

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 5 February 2012

No. T0714

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The Believer's Resources: The Spirit of God

Moses, when sent by God to speak to Pharaoh, hesitated and said, "I am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?" Exodus 6:30. Gideon, when commissioned by God to overthrow his father's idol argued, "How can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" Judges 6:15. And even the great Apostle Paul could say, "And who is sufficient for these things" (2 Corinthians 2:16). Most of us are not called upon to attempt a fraction of what these three men achieved and yet we, too, would readily admit to being weak, insufficient, lacking courage etc. But is that really true? Are we as Christians really without resources? God asked Moses, "What is that in your hand" and Moses replied, "A rod" (Exodus 4:2) Yes, a lifeless branch cut from a tree, but God would use it to teach Moses, the Israelites and the Egyptians that He is a God of resurrection, life, fruitfulness and also of consuming judgement. We have been sent out by the Lord Jesus as sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16) but are we entirely without help and resource?

We are continuing our talks on the Christian's resources so I will read to you the Lord's own words as recorded for us in John 14. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans" John 14:15-18.

The Christian is the most favoured of all people in all time. Never before have God's people been indwelt by God the Holy Spirit in this way. Many times in the Old Testament we read that "the Spirit of God came upon" men like Gideon (Judges 6:34), Samson (Judges 14:6), Saul (1 Samuel 11:6), Azariah (2 Chronicles 15:1) and King David (1 Samuel 16:13). But it was a temporary thing, and David even prayed in Psalm 51:11, "Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me". These men and women in the Old Testament were empowered by God's Holy Spirit for particular tasks at a particular time. But the Lord Jesus, just before He went back to His Father by way of the cross said, "I will not leave you orphans" (John 14:18).

To be orphaned at a young age is such a powerful picture of vulnerability and weakness; to be deprived of natural guidance, security and support and left alone in a world that will exploit and prey upon you. Is this the situation that the Christian is in? Not at all! Jesus said He would not leave us orphans, but God, the Holy Spirit would dwell with us and dwell in us, and never leave us. We would in fact have another Helper in addition to the Lord Jesus, who intercedes for us in heaven. And this other Helper is none other than God Himself, the Holy Spirit.

If we read two more passages of Scripture we will begin to see the immense implications of this truth. First, Romans 8:15-17, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together." Next, in Paul's letter to the Galatians, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Galatians 4:4-7.

Wow! What an incredible transformation! We were once enemies of God and alienated from Him by our wicked works but now, through the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, God's Son at Calvary we have been adopted by God, whom we can now address as "Father", or as we read in these two Scriptures "Abba, Father". "Abba", which simply means "Father", would seem to convey to us the childish cry of a toddler, confident of his father's love.

Orphans? Not a bit of it! Rather we are children of God with all the security and provision that that relationship implies. These verses that we have read emphasise the fact that the Holy Spirit has this character, "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts" (Galatians 4:6) and again that we have "received the Spirit of adoption" (Romans 8:15). There is a new and close family relationship; God has chosen us, adopted us, and has given us "the Spirit of His Son" (Galatians 4:6) so that we can enjoy and appreciate this wonderful new relationship, unlike anything that had gone before.

This links in very closely with other Scriptures that teach us that the Holy Spirit will help believers to understand the Word of God, in which the mind of God is revealed. In John's Gospel, the Lord Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, "He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26. And we can also read "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." 1 Corinthians 2:9-12.

God has spoken to us; His actual words have been recorded by faithful men, and men and women have died to bring to us the Scriptures in our own language. God has given us His Spirit so that we can understand the Scriptures. We cannot comprehend the amazing blessing that God has brought us into, but that is not an excuse for not prayerfully reading the Bible and seeking help to understand it. God has given us His Word but He has also given us "the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God." (1 Corinthians 2:12) God has made every provision for us to understand what He has in mind for us as being blessed in relationship to His delightful Son, Jesus.

Do you struggle to understand the Scriptures? You have the Holy Spirit to help you. Do you, like me, shy away from speaking to others about our Saviour? We have the Holy Spirit, not "the spirit of fear" but "of power and of love and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7. If we were willing we would be helped.

