

THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 16 The Spirit Working Faith

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Transcript

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Chapter 16

The Spirit Working Faith

The principal bond of union between Christ and His people is the Holy Spirit; but as the union is mutual, something is necessary on our part to complete it, and this is faith. Hence, Christ is said to dwell in our hearts "by faith" (Eph. 3:17). Yet, let it be said emphatically, the faith which unites to Christ and saves the soul is not merely a natural act of the mind assenting to the Gospel, as it assents to any other truth upon reliable testimony, but is a supernatural act, an effect produced by the power of the Spirit of grace, and is such a persuasion of the truth concerning the Savior as calls forth exercises suited to its Object. The soul being quickened and made alive spiritually, begins to act spiritually, "The soul is the life of the body, faith is the life of the soul, and Christ is the life of faith" (John Flavel). What Is "Saving Faith" It is a great mistake to define Scriptural terms according to the narrow scope and meaning which they have in common speech. In ordinary conversation, "faith" signifies credence or the assent of the mind unto some testimony. But in God's Word, so far from faith—saving faith, we mean—being merely a natural act of the mind, it includes the concurrence of the will and an action of the affections: it is "with the heart," and not with the head, "that man believeth unto righteousness" (Rom. 10:10). Saving faith is a cordial approbation of Christ, an acceptance of Him in His entire character as Prophet, Priest, and King; it is entering into covenant with Him, receiving Him as Lord and Savior. When this is understood, it will appear to be a fit instrument for completing our union with Christ, for the union is thus formed by mutual consent. Were people to perceive more clearly the implications and the precise character of saving faith, they would be the more readily convinced that it is "the gift of God," an effect or fruit of the Spirit's operations on the heart. Saving faith is a coming to Christ, and coming to Christ necessarily presupposes a forsaking of all that stands opposed to Him. It has been rightly said that, "true faith includes in it the renunciation of the flesh as well as the reception of the Savior; true faith admires the precepts of holiness as well as the glory of the Savior" (J. H. Thornwell, 1850). Not until these facts are recognized, enlarged upon, and emphasized by present-day preachers is there any real likelihood of the effectual exposure of the utter inadequacy of that natural "faith" which is all that thousands of empty professors possess. Saving Faith Is the Work of the Spirit "Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and bath anointed us, is God" (2 Cor. 1:21). None but God (by His Spirit) can "stablish" the soul in all its parts—the understanding, the

conscience, the affections, the will. The ground and reason why the Christian believes the Holy Scriptures to be the Word of God is neither the testimony nor the authority of the church (as Rome erroneously teaches), but rather the testimony and power of the Holy Spirit. Men may present arguments which will so convince the intellect as to cause a consent—but establish the soul and conscience so as to assure the heart of the Divine authorship of the Bible, they cannot. A spiritual faith must be imparted before the Word is made, in a spiritual way, its foundation and warrant.

1. Faith In the Word: The same blessed Spirit who moved holy men of old to write the Word of God, works in the regenerate a faith which nothing can shatter. That Word is the Word of God. The establishing argument is by the power of God's Spirit, who causes the quickened soul to see such a Divine Majesty shining forth in the Scriptures that the heart is established in this first principle. The renewed soul is made to feel that there is such a pungency in that Word that it must be Divine. No born-again soul needs any labored argument to convince him of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures: he has proof within himself of their Heavenly origin. Faith wrought in the heart by the power of the Spirit is that which satisfies its possessor that the Scriptures are none other than the Word of the living God.

2. Faith in Christ: Not only does the blessed Spirit work faith in the written Word—establishing the renewed heart in its Divine veracity and authority—but He also produces faith in the personal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The imperative necessity for this distinct operation of His was briefly shown in a previous chapter upon "The Spirit Comforting," but a further word thereon will not here be out of place. When the soul has been Divinely awakened and convicted of sin, it is brought to realize and feel its depravity and vileness, its awful guilt and criminality, its utter unfitness to approach a holy God. It is emptied of self-righteousness and self-esteem, and is brought into the dust of self-abasement and self-condemnation. Dark indeed is the cloud which now hangs over it; hope is completely abandoned, and despair fills the heart. The painful consciousness that Divine goodness has been abused, Divine Law trodden under foot, and Divine patience trifled with, excludes the expectation of any mercy. How the Spirit Works Saving Faith When the soul has sunk into the mire of despair no human power is sufficient to lift it out and set it upon the Rock. Now that the renewed sinner perceives that not only are all his past actions transgressions of God's Law, but that his very heart is desperately wicked—polluting his very prayers and tears of contrition—he feels that he must inevitably perish. If he hears the Gospel, he tells himself that its glad tidings are not for such an abandoned wretch as he; if he reads the Word he is assured that only its fearful denunciations and woes are his legitimate portion. If godly friends remind him that Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, he supposes they are ignorant of the extremities of his case—should they urge him to believe or cast himself on the mercy of God in Christ, they do but mock him in his misery, for he now discovers that he can no more do this of himself than he can grasp the sun in his hands. All self-help, all human aid, is useless. In those in whom the Spirit works faith, He first blows down the building of human pretensions, demolishes the walls which were built with the untempered mortar of man's own righteousness, and destroys the foundations which were laid in self-flattery and natural sufficiency, so that they are entirely shut up to Christ and God's free grace. Once awakened, instead of fondly imagining I am the man whom God will save, I am now convinced that I am the one who must be damned. So far from concluding I have any ability to even help save myself, I now know that I am "without strength" and no more able to receive Christ as my Lord and Savior than I can climb up to Heaven. Evident it is, then, that a mighty supernatural power is needed if I am to come to Him who "justifieth the ungodly." None but the all-mighty Spirit can lift a stricken soul out of the gulf of despair and enable him to believe to the saving of his soul. To God the Holy Spirit be the glory of His sovereign grace in working faith in the heart of the writer and of each Christian reader. You have attained peace and joy in believing, but have you thanked that peace-bringer—"the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13)? All that "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8) and that peace which "passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7)—to whom is it ascribed?

The Holy Spirit. It is particularly appropriated to Him: "peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17 and cf. 1 Thess. 1:6). Then render unto Him the praise which is His due.

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