Genesis - Commentaries by Frank Binford Hole

Foundations of the Faith: Key Teachings, Work and Indwelling of the Spirit of God, The

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The third Person of the ever-blessed Trinity, the Holy Spirit of God, is presented to us in Scripture as the One from whom the living energies of the Godhead proceed. He is first mentioned in Genesis 1:2 as moving in creation and there giving effect to the Word of God. He is last mentioned in Revelation 22:17 as energizing “the bride” and producing in her heart a suitable response to the Bridegroom, who presents Himself as “I, Jesus.”

These references to Him are highly significant. The first gives us, by way of analogy, a broad outline of His great work in connection with redemption, i.e., giving effect to the Word of God. The last indicates the full and blessed effect of His indwelling, i.e., producing in saints a full and adequate response to the revelation made and to the relationships which love has established.

To God the Father belongs initiative. All purpose, counsel, direction, are His. To God the Son belongs administration the execution of the divine purpose whether in creation, redemption, or judgment. To God the Holy Ghost belongs the energy all-pervading that, acting always in perfect harmony with the Father’s counsels and the Son’s administration, produces the desired effects whether upon matter in creation, or upon the souls and ultimately the bodies of saints in connection with redemption.

The redemption work of the Lord Jesus has been done for us. The work of the Holy Spirit is being wrought in us. The former is accomplished quite outside ourselves at the cross. It is set before us as an object of our faith; we look out at it. We speak of it, therefore, as an objective work, and truth connected with it as objective truth. The latter is something accomplished within us. Instead of regarding it as an object before us we find ourselves the subjects of it. We speak of it as a subjective work, and truth connected with it as subjective truth.

It is first of all necessary to observe that the Spirit’s work precedes His indwelling. Man, in the flesh, i.e., in his unconverted condition, is no fit dwelling place for the Spirit of God. This was foreshadowed both in the consecration of Aaron’s sons (Ex. 29) and in the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14). In both there was observed this order: first, the bathing with water; second, the application of blood; and third, the anointing with oil, typical of the fact that the Spirit can only be given when man comes under the action of the water and the blood. In other words, it is only when the Spirit has applied the water in new birth, and the blood in the knowledge of redemption, that he can take up His abode.

New birth is clearly the work of the Spirit of God. A man must be “born of water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5). The water, figurative of the Word, is the instrument or vehicle; the Spirit, the Agent or Power. In 1 Peter 1:22-25 the same great truth is referred to, only the emphasis is rather laid upon the Word of God which is living and abiding, and which presents itself to us today in the gospel which is preached unto us, and the Spirit of God is referred to as Him by whom we have purified our souls in obeying the truth. In John 3 the chief emphasis is laid upon the Spirit’s operation, and it is declared that He begets His like “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

In John 3 there is the clearest possible distinction between “a man... born again” and “the Son of Man... lifted up.” We just say this to emphasize once more the point that new birth, the beginning of the Spirit’s work, is not something done outside of us, at the cross, once for all, but is wrought in us each individually one by one.

Now, new birth having been carried into effect with any given person, there is produced within that which is born of the Spirit, and is spirit as to its nature, contrasted with flesh, the nature we possess as born of Adam’s race. This new spirit-nature is called the “inward man” in Romans 7:22, and as prompted by that inward man the believer “delights in the law of God.” Verses 7-25 are the detailing of an experience and marked by the constant repetition of the pronouns “I,” “me,” “my,” consequent upon the distress occasioned to the speaker the “I” by the conflicting desires of the two natures, “the flesh” on the one hand, “the inward man” on the other. But amongst the lessons learned in the course of that experience is this, that God (and therefore also faith in us) only recognizes the new spirit-nature; the old is utterly worthless. In it is no good (Rom. 7:18), and in the cross it has been condemned (Rom. 8:3).

The horticultural process of grafting is a good illustration of this point. The gardener selects a stock sapling quite worthless in itself and condemns it by cutting it hard back till but the stump remains. He then inserts the twig of value, let us say some dessert apple. When once the graft is effectively made, he no longer in any way owns the old nature. He always speaks of the tree by the name of the engrafted twig. It is the same tree as far as its identity goes. The two natures are there as experience will prove, but the new nature is the dominant nature and the acknowledged nature of the “born-again” tree.

