

# THE HOLY SPIRIT Chapter 9 The Work of the Spirit

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## Transcript

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Chapter 9

The Work of the Spirit

It is a great mistake to suppose that the works of the Spirit are all of one kind, or that His operations preserve an equality as to degree. To insist that they are and do would be ascribing less freedom to the Third Person of the Godhead than is enjoyed and exercised by men. There is variety in the activities of all voluntary agents: even human beings are not confined to one sort of work, nor to the production of the same kind of effects; and where they design so to do, they moderate them as to degrees according to their power and pleasure. Much more so is it with the Holy Spirit. The nature and kind of His works are regulated by His own will and purpose. Some He executes by the touch of His finger (so to speak), in others He puts forth His hand, while in yet others (as on the day of Pentecost) He lays bare His arm. He works by no necessity of His nature, but solely according to the pleasure of His will (1 Cor. 12: 11). Upon Both the Unsaved and the Saved Many of the works of the Spirit, though perfect in kind and fully accomplishing their design, are wrought by Him upon and within men who, nevertheless, are not saved. "The Holy Spirit is present with many as to powerful operations, with whom He is not present as to gracious inhabitation. Or, many are made partakers of Him in His spiritual gifts, who are not made partakers of Him in His saving grace: Matthew 7:22, 23" (John Owen on Heb. 6:4). The light which God furnishes different souls varies considerably, both in kind and degree. Nor should we be surprised at this in view of the adumbration in the natural world: how wide is the difference between the glimmering of the stars from the radiance of the full moon, and that again from the shining of the midday sun. Equally wide is the gulf which separates the savage with his faint illumination of conscience from one who has been educated under a Christian ministry, and greater still is the difference between the spiritual understanding of the wisest unregenerate professor and the feeblest babe in Christ; yet each has been a subject of the Spirit's operations. "The Holy Spirit works in two ways. In some men's hearts He works with restraining grace only, and the restraining grace, though it will not save them, is enough to keep them from breaking out into the open and corrupt vices in which some men indulge who are totally left by the restraints of the Spirit . . . God the Holy Spirit may work in men some good desires and feelings, and yet have no design of saving them. But mark, none of these feelings are things that accompany salvation, for if so, they would be continued. But He does not work Omnipotently to save, except in the persons of His own elect, whom He

assuredly bringeth unto Himself. I believe, then, that the trembling of Felix is to be accounted for by the restraining grace of the Spirit quickening his conscience and making him tremble" (C. H. Spurgeon on Acts 24:25). The Holy Spirit has been robbed of much of His distinctive glory through Christians failing to perceive His varied workings. In concluding that the operations of the blessed Spirit are confined unto God's elect, they have been hindered from offering to Him that praise which is His due for keeping this wicked world a fit place for them to live. Few today realize how much the children of God owe to the Third Person of the Trinity for holding in leash the children of the Devil, and preventing them from utterly consuming Christ's church on earth. It is true there are comparatively few texts which specifically refer to the distinctive Person of the Spirit as reigning over the wicked, but once it is seen that in the Divine economy all is from God the Father, all is through God the Son, and all is by God the Spirit, each is given His proper and separate place in our hearts and thoughts. The Spirit's Operation in the Non-elect Let us, then, now point out a few of the Spirit's general and inferior operations in the non-elect, as distinguished from His special and superior works in the redeemed.

