

THE HOLY FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

by A. W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer's teaching on cultivating intimate fellowship with the Holy Spirit through recognizing His personality, honoring Christ, walking in righteousness, and meditating on God's Word.

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- Section One

Contrary to what professing Christians like to think, many of God's people are not willing to walk in perfect agreement with Him, and this may explain why so many believers do not have the power of the Spirit, the peace of the Spirit and many of the other qualities, gifts and benefits which the Spirit of God brings.

The question is: Are we willing to walk with Him in love and obedience?

The answer is that we cannot walk with Him unless we are agreed and if we are not agreed, we will not walk with Him in harmony and fruitfulness and blessing.

Many people in the churches who profess that they have an interest in the subject, "How to cultivate the Spirit's companionship," are not really willing to give up all to obtain all. They are not willing to turn completely toward God and walk with Him.

You may remember that John Bunyan, in his great allegorical writings, often mentioned Mr. Facing Bothways, and we ought to know as well as he did that there are a great many Christians who try to accomplish the difficult task of facing in both directions at the same time. They do want Christ but they also want some of the world. They allow the Lord to disturb their way, but they also disturb the Lord's way, and there is no use talking about being filled with the Spirit and walking in the Spirit unless we are willing to give up all to obtain all!

Now, this old question in the text, "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" is a rhetorical question, equivalent to a positive declaration that two cannot walk together except they be agreed, and the affirmation that if the two walk together, they must in some sense be one.

These two, in order to walk together, must agree that they want to walk together, and they must agree that it is to their advantage to have this companionship together. I think you will see that it all adds up to this: for two to walk together voluntarily, they must in some sense be one. They must be unified on the important issues of their walk and companionship and direction if they are going to be committed to traveling together.

I have discovered that some people are just not ready for this teaching of commitment and consecration and devotion to the highest will of God for their lives. They are still facing both ways.

Let me name some of the types of professing Christians who are not ready to give up all to obtain all.

There are those who are most interested in Christianity for its "insurance" value.

Believe it or not, they want the care and protection that God gives them now, and they want avoidance of hell in time of death. They want the guarantee of heaven at last. To get these things, they seem willing to support the church, give to missions and show a financial interest in other church projects.

Amazing, but true! Some people keep on supporting the church, and they even abstain from some gross pleasures because they want protection - they are interested in the insurance value of Christianity. They want what it has to offer. They are not interested in modernism and liberal Christianity - there isn't any insurance value there.

Are you happy that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross because it means that you will not be brought into judgment, having passed from death into life?

Are you willing to live reasonably well, giving up some gross pleasures as a premium you are paying for the guarantee that God will bless you while you live and take you home to heaven when you die?

Some Christians do not like to have this proposition stated in this manner - for it sort of lets the truth leak out that sets up another question: If this is the basis for our Christian life, are we any better than some of the not-professing sinners?

Not every sinner is dirty, you know. Not every sinner is a rascal. There are honorable men and good men and honest men - men that will tell the truth even if it hurts. They have no hope of eternal life or of heaven to come. They are not followers of our Lord. I have known fine, ethical, honest men who were not Christians.

Actually, I know a man who is so fine and good that everyone wants to make a Christian out of him. He steadfastly refuses and is positive in his statement, "I am not a Christian." He doesn't claim he is winning his way to heaven - he knows he is lost, but he is so good in his life and his ways and his habits that he puts a lot of Christians to shame.

Then there are those who are not willing because their concept of religion is social and not spiritual.

This includes the people who have watered down the religion of the New Testament until it has no strength, no life, no vitality in it. They water it down with their easygoing opinions. They are very broad-minded - in fact, they are so broad-minded that they cannot walk on the narrow way.

They are socially-minded. This is as far as religion goes with them. I am not prepared to say dogmatically that they are not saved, but I am prepared to say that they are not ready for what I am talking about. There is no argument with the fact that the gospel of Christ is essentially spiritual, and Christian truth working upon human souls by the Holy Spirit makes Christian men and women spiritual.

In a similar sense, there are those who are more influenced by the world than by the New Testament, and they are not ready for the Holy Spirit.