I must just say here that when we speak about the Holy Spirit we are talking about a Person - not a power, or an influence, but a real Person. I want to return to this fact again later because it is vital. The Holy Spirit is a distinct person in the Godhead, with feelings, character and authority all His own.

Not only does the Holy Spirit help us in relation to the Word of God, He also helps us to pray. "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." Romans 8:26-27.

Have you ever been in a situation where you have felt that you just cannot pray? I have. Sometimes because of sin that we have allowed into our lives, we are not at all comfortable in God's presence, our prayers bounce off the ceiling. Our relationship to God as His children is unchanged, but we do not enjoy that relationship. There is a remedy to this. "The blood of Jesus Christ [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:7-9.

I was, however, thinking more of times when we feel overwhelmed by circumstances, by loss or by loneliness. We might have lost someone so very dear to us, or maybe through illness we fear we will lose a close relative or friend. It isn't that we have sinned and so feel cut off from God but that we hurt so much inside that we just cannot pray. I can't be alone in having these feelings but God has even made provision for this! "The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Romans 8:26. How amazing that we have within us God's Spirit who understands our needs and can express those needs to God even when we can't. To borrow a familiar expression from a dear Christian friend, "What a God we Christians have"!

So then we have within us God the Holy Spirit. Is there anywhere in the entire universe a greater power, greater wisdom or greater resource available to us? And yet I am reminded of a passage in Mark's Gospel when the Lord Jesus was visiting His home town of Nazareth. We read that "He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marvelled because of their unbelief." Mark 6:5-6. This is the same One who created everything! He had raised the dead back to life; He had given sight to those who were blind and healed lepers. But "He could do no mighty work there"! It wasn't that Jesus just didn't or that He didn't want to. No, the Bible, (not !!) says He couldn't! Why? How can this possibly be true? The answer is at the end of Mark 6:6 "unbelief"! The unbelief of the villagers hampered the blessing flowing.

So is it also possible today that I can hinder the work of God the Holy Spirit? Clearly the answer is yes! Yes, I can hinder the work of God the Holy Spirit. But before we think about this I will read about a Man who always moved in perfect harmony with the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" Luke 4:18-21.

As we read the story of Jesus in the four Gospels we come across phrases like "And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness." Luke 4:1. "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" Luke 4:14.

Let's underline these phrases. Jesus was **full** of the Holy Spirit, He was **led** by the Holy Spirit and He acted in the **power** of the Holy Spirit. Exactly the same possibility is open to us. What do these expressions mean?

Being full of the Holy Spirit

What is it to be "full of the Holy Spirit"? I suppose if we take a very simple picture, a glass that is full of water has no room in it for anything else. If I am filled with the Holy Spirit there can be no room in me for selfish motives or my own will, nor will I be seeking to promote myself or my own interests. The Lord Jesus could say "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart" Psalm 40:8 quoted in Hebrews 10:4-6. And also Jesus said in relation to God His Father, "I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." John 8:29. Imagine that! To have God's interests and honour at the very heart of all my thinking, speaking and acting! Surely this is to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Being led by the Holy Spirit

But we also read that Jesus was "**led** by the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:14). In the Acts of the Apostles, a book that someone has very aptly said would be more properly named "The Acts of the Holy Spirit", we read the story of Philip (Acts 8:26-40). Philip was working in the city of Samaria, preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ. His ministry was being greatly blessed and the Bible records that because of Philip's ministry "there was great joy in that city." (Acts 8:8) Can you imagine Philip's surprise when the Lord said to him, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is a desert place." Acts 8:26. He was being called away from a very successful ministry to go to a place that is specifically described as desert! But Philip doesn't question God or argue. Acts 8:27 reads, "He arose and went..." It didn't make sense to Philip, but he was obedient. He was led by the Spirit of God. He consequently was in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. And so, because of his obedience, the Gospel is introduced into the land of Ethiopia and the African continent.

Acting by the power of the Holy Spirit

It is also recorded of the Lord Jesus that He acted in the **power** of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14). When the Apostle Peter was speaking to the Roman centurion called Cornelius, he said that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" Acts 10:38.

