

The Spirit Poured Out

We have been exploring together a little of what it means that our lives are joined to the Lord Jesus, discovering more of the implications of that wonderful statement that *“By His doing you are in Christ Jesus . . .”* (**1 Corinthians 1:30**)

We have seen that our forgiveness is based on the power of the blood of Jesus paying the death penalty for our wrongdoing and failure.

We have seen that our release from the slavery to failure springs from the **fact** that we have been included in his death. We are dead to sin, dead to the captivity of religious rules and dead to trying to please God by our own efforts.

We have seen that the only sort of life that really **can** please God is the life of his own Son, and that this new life is what he has given us by the Holy Spirit making his home inside us. As a result, we can share in the power of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, not just in the future but right now.

So we have ‘followed’ Jesus in two aspects of his death – his shed blood and his broken body. We have ‘followed’ him also in his resurrection from the dead.

If we have seen the truth of this, that our old life is dead and gone and that we have been brought into new life, we have probably asked to be baptised as a clear statement of where we stand.

But Jesus did not stop at his resurrection! About six weeks later, he left his disciples in the most amazing way – he went up into the air and disappeared into a cloud! As he had already told his disciples, he needed to leave them so that the Father could send the Holy Spirit.

About ten days later, at the time of the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit arrived! Peter told the crowd in Jerusalem that this arrival of the Holy Spirit showed that Jesus really had been exalted at the right hand of the Father, that *“God has made him both Lord and Christ – this Jesus whom you crucified.”* (**Acts 2:36**)

Can we also share in **this** aspect of the ‘finished work of Christ’ – ?

Clearly, Peter’s answer to this question was **“Yes!”** When the people responded to this information, he told them that there were two things for them to do and that there would be two results.

They needed to repent and each of them be baptised in the name of Jesus the Messiah and the results would be that they would experience forgiveness for their misdeeds and failures and would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (**Acts 2:37-39**)

There are two words here which are often misunderstood, or at least not fully understood; ‘repent’ and ‘receive’. Both are strong and deeply meaningful words.

To ‘repent’ means to have a complete change of mind, a radical rethink, so that our way of thinking is completely different to what it has been. This goes much deeper than ‘saying sorry’, though obviously it is important that we acknowledge what we have done wrong. ‘Confession’ literally means ‘saying the same thing’ – in other words, that we agree with the verdict that we have done wrong. ‘Repentance’ means that we change our attitude towards wrongdoing, towards God, towards the direction of our lives, towards pretty much everything! A radical word indeed!

There are apparently three different Greek words that can be translated ‘receive’. One is fairly passive, meaning to have something offered to you; one is to take hold of something; one is to seize or remove something. Our English word ‘receive’ tends to be more like the first one, something that happens to us rather than something that we do.

But the word that Peter uses here is the second one, which is the commonest word translated ‘receive’ in the New Testament. He was telling the people in Jerusalem that, if they had a radical rethink of their attitude towards God and the Lord Jesus Christ and were baptised, they would experience God’s forgiveness and they too would take hold of the gift of the Holy Spirit, just as the disciples had done.

In practice, we know that receiving something is not the same as being given it, though often they happen at the same time. But not always! If you send me a gift, then you have selected it and put it in the post, or perhaps given it to me yourself. If it gets lost in the post, or if I simply don't open the parcel, have I received your gift? You have probably paid for it and then given it but, until I open the parcel and take hold – take possession – of the gift which you have kindly given me, I have not properly received it.

Peter said that there were two things that the people needed to do and that there would be two results. *“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” (Acts 2:38,39)* Just in case we were in any doubt, he reassures us that this gift is for everyone whom God calls to himself.

So why do many of us not know this ‘pouring out’ of the Holy Spirit in our own experience? Watchman Nee, commenting on this same passage in **Acts 2:38-39**, gives a lovely simple picture which you may find helpful . . .

“Here then are two divinely appointed conditions of forgiveness – repentance and faith publicly expressed. Have you repented? Have you testified publicly to your union with your Lord? Then have you received remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost? You say that you have only received the first gift, not the second. But, my friend, God offered you two things if you fulfilled two conditions! Why have you only taken one? What are you doing about the second?

“Suppose I went into a bookshop, selected a two-volume book, priced at ten shillings, and, having put down a ten-shilling note, walked out of the shop, carelessly leaving one volume on the counter. When I reached home and discovered the oversight, what do you think I should do? I should go straight back to the shop to get the forgotten book, but I would not dream of paying anything for it. I should simply remind the shopkeeper that both volumes were duly paid for, and ask him if he would kindly let me have the second one; and without any further payment I should march happily out of the shop with my possession under my arm. Would you not do the same under the same circumstances?

“But you *are* under the same circumstances . . .”

(The Normal Christian Life, ch.8)

The gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon us is part of our birthright, part of our inheritance because we are **in Christ!**

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In very simple terms, let us review the ‘headlines’ of our birthright, what we have by being in Christ, and the basis on which each one is given . . .

- 1) Forgiveness of sin and failure in our lives. Based on the fact that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ was shed for us. (See **Romans 5:9, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 7:14, Revelation 12:11, Hebrews 9:14, Revelation 1:5, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Ephesians 1:7-8, Romans 3:24.**)
- 2) Freedom from the power of sin, failure and law. Based on the fact that his body was broken for us. (See **Hebrews 2:14-15, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, Galatians 2:19-20, Romans 6:6 & 11, Colossians 2:20-23, Romans 7:4 & 6, Colossians 3:3, 1 Peter 2:24.**)
- 3) A new life that is pleasing to God, with the Holy Spirit making his home in us and with direct access to the Father. Based on the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. (See **Romans 6:5 & 11, Romans 8:2, Galatians 3:26-28, Romans 8:11, Ephesians 2:18, 2 Corinthians 3:18.**)
- 4) The Holy Spirit poured out on us in power. Based on the fact of Jesus has ascended to the right hand of the Father. (See **John 7:39, John 16:7, Acts 2:33, Romans 8:16, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 12:4, 1 Corinthians 2:12, 1 Peter 1:12.**)

We will do well to remind ourselves that these are historical facts! Once again, we can see that our Father deals with us according to our needs, and that these are met by what he has provided for us in Christ.