1. In restraining evil. If God should leave men absolutely to their own natural corruptions and to the power of Satan (as they fully deserve to be, as He will in Hell, and as He would now but for the sake of His elect), all show of goodness and morality would be entirely banished from the earth: men would grow past feeling in sin, and wickedness would swiftly and entirely swallow up the whole world. This is abundantly clear from Genesis 6:3, 4, 5, 12. But He who restrained the fiery furnace of Babylon without quenching it, He who prevented the waters of the Red Sea from flowing without changing their nature, now hinders the working of natural corruption without mortifying it. Vile as the world is, we have abundant cause to adore and praise the Holy Spirit that it is not a thousand times worse. The world hates the people of God (John 15:19): why, then, does it not devour them? What is it that holds back the enmity of the wicked against the righteous? Nothing but the restraining power of the Holy Spirit. In Psalm 14:1-3 we find a fearful picture of the utter depravity of the human race. Then in verse 4 the Psalmist asks, "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? who eat up my people as they eat bread, and call not upon the Lord." To which answer is made, "There were they in great fear: for God is in the generation of the righteous" (v. 5). It is the Holy Spirit who places that "great fear" within them, to keep them back from many outrages against God's people. He curbs their malice. So completely are the reprobate shackled by His almighty hand, that Christ could say to Pilate, "thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19:11)!
2. In inciting to good actions. All the obedience of children to parents, all the true love between husbands and wives, is to be attributed unto the Holy Spirit. Whatever morality and honesty, unselfishness and kindness, submission to the powers that be and respect for law and order which is still to be found in the world, must be traced back to the gracious operations of the Spirit. A striking illustration of His benign influence is found in 1 Samuel 10:26, "Saul also went home to Gibeah: and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God (the Spirit) had touched." Men's hearts are naturally inclined to rebellion, are impatient against being ruled over, especially by one raised out of a mean condition among them. The Lord the Spirit inclined the hearts of those men to be subject unto Saul, gave them a disposition to obey him. Later the Spirit touched the heart of Saul to spare the life of David, melting him to such an extent that he wept (1 Sam. 24:16). In like manner, it was the Holy Spirit who gave the Hebrews favor in the eyes of the Egyptians—who hitherto had bitterly hated them—so as to give earrings to them (Ex. 12:35, 36).
3. In convicting of sin. Few seem to understand that conscience in the natural man is inoperative unless stirred up by the Spirit. As a fallen creature, thoroughly in love with sin (John 3:19), man resists and disputes against any conviction of sin. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh" (Gen. 6:3): man, being "flesh," would never have the least distaste of any iniquity unless the Spirit excited those remnants of natural light which still remain in the soul. Being "flesh," fallen man is perverse against the convictions of the Spirit (Acts

7:51), and remains so forever unless quickened and made "spirit" (John 3:6). 4. In illuminating. Concerning Divine things, fallen man is not only devoid of light, but is "darkness" itself (Eph. 5:8). He had no more apprehension of spiritual things than the beasts of the field. This is very evident from the state of the heathen. How, then, shall we explain the intelligence which is found in thousands in Christendom, who yet give no evidence that they are new creatures in Christ Jesus? They have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Heb. 6:4). Many are constrained to inquire into those scriptural subjects which make no demand on the conscience and life; yea, many take great delight in them. Just as the multitudes took pleasure in beholding the miracles of Christ, who could not endure His searching demands, so the light of the Spirit is pleasant to many to whom His convictions are grievous. The Spirit's Operation in the Elect We have dwelt upon some of the general and inferior operations which the Holy Spirit performs upon the non-elect, who are never brought unto a saving knowledge of the Truth. Now we shall consider His special and saving work in the people of God, dwelling mainly upon the absolute necessity for the same. It should make it easier for the Christian reader to perceive the absoluteness of this necessity when we say that the whole work of the Spirit within the elect is to plant in the heart a hatred for and a loathing of sin as sin, and a love for and longing after holiness as holiness. This is something which no human power can bring about. It is something which the most faithful preaching as such cannot produce. It is something which the mere circulating and reading of the Scripture does not impart. It is a miracle of grace, a Divine wonder, which none but God can or does perform. Total Depravity Apart from the Spirit Of course if men are only partly depraved (which is really the belief today of the vast majority of preachers and their hearers, never having been experimentally taught by God their own depravity), if deep down in their hearts all men really love God, if they are so good-natured as to be easily persuaded to become Christians, then there is no need for the Holy Spirit to put forth His Almighty power and do for them what they are altogether incapable of doing for themselves. And again: if "being saved" consists merely in believing I am a lost sinner and on my way to Hell, and by simply believing that God loves me, that Christ died for me, and that He will save me now on the one condition that I "accept Him as my personal Savior" and "rest upon His finished work," then no supernatural operations of the Holy Spirit are required to induce and enable me to fulfill that condition—self-interest moves me to, and a decision of my will is all that is required. But if, on the other hand, all men hate God (John 15:23, 25), and have minds which are "enmity against Him" (Rom. 8:7), so that "there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11), preferring and determining to follow their own inclinations and pleasures. If instead of being disposed unto that which is good, "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). And if when the overtures of God's mercy are made known to them and they are freely invited to avail themselves of the same, they "all with one consent begin to make excuse" (Luke 14:1 8)—then it is very evident that the invincible power and transforming operations of the Spirit are indispensably required if the heart of a sinner is thoroughly changed, so that rebellion gives place to submission and hatred to love. This is why Christ said, "No man can come to me, except the Father (by the Spirit) which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44). Again—if the Lord Jesus Christ came here to uphold and enforce the high claims of God, rather than to lower or set them aside. If He declared that "strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it," rather than pointing to a smooth and broad road which anyone would find it easy to tread. If the salvation which He has provided is a deliverance from sin and self-pleasing, from worldliness and indulging the lusts of the flesh, and the bestowing of a nature which desires and determines to live for God's glory and please Him in all the details of our present lives—then it is clear beyond dispute that none but the Spirit of God can impart a genuine desire for such a salvation. And if instead of "accepting Christ" and "resting upon His finished work" be the sole condition of salvation, He demands that the sinner throw down the weapons of his defiance, abandon every idol, unreservedly surrender himself and his life, and receive Him as His only