Of these people, we have to say that they are influenced far more by Hollywood than they are by Jerusalem. Their spirit and mode of life are more like Hollywood than it is like Jerusalem. If you were to suddenly set them down in the New Jerusalem, they would not feel at home because their mode, the texture of their mind, has been created for them by twentieth century entertainment and not by the things of God!

I am positive that much that passes for the gospel in our day is very little more than a mild case of orthodox religion grafted onto a heart that is sold out to the world in its pleasures and tastes and ambitions.

Now another group that talks about the Holy Spirit but is not prepared for His companionship are those who would like to be filled with the Spirit just for the thrill of it.

I think it is plain that some people want to be thrilled so badly that they would pay any price - except that they will not die to themselves, nor to the world, nor to the flesh.

For these, what I am about to say now will have no sympathetic meaning whatsoever. It is this: You have never come over into the region where God can get to you! The kind of teaching I have been giving has disturbed some people. If you have been traveling along thinking you are all right, and a man of God begins to insist there is yet much land to be possessed, you will probably be disturbed. That is the preliminary twinge that comes to the soul who wants to know God. Whenever the Word of God reaches us and convicts us, it disturbs us. But this is normal - for God has to jar us loose, even if it takes a disturbance.

When we speak of conviction by the Spirit, we must differentiate between knowing Christian doctrine intellectually and knowing it sympathetically. Anyone can learn creeds and catechisms and recite Christian doctrines from memory, but it is quite another thing to let the Word of God reach us sympathetically. I am talking about the human heart that goes out sympathetically to the Word of God.

I hope that there are many more people hungry for God than I know. God keeps many of His mysteries and secrets from me, so I have no idea how many persons have been helped by my ministry and my preaching. I do thank God for those I know about - some of those who have told me of their "sympathetic" reception of the Word. From somewhere came the deep longing, a blessed aspiration, a yearning after God that is so real and so wonderful and so pain-filled that they know what I am talking about - sympathetically.

- Section Two

Now, if you are a spiritually hungry person, Christ is more than insurance against hell, and Christianity is more than an opportunity to mingle socially with good people. If God is real to you, and Christ is real, and your heart is longing after God's best, I want to give you these pointers to help you in cultivating the Spirit's holy friendship.

First, the Holy Spirit is a living Person, and He can be known in an increasing degree of intimacy. Since He is a personality, He can never be fully known in a single encounter.

One of the great mistakes we make is to imagine that by coming to God in the new birth and receiving the Spirit of adoption we know all we can know about God! Similarly, those of us who believe in being filled with the Holy Spirit after conversion also make a mistake in thinking that we know all there is to know about the Holy Spirit.

Oh, my friend, we are just beginning. God's personality is so infinitely rich and manifold that it will take a thousand years of close search and intimate communion to know even the outer edges of the glorious nature of God. When we talk about communion with God and fellowship with the Holy Spirit, we are talking about that which begins now but will grow and increase and mature while life lasts.

Actually, I do find Christians these days who seem to have largely wasted their lives. They were converted to Christ but they have never sought to go on to an increasing knowledge of God. There is untold loss and failure because they have accepted the whole level of things around them as being normal and desirable.

The Holy Spirit is a living Person, and we can know Him and fellowship with Him! We can whisper to Him, and out of a favorite verse of the Bible or a loved hymn, we hear His voice whispering back. Walking with the Spirit can become a habit. It is a gracious thing to strive to know the things of God through the Spirit of God in a friendship that passes the place where it has to be kept up by chatter.

How can we cultivate this holy fellowship? Our second pointer is this: Be engrossed with Jesus Christ.

Do you remember that Jesus, on that last day of the feast, lifted up His voice and cried, "He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living waters. (But he spoke this of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because Jesus was not yet glorified.)"

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit depended upon and waited upon the glorification of Jesus Christ the Lord. Then when Pentecost was fully come and Peter got up to give his great sermon, he referred back to that same passage and said, in Acts 2:32-33, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear."