Remarkably, Jesus said about His disciples that they would do "greater works than these" John 14:12, because He, Jesus, was returning to His Father in heaven and the Holy Spirit would be sent to dwell with and in His followers. We should be hugely encouraged by this. In a day of great weakness, as the Old Testament is drawing to a close we read, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts." Zechariah 4:6.

We could also read that wonderful Scripture in the book of Isaiah: "Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, does not faint, nor is weary? There is no searching of His understanding. He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Isaiah 40:28-31. This is a power and resource that goes way beyond what is natural. It is undiminished by the passage of time, and infinite in its capacity.

So we can see that the Lord Jesus lived here anointed with the Holy Spirit. All He said and did was led by that same Person. We have seen that in the Acts of the Apostles there were those who, led by the Holy Spirit, were used by God in remarkable blessing for others and there have been down through the centuries men and women who, through the Holy Spirit, have achieved wonderful things for God. We, too, as Christians have the Holy Spirit within us, and we, too, can be used by God in His service. But, and this is important, just like the folk at Nazareth hindered the work of the Lord Jesus through their unbelief, we, too can hinder the work of God the Holy Spirit.

Maybe the first clue as to how this can happen is in the Name. Constantly in the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is referred to as just that, He is the *Holy* Spirit. I made mention earlier of the fact that the Holy Spirit is a real Person, not a power, not an influence. Electricity is a power; it has no feelings. It cannot be offended if I am rude or sinful; its' power will still flow. But I can grieve the Holy Spirit, as we read in Paul's letter to the Christians at Ephesus. I will read several verses so we can see the context. "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his

own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Ephesians 4:25-32.

What do we have right in the middle of these verses that tell us what we might think are very obvious Christian truths? We are told about not lying, not stealing, doing honest work, using only good wholesome language, not being bitter or angry but rather being kind and forgiving. Right in the middle we are told "do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..." The lesson is very easy for us to learn. The way I live, the things I do and say, my general attitude can be such that the Holy Spirit is grieved. The word means "to be distressed, to have caused grief or sorrow." Yes the Holy Spirit is a divine Person with real feelings and we can cause Him distress, and if we do we cannot expect to know His power and leading in our lives. The work of the Holy Spirit will then be directed to bringing us to repentance, confessing to God our failure and working in us so that our thoughts, words and actions are appropriate to our calling as Christians. Only then can we experience again the leading and power of the Holy Spirit.

There is another and more serious possibility. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit." 1 Thessalonians 5:12-19. Literally, "Do not extinguish the Spirit." (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

The context of these verses would indicate that Paul has in mind the behaviour of the whole Christian company at Thessalonica. The way the Christians behaved towards each other, the care or lack of care they had, the respect or lack of respect they had for each other was vital. Their prayer life and an attitude of thankfulness cannot be divorced from the working of the Holy Spirit. If these, very basic features of a Christian company were out of kilter, there was the dreadful possibility that they would "quench" or "extinguish" the work of the Spirit of God in that company. Paul is not writing here about the way the meetings or services are conducted. He isn't arguing for the use of this or that hymn book. No, rather Paul is writing about our feelings, attitudes and actions towards our fellow Christians that we meet with week after week. This is so important! We all, I am sure, want to see God's richest blessing in our churches. We pray for and plan various initiatives, but if our attitude towards each other is wrong, we will quench the work of God's Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament we read of "a spring shut up, a fountain sealed", Song of Solomon 4:12. A rather bleak picture of a source of life and refreshment that is locked or barred and consequently its benefits cannot be enjoyed. The opposite picture is drawn in the New Testament when Jesus cries out on the last day of the feast of tabernacles, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." Now this He said 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." John 7:37-39. Two simple, yet powerful pictures! Which one do we choose to be?

We must understand that the Holy Spirit will never leave us. Jesus Himself said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth," John 14:16-17. He will never leave us, but we can grieve or cause Him sorrow, and as Christians together we can even extinguish His working in our churches.

That is not the note I want to end on! As Christians we have no personal resources in ourselves and we live in a world or society that cannot feed or help us live for the Lord Jesus. But are we without resources? Never! We have the gift of the Father within us - another Comforter, the Holy Spirit who can and will fill, lead and empower us for the glory of God. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts." Zechariah 4:6.

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