Lord and Master, then nothing but a miracle of grace can enable any captive of Satan's to meet such requirements. Objections to Total Depravity Proved False Against what has been said above it may be objected that no such hatred of God as we have affirmed exists in the hearts of the great majority of our fellow-creatures—that while there may be a few degenerates, who have sold themselves to the Devil and are thoroughly hardened in sin, yet the remainder of mankind are friendly disposed to God, as is evident by the countless millions who have some form or other of religion. To such an objector we reply, The fact is, dear friend, that those to whom you refer are almost entirely ignorant of the God of Scripture: they have heard that He loves everybody, is benevolently inclined toward all His creatures, and is so easy-going that in return for their religious performances will wink at their sins. Of course, they have no hatred for such a "god" as this! But tell them something of the character of the true God: that He hates "all the workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:5), that He is inexorably just and ineffably holy, that He is an uncontrollable Sovereign, who "hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18), and their enmity against Him will soon be manifested—an enmity which none but the Holy Spirit can overcome. It may be objected again that so far from the gloomy picture which we have sketched above being accurate, the great majority of people do desire to be saved (from having to suffer a penalty for their sin), and they make more or less endeavor after their salvation. This is readily granted. There is in every human heart a desire for deliverance from misery and a longing after happiness and security, and those who come under the sound of God's Word are naturally disposed to be delivered from the wrath to come and wish to be assured that Heaven will be their eternal dwelling-place—who wants to endure the everlasting burnings? But that desire and disposition is quite compatible and consistent with the greatest love to sin and most entire opposition of heart to that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). But what the objector here refers to is a vastly different thing from desiring Heaven upon God's terms, and being willing to tread the only path which leads there! The instinct of self-preservation is sufficiently strong to move multitudes to undertake many performances and penances in the hope that thereby they shall escape Hell. The stronger men's belief of the truth of Divine revelation, the more firmly they become convinced that there is a Day of Judgment, when they must appear before their Maker, and render an account of all their desires, thoughts, words and deeds, the most serious and sober will be their minds. Let conscience convict them of their misspent lives, and they are ready to turn over a new leaf; let them be persuaded that Christ stands ready as a Fire-escape and is willing to rescue them, though the world still claims their hearts, and thousands are ready to "believe in Him." Yes, this is done by multitudes who still hate the true character of the Savior, and reject with all their hearts the salvation which He has. Far, far different is this from an unregenerate person longing for deliverance from self and sin, and the impartation of that holiness which Christ purchased for His people. All around us are those willing to receive Christ as their Savior, who are altogether unwilling to surrender to Him as their Lord. They would like His peace, but they refuse His "yoke," without which His peace cannot be found (Matthew 11:29). They admire His promises, but have no heart for His precepts. They will rest upon His priestly work, but will not be subject to His kingly scepter. They will believe in a "Christ" who is suited to their own corrupt tastes or sentimental dreams, but they despise and reject the Christ of God. Like the multitudes of old, they want His loaves and fishes, but for His heart-searching, flesh-withering, sin-condemning teaching, they have no appetite. They approve of Him as the Healer of their bodies, but as the Healer of their depraved souls they desire Him not. And nothing but the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit, can change this bias and bent in any soul. It is just because modern Christendom has such an inadequate estimate of the fearful and universal effects which the Fall has wrought, that the imperative need for the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit is now so little realized. It is because such false conceptions of human depravity so widely prevail that, in most places, it is supposed all which is needed to save half of the community is to hire some popular

evangelist and attractive singer. And the reason why so few are aware of the awful depths of human depravity, the terrible enmity of the carnal mind against God and the heart's inbred and inveterate hatred of Him, is because His character is now so rarely declared from the pulpit. If the preachers would deliver the same type of messages as did Jeremiah in his degenerate age, or even as John the Baptist did, they would soon discover how their hearers were really affected toward God; and then they would perceive that unless the power of the Spirit attended their preaching they might as well be silent.

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