

THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 19 The Spirit Teaching

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Transcript

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Chapter 19

The Spirit Teaching

Taught of the Spirit "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things" (John 14:26). Those words received their first fulfillment in the men to whom they were immediately addressed—the Apostles were so filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit that their proclamation of the Gospel was without flaw, and their writings without error. Those original ambassadors of Christ were so taught by the Third Person in the Trinity that what they delivered was the very mind of God. The second fulfillment of the Savior's promise has been in those men whom He called to preach His Gospel throughout the Christian era. No new revelations have been made to them, but they were, and are, according to their varied measure, and the particular work assigned to them, so enlightened by the Spirit that the Truth of God has been faithfully preached by them. The third and widest application of our Lord's words are unto the entire Household of Faith, and it is in this sense we shall now consider them. It is written, "And all Thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Isa. 54:13 and cf. John 6:45). This is one of the great distinguishing marks of the regenerate: all of them are "taught of the LORD." There are multitudes of unregenerate religionists who are taught, numbers of them well taught, in the letter of the Scriptures. They are thoroughly versed in the historical facts and doctrines of Christianity; but their instruction came only from human media—parents, Sunday School teachers, or through reading religious books. Their intellectual knowledge of spiritual things is considerable, sound, and clear; yet is it unaccompanied by any heavenly unction, saving power, or transforming effects. In like manner, there are thousands of preachers who abhor the errors of "Modernists" and who contend earnestly for the Faith. They were taught in Bible Institutes, and theological schools, yet it is to be feared that many of them are total strangers to a miracle of grace being wrought in the heart. How it behooves each of us to test ourselves rigidly at this point! It is a common fact of observation—which anyone may test for himself—that a very large percentage of those who constitute the membership of evangelical denominations were first taken there in childhood by their parents. The great majority in the Presbyterian churches today had a father or mother who was a Presbyterian and who instructed the offspring in their beliefs. The same is true of Baptists, the Methodists, and those who are in fellowship at the Brethren assemblies. The present generation has been brought up to believe in the doctrines and religious customs of their ancestors. Now we are far from saying that

because a man who is a Presbyterian today had parents and grandparents that were Presbyterians and who taught him the Westminster Catechism, that therefore all the knowledge he possesses of Divine things is but traditional and theoretical. No indeed. Yet we do say that such a training in the letter of the Truth makes it more difficult, and calls for a more careful self-examination, to ascertain whether or not he has been taught of the Lord. Though we do not believe that Grace runs in the blood, yet we are convinced that, as a general rule, (having many individual exceptions), God does place His elect in families where at least one of the parents loves and seeks to serve Him, and where that elect soul will be nurtured in the fear and admonition of the Lord. At least three-fourths of those Christians whom the writer has met and had opportunity to question, had a praying and Scripture-reading father or mother. Yet, on the other hand, we are obliged to acknowledge that three-fourths of the empty professors we have encountered also had religious parents, who sent them to Sunday School and sought to have them trained in their beliefs: and these now rest upon their intellectual knowledge of the Truth, and mistake it for a saving experience of the same. And it is this class which it is the hardest to reach: it is much more difficult to persuade such to examine themselves as to whether or not they have been taught of God, than it is those who make no profession at all. Let it not be concluded from what has been pointed out that, where the Holy Spirit teaches a soul, He dispenses with all human instrumentality. Not so. It is true the Spirit is sovereign and therefore works where He pleases and when He pleases. It is also a fact that He is Almighty, tied down to no means, and therefore works as He pleases and how He pleases. Nevertheless, He frequently condescends to employ means, and to use very feeble instruments. In fact, this seems to generally characterize His operations: that He works through men and women, and sometimes through little children. Yet, let it be said emphatically, that no preaching, catechizing or reading produces any vital and spiritual results unless God the Spirit is pleased to bless and apply the same unto the heart of the individual. Thus there are many who have passed from death unto life and been brought to love the Truth under the Spirit's application of a pious parent's or Sunday School teacher's instruction—while there are some who never enjoyed such privileges yet have been truly and deeply taught by God. Tests for the Spirit's Teaching From all that has been said above a very pertinent question arises, How may I know whether or not my teaching has been by the Holy Spirit? The simple but sufficient answer is, By the effects produced. First, that spiritual knowledge which the teaching of the Holy Spirit imparts is an operative knowledge. It is not merely a piece of information which adds to our mental store, but is a species of inspiration which stirs the soul into action. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). The light which the Spirit imparts reaches the heart. It warms the heart, and sets it on fire for God. It masters the heart, and brings it into allegiance to God. It molds the heart, and stamps upon it the image of God. Here, then, is a sure test: how far does the teaching you have received, the knowledge of Divine things you possess, affect your heart? Second, that knowledge which the teaching of the Spirit imparts is a soul-humbling knowledge. "Knowledge puffeth up" (1 Cor. 8:1), that is a notional, theoretical, intellectual knowledge which is merely received from men or books in a natural way. But that spiritual knowledge which comes from God reveals to a man his empty conceits, his ignorance and worthlessness, and abases him. The teaching of the Spirit reveals our sinfulness and vileness, our lack of conformity to Christ, our unholiness; and makes a man little in his own eyes. Among those born of women was not a greater than John the Baptist: wondrous were the privileges granted him, abundant the light he was favored with. What effect had it on him? "He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose" (John 1:27). Who was granted such an insight into heavenly things as Paul! Did he herald himself as "The greatest Bible teacher of the age"? No. "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints" (Eph. 3:8). Here, then, is a sure test: how far does the teaching you have

