

The Holy Spirit 2017 Part 2

The Holy Spirit and conversion.

We began teaching last Sunday on the Holy Spirit. This morning I want to focus on the work of the Holy Spirit in our life prior to and at conversion.

We mentioned last Sunday the Holy Spirit is the creative agent of the Godhead. Genesis 1 says the Spirit of God was hovering over the void at creation and brought order out of that chaos. What is the Holy Spirit doing in our life prior to our conversion? Perhaps it would be fair to say He is hovering over our life, preparing to once again bring order out of chaos. Turn with me to John 16 and let's read a portion of what Jesus has to say about the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. **“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” John 16:7-11**

Jesus said, “When the Holy Spirit comes...” he will do these things. The first part of what he lists deals with the Holy Spirit's role with the believer, but the next part deals with his role in the world, dealing with those who don't know Christ. Even before you were saved, the Holy Spirit was in some sense at work in your life. What is the role of the Holy Spirit prior to conversion?

The Holy Spirit brings us to an awakened sense of sin. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would convict people of guilt in regard to sin because they don't believe in him. The ultimate sin is finally not believing in Jesus, isn't it? So it is the Holy Spirit's task to bring us to an awakened sense of our sin, that Jesus is not in our life, that we are living contrary to his word, his will, his way. We are aware something is wrong, something is broken, something is missing.

The Holy Spirit convinces us to believe in Jesus. With an awakened sense of our sin and guilt, the Holy Spirit then convicts or convinces us of our need to repent and believe in Jesus. Our own conscience can convict us of some things. We might feel guilty about things because of something our parents or someone else instilled in us. For instance, my Mom taught me to never say “shut up” to anyone but a dog. She produced guilt in me if I do that now, but that is not necessarily something the Holy Spirit convicts me of. But uniquely the Holy Spirit

convicts us and convinces us that we are guilty of transgressing God's law. He convinces us we are sinners and he convinces us to believe in Jesus, that he alone can save us from ourselves and our sin. That is still happening 2,000 years after Jesus. And after our conversion, the Holy Spirit continues to make us aware of sin in our life. This is what we call the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit affirms the righteousness of Jesus. (v10 "convicts in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father") The Holy Spirit has come to testify of and glorify Jesus. He wants us to confess and declare that Jesus is more than mortal, that He is the Son of God, the righteousness of God. He alone is sinless so he alone can atone for our sins and provide the way to God and to eternal life. The Holy Spirit then brings that witness to our heart. Jesus is fully God and the Holy Spirit convinces us that Jesus is who he says he is, affirming the righteousness of Christ.

The Holy Spirit makes us aware of the judgment that has already been handed down. (v11 "convicts in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned.") The Holy Spirit comes to convince us that Satan has been defeated through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and Satan's destiny has already been determined. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts and convinces us of this truth.

The word convict has a couple of definitions. It means to "impel the heart to respond". We feel convicted by the Holy Spirit, or convicted by our own conscience and we feel compelled to respond. But it also means to judge someone guilty. We say, "The judge and jury convicted the man of murder." When we think of this aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in the life of a person prior to conversion, it can be helpful to think of it in legal terms. The judgment has already been handed down. We've been convicted of our sin but the Holy Spirit has come to convince us to settle out of court. If we will plead guilty, repent and receive Christ, we will be forgiven and escape the judgment of condemnation and death. He convinces us to settle out of court and be saved. So the Holy Spirit is at work in a variety of ways prior to our conversion.

How is the Holy Spirit present in our lives at conversion? We said last week that everything Jesus secured and provided for us through his death, resurrection and ascension is given to us or conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit. At conversion, having been drawn to the Father by the Holy Spirit through the activity we've just discussed, **The Holy Spirit is the agent that brings the life of Jesus into us.** Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the

kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” John 3:5

The Lord spoke through the prophet Ezekiel to give us a word concerning the Spirit’s work at conversion. **“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” Ezekiel 36:25-27**

As we said, the Holy Spirit awakens an awareness of our sin and our need of a Savior. He convinces us to believe in Jesus and call on him for salvation. When we repent of our sins and turn from them to Christ, the Holy Spirit applies the cleansing blood of Jesus to our life and we are cleansed from sin. He washes us clean and then takes up residence in our heart and life. We are born again by the Spirit and no longer do we have a heart hardened like stone by sin and guilt, but we are given a new heart, a new life in Christ. This is not just giving mental assent to something, this is being transformed, born as Jesus said “by water and by the Spirit!”

George Wood used the analogy of the birth of Jesus to help explain how the new birth comes to us. How did Jesus become flesh? The gospel of Matthew tells us He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. **“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 1:20.** It was the conceiving work of the Holy Spirit that brought Jesus in the flesh. The angel told Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” Luke 1:35

It may sound mystical, but we could say **The Holy Spirit seeks to do spiritually in us what He did physically in Mary.** He is birthing Jesus into our life, our existence. **The Holy Spirit brings Jesus into our lives!** Consider as well, when a woman is pregnant, she isn’t just a little bit pregnant. Pregnancy involves every aspect of her life. (Pregnancy brain. Metabolism, her entire body is focused on meeting the growing needs of the baby.) Jesus born in us draws the focus of every part of our life and being.