We must always remember that we will know the Spirit more intimately as we make more of Jesus Christ the Lord. As Jesus Himself said, a ministry of the Holy Spirit would be to take the things of Christ and show them to us.

This brings a companion thought - honor Christ and the Holy Spirit will honor you. We walk with the Holy Spirit when we walk with Christ, for Christ will always be where He is honored. The Holy Spirit will honor the one who honors the Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Let's honor Him by giving Him His right title. Let's call Him Lord. Let's believe that He is Lord. Let's call Him Christ. Let's believe that He is Christ. Remember that "God has made this Jesus who you crucified Lord and Christ, and set him at his own right hand and put all things under his feet, and made him to be head over all things."

As we honor Jesus, the Spirit of God becomes glad within us. He ceases to hold back, He communes with us and imparts Himself, and the sun comes up and heaven comes near as Jesus Christ becomes our All in all.

To glorify Jesus is the business of the church, and to glorify Jesus is the work of the Holy Spirit. I can walk with Him when I am doing the same things He is doing and going the same way He is going and traveling at the same speed He is traveling. I must honor Him by obedience, by witness, by fellowship.

There is another pointer: We must walk in righteousness if we are to know the Holy Spirit in increasing intimacy.

Why should we try to argue with the fact that God cannot possibly have sweet fellowship with those who will not live right and walk right?

We have magnified grace in this grace-conscious age. We have magnified grace out of all proportion to the place God gives to it in the Bible. We do have now, as Jude predicted "...ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." We are so afraid that we will reflect upon the all-sufficiency of grace that we do not dare tell Christians that they must live right.

Paul wrote his epistles in the Holy Spirit and he laid down holy, inward ethics, moral rules for the inward Christian. You can read them in Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Galatians.

Read the Sermon on the Mount and the other teachings of Jesus, and you will see that He does expect His people to be clean and pure and right.

Now, I have heard that a Christian brother has said, "Tozer doesn't distinguish between discipleship and salvation. You can be a Christian without being a disciple."

Just let me ask: Who said that you can be a Christian without being a disciple? I don't think you can be a Christian without being a disciple. The idea that I can come to the Lord and by grace have all of my sins forgiven and have my name written in heaven, and have the carpenter go to work on a mansion in my Father's house, and at the same time raise hell on my way to heaven is impossible and unscriptural. It cannot be found in the Bible.

We are never saved by our good works, but we are not saved apart from good works. Out of our saving faith in Jesus Christ, there springs immediately goodness and righteousness. Spring is not brought by flowers, but you cannot have spring without flowers. It isn't my righteousness that saves, but the salvation I have received brings righteousness.

I think we must face up to this now - that we must walk in righteousness if we are going on to know the Lord. The man who is not ready to live right is not saved, and he will not be saved, and he will be deceived in that great day.

The grace of God that brings salvation teaches the heart that we should deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world. There you have the three dimensions of life: soberly - that is me; righteously - that is my fellow man; and godly - that is God. We ought not to make the mistake of thinking that we can be spiritual - and not be good.

I cannot believe that a man is on the road to heaven when he is habitually performing the kind of deeds that would logically indicate that he ought to be on his way to hell.

How can the two walk together accept they be agreed? He is the Holy Spirit, and if I walk an unholy way, how can I be in fellowship with Him?

The fifth point of help is this: Make your thoughts a clean sanctuary.

God reveals to us that our thoughts are a part of us. Someone has said that "thoughts are things," and the Spirit is all-seeking and all-hearing and all-loving and pure.

Can you imagine a man with malicious and evil thoughts in his heart having companionship with the loving Holy Spirit? Can you imagine a man bloated with egotism knowing the Holy Spirit in any like intimacy? Can you imagine a man who is a deceiver having blessed fellowship with the Holy Spirit? Never!

My friend, if you are habitually given over to thinking and harboring and savoring dirty thoughts, you are habitually without the communion of the Holy Spirit!

Keep your mind pure. Clean out the sanctuary the way old Hezekiah did. They had dirtied up that sanctuary so when he had taken over, Hezekiah got all of the priests together. It took them days and days but they carried out all of the filth and burned it, threw it over the bank and got rid of it, and then went back and sanctified the temple. Then the blessed God came and they had their worship again.

