. Self-righteousness separates from God (Isaiah 64:6; Romans 10:1-3; Jeremiah 2:13). The imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ is acceptable to God (Acts 1:9; 7:56; Hebrews 10:12). No one will be accepted before God unless he bears the imputed righteousness of Jesus.

3. He convicts the sinner of the certainty of judgment on sin. The present world system is not righteous (Ephesians 2:2; I John 5:19) because its ruler is Satan (Luke 4:5, 6; II Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31). Therefore, the

present world order is condemned to pass (I Corinthians 7:31; II Peter 3:10). Those who are still in sin will suffer the judgment of God upon sin and will be destroyed with everlasting punishment from the presence of the Lord.

No man will have any excuse of ignorance in the day of judgment, because the Spirit will have revealed truth to him so he will be without excuse.

D. The Spirit renews men by causing them to be “born again,...born...of the Spirit” (John 3:3, 5, 7). That is called the “*renewing of the Holy Ghost*” in Titus 3:4-6.

Death means “separation” in the New Testament. To be spiritually dead is to be separated from God in one's spirit.

Life means “union with God.” Eternal life means one has the life of God himself lived within him. The life of God is in the believer because the Spirit of God is in the spirit of the believer. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the salvation, the eternal life, which the believer enjoys (John 4:14; 7:37-39).

Salvation is called by many names in the Bible. It is a spiritual birth (John 3:3, 5); it is a spiritual baptism (I Corinthians 12:13); it is a spiritual creation (II Corinthians 5:17); it is a spiritual indwelling (John 14:16; Galatians 2:20); it is a spiritual resurrection (Ephesians 2:1). But by each name it is evidently a work of the Holy Spirit of God.

Thank God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit by which the atoning deed of Jesus Christ is made valid to those who repent and trust.

III. WHAT EFFECTS FOLLOW THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION?

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:14-16).

A. The Holy Spirit makes the believer a new person. *“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (II Corinthians 5:17). What becomes new in the believer?

1. He gets a new mind. His thought patterns change. A person with a “*carnal mind*” cannot please God, “*because the carnal mind is enmity against God*” (Romans 8:7). But the Christian no longer lives under a flesh dominated mind: “*But we have the mind of Christ*” (I Corinthians 2:16).

2. He gets a new affection. His affections had been set on the world and the things it offers. Now he is under a command, *“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him”* (I John 2:15). The Christian has a new object and nature to his affections, *“because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”* (Romans 5:5). He loves what God loves because he is indwelt by the Spirit of God and filled with the love of God.

3. He gets a new will. No longer does he follow the lifestyle which is determined by his own will. *“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13). That is why he does the will of God from the heart (Ephesians 6:6) with the witness, *“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart”* (Psalm 40:8).

With a new mind, a new affection, and a new will, he is *“a new creature”* in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17). God makes each believer new by faith in Jesus Christ.

B. The Holy Spirit gives the believer a new life. *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). The Christian's life is the life of Christ lived within by the indwelling Spirit.

C. The Holy Spirit assures eternal security to the believer. He is the *“earnest”* (assurance, guarantee) of our salvation (II Corinthians 1:21, 22; Ephesians 1:13, 14). The Christian is *“confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6). The one who believes in Jesus *“shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life”* (John 5:24). The Spirit guarantees it!

D. The Holy Spirit establishes the believer in Christ, anoints him, seals him, and remains in his human spirit as the guarantee of God's total work of redemption in him. That is the blessed assurance of II Corinthians 1:21, 22. Read it and rejoice.

E. The Holy Spirit takes up permanent and unceasing residence in the believer to make applicable to him all that he needs for life and godliness. The result is that the believer's physical body becomes a member of Christ and a holy sanctuary unto the Lord (I Corinthians 6:15, 19, 20).

The salvation of sinners was planned by God the Father, procured by God the Son, and applied by God the Spirit. All three persons of Holy Trinity are involved in the saving of sinners. Praise God for salvation by grace through faith!

Questions

1. What does it mean to be saved?
2. How is salvation described in John 3:5; Titus 3:5?
3. What is man's "total depravity"?
4. What does John 6:44 teach you?
5. What terms are used in the Bible to describe salvation?
6. What need is expressed in II Corinthians 4:4?
7. How does John 16:8-11 describe the work of the Holy Spirit?
8. What does it mean to be "born of the Spirit"?
9. What change comes to a person at salvation?
10. How would you explain the way to be saved?