

THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 29 The Spirit Confirming

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Transcript

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Chapter 29

The Spirit Confirming

In view of the preceding chapter on the Spirit preserving, there is really no need for us to take up another aspect of the subject which so closely approximates thereto—yet a little reflection has persuaded us that it may be wise to do so. Some of our readers are fearful that the editor wavers on the blessed truth of the eternal security of the Christian. Some Arminians, because of our strong emphasis upon the absolute supremacy and sovereignty of God and the total impotency of fallen men unto holiness, have charged us with denying human responsibility, when the fact is that we go much farther than they do in the holding and proclaiming of man's accountability. On the other hand, some Calvinists, because we insist so emphatically and frequently on the imperative necessity of treading the Highway of Holiness in order to escape the everlasting burnings, have questioned our soundness on the final perseverance of the saints; when probably, as our writing on suicide shows, we believe this truth more fully than they do. Very few today hold the balance of the Truth. The Holy Spirit as "Earnest" That which we now desire to contemplate is the blessed Spirit viewed under the metaphor of an "earnest." This term is used of Him in the following passages: "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:22); "Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 5:5); "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:13, 14). The figure is taken from an ancient custom (which is by no means obsolete today) of the method used in the clinching of a commercial bargain or contract. The seller agrees to make delivery at some future date of what has been agreed upon, and as a guaranty of this the purchaser receives an "earnest," that is, a sample or token, an insignificant installment, of what has been contracted for. An "earnest," then, supposes a contract wherein two parties are agreed, the one who is ultimately to come into possession of what has been agreed upon being given a token of the other's good faith that he will abide by the terms of the bargain. It is a part of the price given beforehand, to assure the one to whom the "earnest" is given that at the appointed season he shall receive the whole of that which is promised. Now the right which the believer has to eternal life and glory comes in a way of contract or covenant. On the one side, the believer agrees to the terms specified (the forsaking of sin and the serving of the Lord), and

yields himself to God by repentance and faith. On the other side, God binds Himself to give the believer forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith. This is clearly enough stated in, "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will (then) make an Everlasting Covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3)—upon our hearty consent to the terms of the Gospel, God engages Himself to bestow upon us those inestimable blessings secured for His people by the spiritual or antitypical David. An "earnest" intimates there is some delay before the thing bargained for is actually bestowed: in the case of goods, deliverance at once is not agreed upon, in the case of property possession is not immediately entered into. It is for this reason that the token of good faith or preliminary installment is given: because the promised deliverance is deferred, possession being delayed for a season, an "earnest" is bestowed as a pledge or confirmation of what is to follow. Now as soon as the believer really enters into covenant with God, he has a right to the everlasting inheritance, but his actual entrance into full blessedness is deferred. God does not remove us to Heaven the moment we believe, any more than He brought Israel into Canaan within a few days after delivering them from Egypt. Instead, we are left for a while in this world, and that for various reasons: one among them being that we may have opportunities for exercising faith and love; faith in "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13), hope in longing: "ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption" (Rom. 8:23). An "earnest" is a part, though only a very small one, of the whole that has been agreed upon. If a contract was made for the delivery of a sum of money on a certain date, then a trifling installment thereof was given; if it were the transfer of a piece of land, then a square of turf was cut and handed to its future possessor, that being a symbolic guarantee to assure him during the interval of waiting. So too, those comforts which the Spirit communicates to believers are the same in kind as the joys of Heaven though they are vastly inferior in their degree. The saving gifts and graces of the Spirit are but a small beginning and part of that glory which shall yet be revealed in and to us. Grace is glory begun, and they differ from each other only as an infant does from a fully matured adult. Holiness or purity of heart is a pledge of that sinless estate and full conformity to Christ which is promised the Christian in the future. That present loosing of our bonds is but a sample of our perfect and final freedom. An "earnest" is given for the security of the party who receives it, and not for the benefit of him that bestows it. He who gives the earnest is legally bound to complete his bargain, but the recipient has this guarantee in hand for the confirming and comforting of his mind while he is waiting—it being to him a tangible pledge and sample of what as yet is only promised. Here again we may see the aptness and accuracy of the figure, for the spiritual earnest which Christians receive is given solely for their benefit, for there is no danger whatever of backing out on God's part. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:17, 18)—and this because believers commonly are assailed by many doubts and fears. More about "Earnest" An "earnest" remains the irrevocable possession of its recipient until the bargain is consummated, and even then it is not taken from him. Therein an "earnest" differs from a "pledge," for when a pledged article is returned, the pledge is taken back again. So, too, the "earnest" which Christians receive is irrevocable and inalienable: "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). As the Lord Jesus declared, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). How blessedly and how positively this intimates the eternal security of God's elect! Jehovah has made with them "an Everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5). Even now they have received "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23), and that is the Divine certification of the glorious harvest, the plentitude of God's favor yet to