The Holy Spirit brings regeneration. To regenerate means to take what was dead and make it alive again. We were dead in our trespasses and sins but Jesus makes us alive again, regenerated by his grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. **“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing**

of rebirth [regeneration] and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior...” Titus 3:5-6. We have been made alive in Christ, given new life. What was dead is now alive through Christ and by the Holy Spirit.

Consider the disciples. When were they saved? When did that rebirth or regeneration take place in their lives? I believe the disciples experienced conversion on the evening of Easter Sunday when Jesus appeared to them. They saw the risen Lord, believed and the Bible says, **“And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” John 20:22.**

I believe prior to this the disciples were saved in the Old Testament sense. In fact, remember when Jesus sent out the 72. When they returned, he told them not to rejoice because evil spirits were subject to them, but because their names were written in heaven. They were saved, their names written in heaven, but I believe it was in the Old Testament sense because saving faith is looking back on the finished work of Christ on the cross and receiving the benefits of what he has done. Old Testament saving faith is anticipatory – looking forward to what will happen through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

In the upper room in John 20, was the first opportunity the disciples had of receiving New Testament salvation. They were able to do what the bible said, to believe in their heart that Jesus was the Christ, that he died for their sins and that God raised him from the dead. I believe they did that. They saw and believed and it was then that Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” He used the very symbol of life itself: “breath.” He breathed on them. It was as though Jesus was saying, “Now, through my death and victorious resurrection, I have new life to bestow on you. I have won eternal benefits by virtue of my resurrection that I can now bestow on you. I have a new kind of life to give you and I now breathe new life into you as the Holy Spirit comes to reside in your heart and life.”

In Genesis 2 God breathed into man and he became a living soul. In John 20, Jesus breathed upon the disciples and they became new creations. They received a new life in Christ. Not an earth bound life but a new life, eternal life, a life to be lived on beyond this mortal life.

Now, understand, there is a distinction between receiving the Holy Spirit at conversion, and receiving the Spirit in Pentecostal empowerment. Jesus breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit in John 20, but days later in Acts 1 he tells them to wait in Jerusalem for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. It was important for them to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and to receive power. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit at conversion, salvation, but there is more that

the Lord has for us in the Pentecostal empowerment of Spirit baptism.

Let me be clear. At conversion we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The bible says, **“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you.” 1 Corinthians 3:16.** And in Romans Paul writes, **“You however are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.” Romans 8:9.** The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us at our conversion. But at the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, Jesus baptizes us into the Holy Spirit. We are not simply indwelt by the Spirit, but we are then clothed with the Holy Spirit and his power. It is a difference in mission and purpose and we will talk about that on another Sunday.

I said at the beginning that prior to conversion it is uniquely the work of the Holy Spirit to convince us to believe in Jesus. Well, after conversion, **The Holy Spirit continually makes a true confession regarding Jesus.** The bible says, **“Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus is cursed’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3**

The Holy Spirit continually makes a true confession with respect to Jesus. Declaring who he is, testifying that he is Lord. Let me show you a unique example of this. Look with me at Luke 1:41. Mary the Mother of Jesus, while pregnant with Jesus, goes to see her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with John the Baptist. The bible says, **“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.’” Luke 1:41-44.**

Now, why is this happening in this passage? Because the Holy Spirit is continually making a true confession regarding Jesus Christ, declaring who he is, testifying to who he is. Elizabeth declares that Mary’s unborn baby is “my Lord.” How could she do that? Because the Bible says that she was filled with the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit continually makes that true confession regarding Jesus. He is Lord. One last thought...

The Holy Spirit continually makes a true confession regarding our relationship to God. It is the Holy Spirit that testifies that he is our Lord and that we are his children. In Romans 8 Paul writes, **“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear,**

but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Romans 8:15-16.

We have a new life in Christ. Thank God that before we were even saved, the Holy Spirit was at work. He was making us aware of our sin and our position without God and without hope. He was convincing us to believe in Jesus. He was showing us that Jesus is truly the Son of God, that judgment has already been handed down and that we have been convicted, judged guilty, but we can settle out of court if we will only turn to Christ and surrender our lives to him!

Thank God that as we place our faith in Christ as our Savior and turn from our sins, we are born again. Born of the Spirit. We are regenerated. Not just brought to life, but given brand new life, eternal life in Christ. He breathes into us and we become new creations in Christ.

And thank God that the Holy Spirit continues to be at work in us, continually making that true confession that Jesus Christ is not only Savior, but he is Lord. Our Lord. We are joint heirs with Christ and part of the redeemed, the family of God. He continues that work of sanctifying us and making us more like Jesus, producing his life and character in us.

Do you know who you are today? The Holy Spirit is testifying in you - you are God’s child! Rejoice in it. Give thanks because of it. And live like it!

If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, but you’ve not asked him to forgive your sins and you’ve not surrendered your life to him, the Holy Spirit has been convicting you, drawing you. It’s time to obey God. It’s time to surrender your life to Christ.

If you have loved ones that are not following Christ, away from God, be encouraged today, that as we pray, the Holy Spirit is at work in their life, even prior to their conversion, he is convincing them of their sin, their need to repent and turn to Christ, convincing them that what the bible says is true.

Thank God for the work of the Spirit in our lives, both now and even before we came to Christ. May the Spirit of the Lord continue to make that true confession regarding Jesus through our lives, our testimony, our witness in this world!