

The Love of the Holy Spirit

PART ONE: THE LOVE OF THE SPIRIT IN BRINGING US INTO SALVATION

Main Passage: Romans 5:5–11, ‘The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’.

When we come to consider the matter of God’s love we see that ‘the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given unto us’ (Rom. 5:5). The rest that follows (5:6–11) shows us the ways in which the love of God has worked in us and for us. For the moment we will not look at these but first will consider the whole matter of knowing God’s love by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Reveals the Love of God to Us

In John 3:1–14 we see the account of the Pharisee, Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night to talk to him. Jesus told him that except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God and only when born of water—baptism—and of the Holy Spirit could he enter the Kingdom. The conclusion we draw is that it is by the Spirit that we understand and participate in things which are spiritual. Likewise in 1 Corinthians 2:6–16 Paul teaches that no one can understand the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God and he makes such things intelligible to persons of the Spirit but not others. In John chapters 14 to 16 Jesus taught his disciples that when the Holy Spirit would come—as at Pentecost—then, and only then, would they know the truth. He gave promises that the Holy Spirit would: (i) be their counsellor and as the Spirit of truth would dwell in them (14:15–17); (ii) would teach them all things and bring into their remembrance the things Jesus had told them (14:25–26); (iii) would bear witness to Christ, as also they will bear witness (15:26–27); (iv) would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:7–11); (v) would guide them into all the truth (16:13); and (vi) would glorify him—Christ—along with the Father (16:14–15). In 1 John 5:6 the Holy Spirit is called the ‘Spirit of truth’ and as such he witnesses to God.

We now return to our passage of Romans 5:5–11 where the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into the heart of a person who believes. If we look at verses 6 to 11 we see that God’s love is shown in: (i) when we were weak and helpless to save ourselves Christ died for us, the ungodly; (ii) Christ dying for us when we were sinners; (iii) by saving us who have been justified from the wrath of God; and (iv) by saving us by his very life, reconciling us by Christ’s death, but giving us the gift of reconciliation. If we think on these things we will see how great is God’s love. The passage of 1 John 4:7–18 shows the love of God through sending His Son into the world that we might live. That life will come to us because the Father sent His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. All of this is shown to us by the Holy Spirit.

Without the revelation by the Holy Spirit of God’s—i.e. the Father’s—love, we would never really know God’s love, for nothing in all human history has ever equalled God’s love. Whilst it is true that human beings have loved God’s love through to others, yet we cannot understand their actions unless we first see the Father’s love in the actions of the Son, such as in Romans 5:6–11 and 1 John 4:9–10.

I am sure that every human thinks he or she can know the love of God just by considering it, but no, the Spirit must bring the revelation of the mystery of Divine love. So then when the Spirit reveals the love of God and fills our hearts with that love we can speak of him as ‘the Spirit of love’.

The Holy Spirit Reveals the Love of God to Us by Showing the Means of Love Which God Uses

If we say that God reveals His love by the Holy Spirit in that Christ died for us, then we must understand what ‘Christ died for us’ really means. We could look at his becoming human to be with us and die for us and then rising for us from the dead, and be unmoved by these facts of history. Unless we see the holiness of God we cannot understand the sinfulness of Man and the doom of death and judgment which await him. The words ‘death’ and ‘doom’ are really unintelligible to us although we think we understand them. What is ‘doom’ to you, and what is ‘death’? You really do not know. When the Holy Spirit makes them real then it will be hard for you to keep your composure. You will be moved to your depths. When, then, we ask the question, ‘Why did Cain kill his brother?’, the answer is ‘Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous’. Even so, we have yet to comprehend this. In a moment a man in road-rage can kill a person he has not seen before.

Take Titus 3:3–7, as sounding out the sinfulness of Man as he opposes true love:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Do we really see ourselves as ‘hated by men and hating one another’ with all the other elements of our depravity? The key to understanding lies in ‘the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’. Only when this happens do we see our prior sinfulness. Understanding the means God uses in His Son going to the Cross and bearing the hideous matter of human depravity with its attendant guilt, shame, pollution and evil will bring us to understand love in the suffering of the Son for the humanity created by God. The passages such as Romans 5:5–11 and 1 John 4:7–18 become really intelligible to us. The mystery of the Cross opens as a brilliant and beautiful revelation by the work of the Spirit. Not only do we see the Father’s love in the Son, but also the Son’s love in the Father.

The Holy Spirit Takes Us through the Work of Grace to the Father’s Love

Often we read the ways in which God brings us to salvation, i.e. by conviction of sin, repentance, faith and so on. We have the habit of learning these steps and knowing their necessity, but what sometimes we do not realise is that they are all to do with the will of God for us, against our will for ourselves. We have already seen that without the Holy Spirit we could not comprehend, in experience, the steps leading to salvation. It is the Spirit who exhorts and then enables us to take these steps. Let us look at them and the work of the Spirit in them:

- (a) *The work of the Spirit in conviction.* In John 16:7–11 it is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin and righteousness. When on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) Peter spoke through the Holy Spirit, a large number of Jews was convicted and cried out, asking what they should do. The answer was, ‘Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’. This was to be the pattern for the work of the Spirit.
- (b) *The work of the Spirit in repentance.* We have seen that at Pentecost the Spirit wrought this as thousands who heard Peter’s message repented. This was repeated in Acts 3:19. In 5:32 Peter speaks of repentance as a gift and in 11:18 Paul speaks of it as a gift to the Gentiles who had been filled with the Holy Spirit. The command to repent is seen in Acts 2:38, 3:19, and 17:30–31.
- (c) *The work of the Spirit in believing.* In Acts 2:44 it says ‘And all who believed’, and this state came from the preaching of Peter through the Spirit. The church was known as ‘the company of those who believed’ (4:32). In 4:4 it is stated, ‘But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of men came to be about five thousand’. In Philippians 1:29 Paul says, in effect, ‘It was given to you to believe’. We saw the belief of various groups in Acts when the gospel was preached in the Spirit, one of which we have quoted immediately below.
- (d) *The work of the Spirit in the forgiveness of sins.* A remarkable example of this is seen in Acts 10:43–44 where Paul tells the Gentiles that ‘every one who believes in him [Christ] receives forgiveness of sins through his name’, and ‘the Holy Spirit fell on all who believed’.
- (e) *The work of the Spirit in regeneration, i.e. new birth.* We have seen this work of new birth accorded to the Holy Spirit in John 3:1–4. In Titus 3:3–7 we have seen it was ‘by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit’ that sinful people were changed from depraved creatures to new persons. How deep a work of the Holy Spirit this must be.
- (f) *The work of the Spirit in sonship or ‘adoption as sons’.* Galatians 4:4–7 speaks of ‘the adoption of sons’ as being part of the gospel. He also makes it clear that it becomes substantial to us when the Spirit is crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ within us. Romans 8:14–17 substantiates this.
- (g) *The work of sanctification is wrought by the Spirit in us.* This is brought out clearly in 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14, ‘But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ We see this also in 1 Peter 1:2 as he addresses believers as, ‘chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood’.

There are other elements we could include but the list is enough to show us the intimate and detailed work of the Spirit in depraved Man to bring him to the fullness of life and give him hope for the future.

PART TWO: THE LOVE OF THE SPIRIT IN BRINGING TO BE THE COMMUNITY OF LOVE

Special Verse: 2 Corinthians 13:14: ‘The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all’.

We may begin with 2 Corinthians 13:14, for the grace of the Lord Jesus is that which brings us into the love of God and then constitutes us as members of the community of the Holy Spirit. This is true whether or not it is intended this way in the verse. For our purposes we fix on ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’. The love of God is that which is His love—not our love for Him. Christ has grace and by it redeems us. The Spirit is the Spirit who is the one who has fellowship as his power, and works that fellowship in us, bringing us into fellowship one with another. In Philippians 2:1 Paul speaks of ‘the fellowship of the Spirit’. Some translations have ‘any sharing in the Spirit’ or ‘any participation in the Spirit’, which may be what Paul intended. In Ephesians 4:3 Paul says, ‘eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit’, indicating that the unity of the Spirit was there prior to maintaining it. In this verse he is telling them to prize the unity of the Spirit. In 4:4 he speaks of ‘one body and one Spirit’. His treatment of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 is far reaching and profound. Let us look at it.

The key to the chapter is that the community of the Spirit is one that says ‘Jesus is Lord!’ by the Holy Spirit! (12:3), but this is because we are all baptised by one Spirit (‘oneness Spirit’) into one body (‘oneness body’) and made to drink of one Spirit (‘oneness Spirit’). We are not simply located in one body but we are all the natural faculties, limbs, members, of that body. **The Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of fellowship has made us ‘the community of the Holy Spirit’ by entering us into the community of the Godhead.** All the unity, love and fellowship that make the Three to be One is communicated to us by the Spirit. We, in this way, are participators in the Holy Community by the Spirit. We do as is done in the Godhead by its members, we inter-serve, inter-love, inter-honour and inter-share all we have. In the body of the church this is what we do when we open ourselves to intersubjectivity. What we mean by that word ‘intersubjectivity’ is that we give ‘space’ to others within ourselves where we are ourselves, and use the ‘space’ given to us by others. In simple terms, we all share our lives with all others.

What we have just said was evident at Pentecost:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:42–47).

At a later point when they were all filled afresh with the Holy Spirit they showed the same fellowship or *koinonia*:

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness. Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was

not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need (Acts 4:31–35).

Returning to 1 Corinthians 12 we see the community equipped with gifts by which all could serve one another. The giving of gifts is love when it is done by the Spirit alone. 'God so loved that He gave' To love is to give and to give is to love. One John 3:11–18 speaks of anti-love—i.e. hatred—and of true love. Hatred denies not only the flow of oneself into that other but denies that other a love-flowing into ourselves. Indeed, horribly it kills the very life of the other. He who has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart of compassion, how can God's love possibly live in him? To give is to share one's life with others, at the same time receiving of them (cf. Gal. 6:6).

Conclusion: The Outcome of the Love of God

The study in the love of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit tell us that the Divine Community flows out into us, and causes us to flow into them. So we become participators (fellow-shippers) in the divine nature, not being of the divine nature (*ousia*), but one with them as they with us. God is love and His love redeems, glorifies, sanctifies us into the perfection Man needs and which makes us one with them—the Godhead—in their wonderful plan for an eternity, the Community of love reigning in the eternal glory.

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22/8/02