No matter what the time or dispensation, this tremendous operation of the Spirit of God— new birth— is necessary if a soul is to have to do with God in blessing; consequently in all ages men have been born again.

The indwelling of the Spirit of God is a blessing, however, quite characteristic of the present age. Before it could be, redemption had to be accomplished; sins must be expiated and sin condemned. The cross of Christ having become an accomplished fact and Christ having been raised and glorified, the Spirit was given as recorded in the second chapter of Acts.

In Old Testament times not only were men born again of the Spirit of God, but also in different cases He came upon them in extraordinary power, energizing them for special service. In these cases He came for a brief occasion with no thought of permanency. Hence, when the Lord Jesus promised the “Comforter,” as recorded in John 14, John 15, and John 16, He spoke of Him as coming to be “in you” and “that He may abide with you forever.”

When the Spirit of God descended, as recorded in Acts 2, He came in a twofold way. First, He indwelt each individual saint present on that occasion. This plainly appears in the narrative. There were the “cloven tongues like as of fire,” signalizing His presence, and it adds, “it sat

upon each of them." But, secondly, His coming meant the formation of the Church as 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us, "by one, Spirit are we all baptized into one body," and having formed this "one body" — the Church— He also made it the house of God by His indwelling. We are "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). This larger indwelling is not mentioned in Acts 2, though perhaps it is symbolized in the fact that the "sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind... filled all the house where they were sitting."

If we inquire a little more closely as to the way the Spirit of God indwells the individual believer, we find that He comes bearing a threefold character. He is the Seal, the Earnest, and the Anointing as stated in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22.

As the Seal He secures us for God and marks us out as His (see Eph. 4:30). As the Earnest He is the pledge and fore taste of all those blessed realities which are yet to be ours in the day of glory (see 2 Cor. 5:5; Eph. 1:14). As the Anointing, or Unction— this latter word is used in 1 John 2:20— He endows the believer with the capacity to apprehend and enjoy the things of God (see 1 John 2:27), and also empowers for worship and the service of God. This is illustrated in the case of the Lord Himself (see Acts 10:38)

Then, again, if we take such a chapter as Romans 8, we find that the Spirit of God, so graciously given to the believer, is identified with and characterizes the new state formed in him by His power: i.e. the Spirit of God is the energy of that new being and nature which is the believer's as the result of the new birth. It can be said, therefore, that "the Spirit is life" (v. 10). He is also "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" and exerts His controlling power or "law," thus setting the believer free from "the law of sin and death" (v. 2). Indeed, that remarkable chapter sets the Spirit before us as filling various other capacities in connection with the practical life of the Christian, but these we have not space to deal with particularly, for we must turn to the work He does as indwelling the believer.

He works, as we have seen, before He indwells, grappling with the conscience, breaking the will, and finally producing new birth. This is something like the building of a suitable house for Himself. Then He takes up His abode so that the very body of the believer becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:19). But we must not suppose that this is the end of everything. As indwelling He still works.

In the chapters in John already referred to (14, 15, 16), the Lord Jesus especially emphasized the teaching of the Spirit as regards His disciples. He would "teach" them "all things." He would "guide" them "into all truth." This was doubtless true in an especial degree of the apostles to whom He was speaking, inasmuch as they were to be the original depositories of the further revelations which are now contained in the Epistles. Admitting this, it is still true in a general sense of every believer, even the most recently converted— the babe— as 1 John 2:27 shows. The teaching work of the Spirit goes deeper than the mere imparting of information. He instructs so effectually that the believer not only knows mentally but is also possessed by the things that he knows. They are made living and operative in his life.

Then He strengthens as well as instructs. The Apostle prayed that the Ephesian saints might be "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:10). The inner man itself is the fruit of the Spirit's earlier working, but it needs to be strengthened if Christ is to dwell in the heart by faith.