Our thoughts are the decorations inside the sanctuary where we live. If our thoughts are purified by the blood of Christ, we are living in a clean room, no matter if we are wearing overalls covered with grease. Our thoughts largely decide the mood and weather and climate within our beings, and God considers our thoughts as part of us. They should be thoughts of peace, thoughts of pity and mercy and kindness, thoughts of charity, thoughts of God and the Son of God - these are pure things, good things and high things.

Therefore, if we would cultivate the Spirit's acquaintance, we must have the control of our thoughts. Our mind ought not to be a wilderness in which every kind of unclean thought makes its own way.

Again, for the kind of fellowship we are talking about, seek to know Him in His Word. Remember that the Spirit of God inspired the Word and He will be revealed in the Word. I really have no place in my sympathies for those Christians who neglect the Word or ignore the Word or get revelations apart from the Word. This is the Book of God, after all, and if we know the Book well enough, we will have an answer to every problem in the world.

Every problem that touches us is answered in the Book - stay by the Word! I want to preach the Word, love the Word and make the Word the most important element in my Christian life.

Read it much, read it often, brood over it, think over it, meditate over it - meditate on the Word of God day and night. When you are awake at night, think of a helpful verse. When you get up in the morning, no matter how you feel, think of a verse and make the Word of God the important element in your day. The Holy Spirit wrote the Word, and if you make much of the Word, He will make much of you. It is through the Word that He reveals Himself. Between those covers is a living Book. God wrote it and it is still vital and effective and alive. God is in this Book and the Holy Spirit is in this Book, and if you want to find Him, go into this Book.

Point #7 Let the old saints be our example. They came to the Word of God and meditated. They laid the Bible on the old fashioned, handmade chair, got down on the old, scrubbed, board floor and meditated on the Word. As they waited, faith mounted. The Spirit and faith illuminated. They had only a Bible with fine print, narrow margins and poor paper, but they knew their Bible better than some of us do with all of our helps.

Let's practice the art of Bible meditation. But please don't grab that phrase and go out and form a club - we are organized to death already. Just meditate. Let us just be plain, thoughtful Christians. Let us open our Bibles, spread them out on a chair, and mediate on the Word of God. It will open itself to us, and the Spirit of God will come and brood over it.

I do challenge you to meditate, quietly, reverently, prayerfully, for a month. Put away questions and answers and the filling in of the blank lines in the portions you haven't been able to understand. Put all of the cheap trash away and take the Bible, get on your knees, and in faith, say, "Father, here I am. Begin to teach me!"

He will surely teach you about Himself and about Jesus and about the Spirit and about life and death and heaven and hell, and about His own presence.

Finally, our last pointer is to cultivate the art of recognizing the presence of the Spirit everywhere, all of the time.

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world. The Holy Spirit is here and you will find it impossible to just walk out and hide from His presence. David tried it, and in the 139th Psalm tells how he found out that he could not get away from God.

"If I ascend up into heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in hell, you are there. If I ...dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall your hand lead me," David said. "If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me." (Psalms 139:8-11) He testified that he could not get away from the presence of God.

If you are interested in Him, you will find Him where you are. The Presence is all about you. When you awaken in the morning, in place of burying your head behind the local newspaper, can't you get in just a few thoughts of God while you eat your grapefruit? Remember, cultivating the Holy Spirit's acquaintance is a job. It is something you do, and yet it is so easy and delightful.

Now, I recommend that you find out what it is that has been hindering you in your Christian experience. You have not made progress. You do not know God as well as you did.

It all depends upon how you must answer certain questions about your daily life habits - some things you do and others that you are not doing. Do these things help to hide the face of Jesus from you? Do these things chill and stifle your spiritual progress? Do these things take the joy out of your spirit? Do they make the Word of God a little less sweet? Do they make earth more desirable and heaven farther away?

Repentance may be necessary. There may be some necessary cleaning up before the Holy Spirit will come and warm your heart and refresh it and make it fragrant with His presence. This is how we cultivate the Spirit's friendship and companionship.

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