follow. Like Mary, the believer today, by yielding to the Lordship of Christ, has "chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away" (Luke 10:42). "Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. 1:21, 22). It is to be duly noted that both the sealing and the earnest are for our "stablishing." As one hymn-writer put it, "What more can He say than to you He hath said, to you who to Jesus for refuge hath fled?" And what more can He do, we may ask, than what He has done to assure His people of the glorious inheritance awaiting them? We have the Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven with our nature, to show that our nature shall yet come there: "Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus" (Heb. 6:20). Nor is that all: we have the Holy Spirit sent down into our hearts as proof that we are not only children, but also the heirs of God: Romans 8:14-17. "Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 5:5). That "selfsame thing" is not to be restricted unto a resurrected body: it is the "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" of 2 Corinthians 4:17, the "things which are not seen" of 4:18. Having spoken of the everlasting bliss awaiting the saints on High, for which they now groan and earnestly long (5:4), the Apostle mentions two of the principal grounds on which such a hope rests. First, God has "wrought us for" the same, that is He has regenerated us, giving us a holy and heavenly nature which fully capacitates us to be with Himself. Second, He has given us "the earnest of the Spirit" as a guaranty of this glorious estate. Thus are we fitted for, and thus are we assured of the infinitely better life awaiting us. "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:13, 14). In this passage (1:3-14) the Apostle describes those wondrous and numerous blessings with which the saints are blest in Christ. Eternal election (v. 4), membership in God's family (v. 5), acceptance in the Beloved (v. 6), the forgiveness of sins (v. 7), and understanding of Divine mysteries (vv. 8, 9), predestined unto an inheritance (v. 11), sealed with the Holy Spirit (v. 13), and now the Spirit given to us as "the earnest of our inheritance"—a part-payment in promise and pledge of the whole. The dwelling of the Spirit in the believer's heart is the guaranty of his yet taking his place in that holy and joyous scene where all is according to the nature of God and where Christ is the grand Center. According to the literal meaning of the figure, an "earnest" signifies the clinching of a bargain, that it is a sample of what has been agreed upon, that it confirms and ensures the consummation of the contract. And that is what the operations and presence of the Spirit in the believer connote. First, they supply proof that God has made a covenant with him "ordered in all things and sure." Second, the present work of the Spirit in him is a real foretaste and firstfruit of the coming harvest. Is there not something of the glorified eye in that faith which the Spirit has implanted? Do the pure in heart see God face to face in Heaven? Well, even now, faith enables us to endure "as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). Is there not now something of that glorified joy wherein they in Heaven delight themselves in God: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19). And is there not now a real though faint adumbration of that glorified transformation of soul into the image of Christ? Compare 2 Corinthians 3:18 with 1 John 3:2! The "earnest" ensures the consummation of that contract. It is so here. The first operation of the Spirit in the elect is the guaranty of the successful completion of the same: "being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). Thus, God has given us something in hand that we may confidently anticipate the promised inheritance. And this, so that both our desire and our diligence may be stimulated. We are not asked to mortify sin, deny self, forsake the world, for nothing. If the "Earnest" be so blessed, what shall the Inheritance itself be! O what lively expectations of it should be cherished in our hearts! O what earnest efforts should be made in "reaching forth unto those things which are before" (Phil. 3:13)! And what is the Inheritance of which the Spirit is the "Earnest" unto the believer? It is nothing less than God Himself! The

blessed God, in the trinity of His Persons, is the everlasting portion of the saints. Is it not written, "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17)? And what is Christ's "inheritance"? "The LORD is the portion of Mine inheritance" (Ps. 16:5), He declared. The future bliss of believers will consist in the fullness of the Spirit capacitating them to enjoy God to the full! And has not the believer already "tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:3)? Yes, by the Spirit. The Spirit is the utmost proof to us of God's love, the firstfruit of glory: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4:6). God, then, grants His people a taste in this world of what He has prepared for them in the world to come. The gifts and graces of the Spirit in the elect affirm the certainty of the glory awaiting them: as surely as an "earnest" guarantees the whole sum, so do the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) the coming harvest of bliss. The nature of the Christian's "earnest" intimates both the character and the greatness of what is in store for him: even now He bestows a measure of life, light, love, liberty—but what shall these be in their fullness! One ounce of real grace is esteemed by its possessor more highly than a ton of gold: what, then, will it be like to bathe in the ocean of God's favor? If now there are times when we experience that peace which "passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) and are made to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8), how incapable we are of estimating the full value of our Inheritance, for an "earnest" is but a tiny installment of that which is promised. O that the realization of this, faint though it be, may move us to look and long for the heavenly glory with greater vehemence.

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