Connected with this is His transforming work as spoken of in 2 Corinthians 3:18. We Christians, in contrast to Israel, have before us the unveiled glory of the Lord, and not the partial and veiled glory of the law as reflected in the face of Moses. Beholding that unveiled glory, we are changed or transformed "into the same image" from one degree of glory to another, "as by the Spirit of the Lord."

How vast the range of all those things which have come to light in the revelation which has reached us! Each item has its own peculiar glory which streams toward one central point of focus— the Lord Jesus Christ. His glory shines everywhere, and we may see it without a veil between. As we behold, we are transformed by the Spirit's power, and transformed into the same image, the very character of Christ being thus produced in us. This is perhaps the very crown and climax of the Spirit's work in the believer. He transforms, writing upon the fleshy table of the heart, Christ in His character, or moral features. This is to be supplemented and completed, when the Lord comes again, by the body of the saint being brought into conformity to Christ's body of glory. The Lord Himself will do this, it is true (Phil. 3:21), but not apart from the Spirit of God, for God will "quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11).

Of great importance, too, are all the Spirit's operations in connection with the Church as distinguished from those that concern the individual believer. He is the true Vicar of Christ upon earth. He is the "Servant" who is commissioned not only to carry the gospel invitation but also to "compel them to come in," according to the parable in Luke 15. He it is who gives those gifts to various members of Christ's body which are to be for the profit of all. The gifts are varied, but "all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. 12:11), and as chapter 14 of that Epistle shows, He is the One to preside and control in the assemblies of the saints. He is here not to exalt Himself but to magnify Christ, nevertheless He is to be honored and given His place as indwelling the saints who are God's house. To ignore His presence in the assembly of God, or to treat Him as a nonentity there, by men (though well-meaning) usurping His place and functions, is a serious sin.

How vast a subject is that of the work and indwelling of the Spirit of God! We have but hastily and imperfectly sketched its outlines.

How may a believer know that he has received the Holy Spirit?

By the fact that he is a believer, assuming always, of course, that he has heard and believed the gospel of the risen Christ. The Ephesian believers were sealed with the Holy Spirit after that they believed, or "having believed" (see Eph. 1:13). This verse gives us definitely the order which is always observed. First, they "heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation"; second, they believed it; third, they were sealed with the Spirit.

1. We have in the Acts the historic record of cases where the Spirit was received. Take, for example: The disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 2).

2. The Samaritans (Acts 8).

3. The Gentiles— Cornelius and his friends (Acts 10 and Acts 11).

4. The twelve men at Ephesus (Acts 19).

In each case there are differences as regards details, such as baptism, the laying on of hands, and speaking with tongues. There are good reasons for these differences on which we do not dwell, but evidently it is impossible in the face of them to formulate rules and say, for

instance, that baptism must take place before the Spirit can be received— the third case negates that. On the other hand, beneath these surface differences there is the divine order of hearing, believing, and the sealing of the Spirit, verified in each case of the four. The fourth case emphasizes that what is heard and believed must be the full gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ. It was because the twelve men had not heard and believed this that they had not received the Spirit.

Ought there not, however, to be some very definite outward signs when the Spirit is received; something that makes so great a gift manifest to all?

There ought to be, and are, definite signs when the Spirit is received, but not necessarily of a sort to be noticed by sight or hearing. The fact that a new convert looks up to God as his Father is a sign that the Spirit is received (see Rom. 8:15). So also is the fact of the Bible becoming a new book to such (see 1 Cor. 2:11-14); and many other such things could be specified. These are far more important than such things as speaking with tongues.

True, the outward signs were much in evidence in apostolic times, inasmuch as then God was publicly accrediting the Church which He had just founded. Now that stage is over and it is these less sensational and more hidden and important things which abide. We may draw an analogy between this and the human body, the most important and vital organs of which are hidden away beneath the surface.

Take speaking with tongues just mentioned: some insist that unless this takes place the Spirit of God is not received. How does Scripture bear on this?

Quite effectively. What we have just pointed out bears on it. So also does the fact that in the six cases of the Spirit's reception recorded in Acts, three make no mention at all of speaking with tongues. So also does the fact that speaking with tongues is much alluded to in 1 Corinthians 12, where the whole argument of the Apostle turns upon the point that though the Spirit of God is one, yet the gifts or manifestations which proceed from Him are many and various; and that to one member of the body was given one gift such as prophecy, to another member another gift such as speaking with tongues.