received humble you? Third, that knowledge which the teaching of the Holy Spirit imparts is a world-despising knowledge. It makes a man have poor, low, mean thoughts of those things which his unregenerate fellows (and which he himself, formerly) so highly esteem. It opens his eyes to see the transitoriness and comparative worthlessness of earthly honors, riches and fame. It makes him perceive that all under the sun is but vanity and vexation of spirit. It brings him to realize that the world is a flatterer, a deceiver, a liar, and a murderer which has fatally deceived the hearts of millions. Where the Spirit reveals eternal things, temporal things are scorned. Those things which once were gain to him, he now counts as loss; yea, as dross and dung (Phil. 3:4-9). The teaching of the Spirit raises the heart high above this poor perishing world. Here is a sure test: does your knowledge of spiritual things cause you to hold temporal things with a light hand, and despise those baubles which others hunt so eagerly? Fourth, the knowledge which the teaching of the Spirit imparts is a transforming knowledge. The light of God shows how far, far short we come of the standard Holy Writ reveals, and stirs us unto holy endeavors to lay aside every hindering weight, and run with patience the race set before us. The teaching of the Spirit causes us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts," and to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). Here, then, is a sure test: how far does my knowledge of spiritual things influence my heart, govern my will, and regulate my life? Does increasing light lead to a more tender conscience, more Christlike character and conduct? If not, it is vain, worthless, and will only add to my condemnation. The Spirit Applies Knowledge to the Heart "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things" (John 14:26). How urgently we need a Divine Teacher! A natural and notional knowledge of Divine things may be obtained through men, but a spiritual and experimental knowledge of them can only be communicated by God Himself. I may devote myself to the study of the Scriptures in the same ways as I would to the study of some science or the mastering of a foreign language. By diligent application, persevering effort, and consulting works of reference (commentators, etc.), I may steadily acquire a comprehensive and accurate acquaintance with the letter of God's Word, and become an able expositor thereof. But I cannot obtain a heart-affecting, a heart-purifying, and a heart-molding knowledge thereof. None but the Spirit of truth can write God's Law on my heart, stamp God's image upon my soul, and sanctify me by the Truth. Conscience informs me that I am a sinner; the preacher may convince me that without Christ I am eternally lost; but neither the one nor the other is sufficient to move me to receive Him as my Lord and Savior. One man may lead a horse to the water, but no 10 men can make him drink when he is unwilling to do so. The Lord Jesus Himself was "anointed to preach the Gospel" (Luke 4:18), and did so with a zeal for God's glory and a compassion for souls such as none other ever had; yet He had to say to His hearers, "Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40). What a proof is that, that something more is required above and beyond the outward presentation of the Truth. There must be the inward application of it to the heart with Divine power if the will is to be moved. And that is what the teaching of the Spirit consists of: it is an effectual communication of the Word which works powerfully within the soul. Why is it that so many professing Christians change their view so easily and quickly? What is the reason there are so many thousands of unstable souls who are "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14)? Why is it that this year they sit under a man who preaches the Truth and claim to believe and enjoy his messages; while next year they attend the ministry of a man of error and heartily embrace his opinions? It must be because they were never taught of the Spirit. "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). What the Spirit writes on the heart remains: "The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you" (1 John

