

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND YOU

By: Earl West

Contemporary American Protestantism finds itself going through a transition similar to the times of Bernard of Clairvaux in the 11th century. With the rise of the cult of the Virgin Mary, Christ was pushed back into a secondary role while an emotional religion built around appeals to Mary substituted for the traditional faith.

In today's Protestant world the guidance of the Holy Spirit through attractive emotional responses has taken the place of a serious search to discover what the Scriptures teach on any controversial subject. Thus the Scriptures have taken a secondary role while the leadership of the Holy Spirit also has reduced the pre-eminence of Christ.

One sees this in invitations to sinners. T. B. Larimore frequently extended this succinct appeal: "Take God at His word; believe what He says; obey what He commands; trust what He promises; strive to be just what He requires and leave results with Him." Here was divine providence at work: Believe God's divine gospel, obey its commandments, and know that God will go with you. Jesus put it, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matt.28:19,20)."

Obedying the gospel results in Christ's companionship and help all of one's Christian life. Christ not only is the head of the Church and the sinner's redeemer, but He also is the ever-present help in time of trouble.

The revelation of the primitive gospel was given by the Holy Spirit. The apostles were to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit "whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you

all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you”(John 14:26).

In Jerusalem on Pentecost the apostles received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who guided them in the delivery of that historic message on that day. Through the guidance of the Spirit, sinners were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. The promise was given that they would receive the Holy Spirit as a gift of God (Acts 2:38). When 3,000 did this, their sins were washed away, and they were added to the Church.

The Holy Spirit was working, not in giving a “cutting edge” to the message, but in convicting the audience members that they were sinners who had crucified Jesus. The Spirit guided them in God’s way in having those transgressions forgiven.

Paul had this in mind a few years later when he recalled the experiences of the Corinthians. Upon entering that ancient pagan city, Paul had preached by the Holy Spirit that message of salvation, and “many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized”(Acts 18:8). Paul could later say, “For by one Spirit [by the teaching of one Spirit] are we all baptized into one body” (I Cor. 12:13).

Early Christians received the Holy Spirit when they obeyed the gospel. “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him”(Acts 5:32). God has given to the newborn member of His family not only the forgiveness of sins but the promise of eternal life. The Holy Spirit then is given to a Christian as an earnest of his inheritance, which is a down payment of the eternal home God promises. Therefore, the guarantee is that eternal possession will be a reality based upon the promise of God.

Christians, however, must be careful to let their hope stand on the promise of God, the surety of His Word, rather than on the vagaries of emotions. The mind of man often is

crisscrossed with a variety of thoughts based upon the wisest judgment the individual's experience and knowledge conveys to him. As these thrash against the walls of the mind, which one is of the Holy Spirit, and how can a Christian be sure? His wishful-thinking in selecting the one he wants to believe may convince him that that particular one is of the Holy Spirit rather than some less desirable thoughts.

Likewise, every human wrestles with conflicting emotions that are there just because he is human. If the Christian believes that one or more of these emotions is placed there by the Holy Spirit, how does he know which one? Is it the one of joy or sadness? Is it the depressive mood? Is it the mood of self-assurance?

The person who is guided by emotions placed there by some imagined spiritual source has an unverifiable guide. He selects the emotion He prefers to follow and calls it the one placed there by the Holy Spirit. He follows what he wants to pursue without having the ability to verify any particular leading as placed there by the Holy Spirit. It feels good, and by convincing himself God's Spirit is guiding him, he goes the way he wants to go without any way of knowing it is really the way the Spirit directs him.

Against the uncertainty of emotions is the sure guidance of God's inspired Word, given by the Holy Spirit. Those who want to add power to their lives should anchor their lives in God's divine Word, which is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"(Heb. 4:12).

So then, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).