At the end of the chapter (vv. 29-30) a number of questions are raised. No answer is given because it is so obvious. "Are all apostles?" he asks. Clearly, No. "Are all prophets?" No. "Do all speak with tongues?" Just as clearly, No. Are all Christians members of Christ's body by baptism of the Spirit? Yes. Do all the members speak with tongues? No. A clear scriptural refutation of this erroneous idea.

Does the believer receive the Holy Spirit in order that he may use His influence for God?

The Scriptures do not put it just in that way. The Spirit of God is a Person. He wields an incalculable influence. Yet it is as a Person He indwells.

Now whether we consider Him as indwelling the individual believer or the whole Church, as the house of God, we find Him supreme and sovereign in His actions. He is not given to us as a power or influence at our disposal, but rather that we may be at His disposal.

This comes clearly to light in the history of the Apostle Paul. He started on his missionary career because "The Holy Ghost said..." (Acts 13:2). Later, he was "forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the Word in Asia" and assaying to go into Bithynia, "the Spirit suffered them not" (Acts 16:6, 7).

What is it to be filled with the Spirit?

It is to be so fully under the control of the Spirit of God that He becomes the source of all the believer's thoughts and actions, and also the energy in which they are carried into effect.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find that on special occasions one or another were filled with the Spirit (Acts 4:8, 31; Acts 7:55; Acts 13:9 and 52). He possessed them with especial completeness so that the emergency might be met in the full power of God.

Yet we find in Ephesians 5:18 the exhortation "be filled with the Spirit," and this addressed to all saints in that city, so that evidently it is something that each saint should know and experience for himself and not something only attainable by the few.

If it be further asked, Why then is it so little known? the answer we fear is because with most of us the flesh is so often unjudged, and therefore active, that the energies of the Spirit are largely taken up in counteracting its power. Galatians 5:17 speaks of the Spirit and flesh as "contrary the one to the other," and we are to walk in the Spirit and so "not fulfill the lust of the flesh." The first step towards being filled with the Spirit is so to walk in the Spirit that the flesh is judged, and quiescent with the sentence of death upon it in a practical way.

What is it that "grieves" the Spirit of God, and what "quenches" Him?

What grieves Him is anything which dishonors Christ, or deviates from His control. The Scripture runs, "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30). He will therefore be grieved by anything unholy. Not grieved away, for the next words are: "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption," i.e. the day of the redemption of our bodies at the coming of the Lord.

To grieve Him is to lose the practical benefits of His presence, for He then turns His energies to grieving us into a recognition and confession of the evil that we may be restored to communion.

"Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19) is an exhortation not to hinder His action through the prophets or others in the assemblies of the saints. The next verse or two shows this. The Spirit indwelling the Church claims the right to order its gatherings and let not men under any pretext interfere with or quench His voice. This is an exhortation generally disregarded in Christendom where organizations and liturgies have been instituted in order to place everything under the control of a man or men. Under such circumstances the free and sovereign action of the Spirit would be resented as an intrusion and promptly suppressed.

What, in a word, is the great mission of the Spirit of God?

To glorify Christ. See John 16:14. In the preceding verse it is said, "He shall not speak of Himself," that is, of His own initiative. He has taken the place of serving the interests of Christ and hence His activities are along that line and He has not come to make Himself the prominent

feature. For this reason we do not find either prayer or worship in Scripture ever addressed distinctively to the Holy Spirit. He is rather the Inspirer of both in the believer.

This is important because some have taken up matters in such a way as to form a kind of “cult” of the Holy Spirit. He is talked about; His operations within the believer are analyzed and discussed and even systematized in people’s minds; the effect of all this being that such get hopelessly occupied with themselves, their own state, and the operations of the Spirit whether real or fancied within; and Christ is eclipsed.

Such self-occupation is a serious evil, and totally opposed to the real ministry of the Spirit. He is here in the Church to glorify Christ and lead our souls to Him.

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