2:27), and neither man nor devil can efface it. Why is it that so many professing Christians are unfruitful? Month after month, year after year, they attend upon the means of grace, and yet remain unchanged. Their store of religious information is greatly increased, their intellectual knowledge of the Truth is much advanced, but their lives are not transformed. There is no denying of self, taking up their cross, and following a despised Christ along the narrow way of personal holiness. There is no humble self-abasement, no mourning over indwelling sin, no mortification of the same. There is no deepening love for Christ, evidenced by a running in the way of His commandments. Such people are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7), i.e. that "knowledge" which is vital, experimental, affecting, and transforming. They are not taught of the Spirit. Why is it in times of temptation and death that so many despair? Because their house is not built upon the Rock. Hence, as the Lord Jesus declared, "the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and itself" (Matthew 7:27). It could not endure the testing: when trouble and trial, temptation and tribulation came, its insecure foundation was exposed. And note the particular character Christ there depicted: "Everyone that heareth these sayings of Mine, (His precepts in the much-despised "Sermon on the Mount") and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand" (v. 26). Men may go on in worldly courses, evil practices, sinful habits, trusting in a head-knowledge of Christ to save them; but when they reach "the swelling of Jordan" (Jer. 12:5) they will prove the insufficiency of it. Ah, dear reader, a saving knowledge is not a knowledge of Divine things, but is a Divinely-imparted knowledge. It not only has God for its Object, but God for its Author. There must be not only a knowledge of spiritual things, but a spiritual knowledge of the same. The light which we have of them must be answerable to the things themselves: we must see them by their own light. As the things themselves are spiritual, they must be imparted and opened to us by the Holy Spirit. Where there is a knowledge of the Truth which has been wrought in the heart by the Spirit, there is an experimental knowledge of the same, a sensible consciousness, a persuasive and comforting perception of their reality, an assurance which nothing can shake. The Truth then possesses a sweetness, a preciousness, which no inducement can cause the soul to part with it. What the Spirit Teaches Now as to what it is which the Spirit teaches us, we have intimated, more or less, in previous chapters. First, He reveals to the soul "the exceeding sinfulness of sin" (Rom. 7:13), so that it is filled with horror and anguish at its baseness, its excuselessness, its turpitude. It is one thing to read of the excruciating pain which the gout or gall stones will produce, but it is quite another thing for me to experience the well-nigh unbearable suffering of the same. In like manner, it is one thing to hear others talking of the Spirit convicting of sin, but it is quite another for Him to teach me that I am a rebel against God, and give me a taste of His wrath burning in my conscience. The difference is as great as looking at a painted fire, and being thrust into a real one. Second, the Spirit reveals to the soul the utter futility of all efforts to save itself. The first effect of conviction in an awakened conscience is to attempt the rectification of all that now appears wrong in the conduct. A diligent effort is put forth to make amends for past offenses, painful penances are readily submitted to, and the outward duties of religion are given earnest attendance. But by the teaching of the Spirit the heart is drawn off from resting in works of righteousness which we have done (Titus 3:5), and this, by His giving increasing light, so that the convicted soul now perceives he is a mass of corruption within, that his very prayers are polluted by selfish motives, and that unless God will save him, his case is beyond all hope. Third, the Spirit reveals to the soul the suitability and sufficiency of Christ to meet its desperate needs. It is an important branch of the Spirit's teaching to open the Gospel to those whom He has quickened, enlightened, and convicted—and to open their understanding and affections to take in the precious contents of the Gospel. "He shall glorify Me" said the Savior, "for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:14). This is His prime function: to magnify Christ in the esteem of "His own." The Spirit teaches the

believer many things, but His supreme subject is Christ: to emphasize His claims, to exalt His Person, to reveal His perfections, to make Him superlatively attractive. Many things in Nature are very beautiful, but when the sun shines upon them, we appreciate their splendor all the more. Thus it is when we are enabled to view Christ in the light of the Spirit's teaching. The Spirit continues to teach the regenerate throughout the remainder of their lives. He gives them a fuller and deeper realization of their own native depravity, convincing them that in the flesh there dwells no good thing, and gradually weaning them from all expectation of improving the same. He reveals to them "the beauty of holiness," and causes them to pant after and strive for an increasing measure of the same. He teaches them the supreme importance of inward piety.

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