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So what **needs** do we have which are met by the Holy Spirit being poured out on us? Some of these

verses above will give us some clues:

Romans 8:16 *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”* Sometimes we doubt whether we really are Christians, don't we? The Holy Spirit confirms it to us.

Romans 8:26 *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”* How many of us have NOT been here? Sometimes we just run out of words, maybe because the situation is too awful, or sometimes because it is too wonderful!

1 Corinthians 2:12 *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.”* One of the verses that I come back to again and again. Read the whole section, **v. 6-16**. The Holy Spirit is the one who first opens up our awareness to what God has given us in Christ, and continues to do so. As Jesus himself said, *“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose it to you.”* (**John 16:13-14**)

These are needs which we all have from time to time, but there is another vital aspect which often gets overlooked, concerning what some old speakers used to call 'power for service'. In other words, someone who is engaged in serving the Lord by witnessing or public speaking. If you have ever done any of that, you will know the sense of weakness, almost helplessness, as you face what seems like an impossible task. We may be surprised that Paul faced exactly the same feeling . . .

“ . . . we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and will deliver, he on whom we have set our hope” (**2 Corinthians 1:8-10**)

“He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**)

But this idea of 'power for service', although it is definitely true and necessary, is much more limited than the Lord has in mind for **all of us**. The majority of Christian believers will NOT find ourselves in situations like Paul, where we are called upon to speak publicly for Jesus, but that power is still available and necessary for us to experience and exercise.

There is a clue in one of the verses we have looked at already: **1 Corinthians 2:12** *“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.”*

In the Old Testament, we can see a whole class of people running like a thread through the history of God's dealing with the Jews – the prophets. Their task was not mainly to predict the future (although that was sometimes included) but, first and foremost, to declare what the LORD was saying to his people in the current situation. As Elijah used to say, “As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand . . .” If anyone listened to them (which did not always happen!), then that person would benefit from the 'word of the LORD', their life would be enhanced. See a lovely example in **1 Chronicles 17**, where King David and Nathan the prophet interact. A positive example of Elijah in **1 Kings 17**, less positive for King Ahab with Elijah in **1 Kings 18** and with Micaiah in **1 Kings 22 & 2 Chronicles 18**.

One of Joel's (future!) prophecies that Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost was that *“ ‘it shall be in the last days’, God says, ‘that I will pour forth of my Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of my Spirit and they shall prophesy.’ ”* (**Acts 2:17-18, Joel 2:28-29**)

Although there was no obvious evidence of prophecy on the day of Pentecost, that was the day on which prophecy was opened up to all – young, old, male, female – in line with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on 'all mankind'. What had been reserved for a special select few through Jewish history

was now to be spread to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ – the church!

Along with all the other spiritual gifts that Paul lists in **1 Corinthians 12** and talks about in **1 Corinthians 14**, prophecy has to do with the intervention of the almighty God into the affairs of humankind. Maybe we have seen, or heard of, some evidence of God at work through miraculous healings or answers to prayer. Cases of ‘thus says the Lord’ with a very practical result!

And then Paul lists the other gifts which are much more obviously ways in which the ‘word of the Lord’ is conveyed to his people. This time, the channel of communication is not restricted to just one or two special people in a nation, but to all of us.

There is not time or space here to go into much detail about these gifts, but it is important that we do not fall into either of two very common traps:

The first trap is to say that spiritual gifts are not for us today. There is (or used to be) a common view that spiritual gifts became obsolete once we had the written New Testament. Because all God’s will had been revealed in the Bible, there was no more need for him to communicate directly with his people. Unfortunately for this theory, an honest study of the Bible itself gives absolutely no basis for it. Also, if we will take a closer view of real church history (not just the history of man-made organisations and denominations), we can see that spiritual gifts have continued to be in evidence more or less continuously since the first century AD. (See *The Pilgrim Church* by E.H.Broadbent and *The Torch of the Testimony* by J.W.Kennedy)

The second trap is to make so much of spiritual gifts that they become almost the total focus of church life and meetings. We have probably seen or heard about this approach and have rightly shied away from it. Particularly ‘speaking in tongues’ has been a really contentious subject. If we look at Paul’s comments about tongues, we can see that he values them, in their place, but that prophecy is much more valuable for the church as a whole.

And that is the key to the purpose behind all the gifts of the Spirit which are part of our inheritance of ‘the Holy Spirit poured out’. *“Let all things be done for edification”* says Paul (**1 Corinthians 14:26**), and that word ‘edification’ is not some dry and dusty academic word! It means simply ‘building the house’.

What house? *“And coming to him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up (same word – ‘edified’) as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* (**1 Peter 2:4-5**)

So, this aspect of our inheritance of being in Christ gives us the means to be part of the process that our Father is committed to fulfilling, to prepare a Bride for his Son. Having the Holy Spirit poured out upon us equips us to be fully functioning members of the Body of Christ, making ‘our’ contribution to the growth and developing maturity of the church – WOW!

“. . . we are no longer to be children,
tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,
by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;
but speaking the truth in love,
we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,
from whom the whole body,
being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies,
according to the proper working of each individual part,
causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”
(Ephesians 4:14-16)

Dave Taylor December 2019

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