

The Holy Spirit's Testimony

by Bishop W. F. Mallalieu

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu's sermon emphasizes the Holy Spirit's vital role in affirming believers' adoption as children of God through various forms of testimony and assurance.

Scripture: Romans 8:9, Romans 8:14-15, 2 Corinthians 1:21, 2 Corinthians 5:5, Galatians 4:6, Ephesians 1:13, 1 John 3:23, 1 John 4:13

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Assurance Of Salvation"

Description

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu preaches about the assurance of salvation through the testimony of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the direct communication between the Spirit of God and the human soul to confirm adoption into God's family. He discusses the importance of trusting in God's timing and method of communication, highlighting that the Spirit's witness may come in various forms, such as a quiet assurance or a still small voice. Mallalieu stresses the need to let God have His way and patiently wait for His promises to be fulfilled, as the Spirit's testimony includes repentance, faith, justification, regeneration, and sanctification.

Transcript

In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
Mighty, and merciful, and just;
Thy sacred Word is past;
And I, who dare thy Word believe,
Without committing sin shall live,
Shall live to God at last.
I rest in thine Almighty power;
The name of Jesus is my tower
That hides my life above:
Thou canst, thou wilt, my helper be;

My confidence is all in thee,

The faithful God of love.

-- Charles Wesley.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. -- Rom. viii, 15, 16, 17.

THE third testimony to the soul's conversion is that of the Holy Spirit. In this it is assumed that in some way the Holy Spirit communicates with the human soul and gives specific testimony to the fact of adoption into the heavenly family. There are those who doubt in regard to this form of testimony, notwithstanding the direct and explicit declarations of the Word of God.

No one doubts that one human intelligence can communicate with another. And it is equally clear that more than one method of communication is possible. It may be by a glance of the eye, by a smile or a frown, by a gesture, by the pressure of the hand, by a whisper or a full tone; but no one need be limited to either of these methods, for there is an almost endless variety of ways by which thoughts, ideas, suggestions, may be communicated from one person to another.

If, then, finite intelligences can thus communicate, why should any one hesitate to believe that the Holy Spirit, the Infinite Intelligence, can communicate with the finite? It would be far more rational to say that, as much greater as the Infinite is than the finite, so much greater the possibility, the probability indeed, that the Infinite may and will communicate with the finite.

But in these personal experiences it is very natural that persons mark out the process by which such communications shall be made. Time and place and method are wrongly supposed to be essential. Here again it may be said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." We may rest assured that the Spirit will not yield to human dictation, and will not necessarily favor preconceived notions. There must be no attempt at dictation, there must be no insistence upon the gratification of human wishes and preferences.

The Spirit's testimony is sometimes as unseen and silent as the falling dew. The dew is a blessed and refreshing reality, though we may neither see it nor hear it as it falls upon leaf and flower. So in the soul there may be a quiet as absolute as the movement of light, but at the same time there is a sweet assurance of salvation and sonship that will not admit of the slightest doubt. Or, again, the testimony of the Spirit may come to the soul as a still small voice, as gentle and soft as the mother's whisper of love in the ear of the little babe nestling in the enfolding arms. Why not be content when thus the Spirit communicates with a trusting soul? Why prefer the silence of the falling dew to the still small voice? Surely, God was revealing himself to the prophet in the way that was best suited to his needs when thus he came to him in the still small voice, but God was present revealing himself to Moses when Sinai's trembling beneath the footfalls of the Almighty sent a quiver and a thrill to the very center and heart of the earth. So, God was present revealing himself when the prison at Philippi shook from lowest foundation to highest turret and finial when it felt the mighty throbbing of the earthquake. God's earthquake came, and bars and bolts were removed, and all doors swung wide open, and stocks and fetters were unloosed.

The best way is to let God have his own way. The best time is God's time. The best place is God's place. The soul that patiently waits, that fully trusts, that leaves time and place and method all to God, will not be disappointed. The promise will not fail. It never has failed. It can not fail, for God is faithful.

Let it be noticed that the promise has direct reference to the matter of adoption, while at the same time it inferentially includes all that precedes in the experience of a penitent believer. It thus includes repentance, faith, pardon, justification, and regeneration. These all precede adoption, and are prerequisites. There can be no testimony to adoption independent of these; hence we say that the testimony to one's adoption includes the testimony concerning them.

It is equally clear and certain that the Holy Spirit does testify to the reality and actual possession of the fullness of the blessing. The Spirit witnesses just as definitely to the experience of sanctification as to that of adoption. By whatever name the experience may be called, it is found by the gracious help of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit will bear witness to his own work. This witness may be delayed, it may not come in accordance with preconceived notions, it may not involve any anticipated manifestations, but it will come.

There are numerous passages in the Scriptures that clearly teach that the Holy Spirit does testify concerning the relations of the believer to God. We read:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. -- Rom. viii, 14.

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. -- 1 John iv, 13.

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. -- Eph. 1, 13, 14.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. -- Rom. viii, 9.

And this is the commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us. -- 1 John iii, 23, 24.

Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. -- 2 Cor. i, 21, 22.

Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of his Spirit. -- 2 Cor. v, 5.

Let it be clearly understood that the witness of the Holy Spirit does not involve the idea of anything that can be perceived by any or all of the five senses. It is surely not impossible to imagine that the Spirit might communicate with us in this way, and possibly he has done so in some instances, but no one has any good ground for supposing that such will be his experience. The Spirit's communications are not made by signs in the heavens or on the earth, and certainly not through preternatural or supernatural visions or dreams. Views different from these just expressed would evidently lead to all sorts of fanaticism and folly. Wesley gave special prominence to the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, and his teachings in regard to it are as important and needful at the present time as they were when he lived among men. He says:

None who believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God can doubt the importance of such a truth as this; a truth revealed therein, not once only, not obscurely, not incidentally, but frequently, and that in express terms; but solemnly and of set purpose, as denoting one of the peculiar privileges of the children of God. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. 1, p. 93.

Again, of this doctrine, the witness of the Spirit, he says:

When may a person judge himself to have attained this?

When, after having been convinced of inbred sin, by a far deeper and clearer conviction than that he experienced before justification, and after having experienced a gradual mortification of it, he experiences a total death to sin, and an entire renewal in the love and image of God, so as to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. Not that "to feel all love and no sin" is a sufficient proof. Several have experienced this for a time before their souls were fully renewed. None, therefore, ought to believe that the work is done till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification as clearly as his justification. -- Plain Account.

The design of that witness is to assure us we are the children of God; and this design it does answer. -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. II, p. 100.

It is certain, over and above those other graces which the Holy Spirit inspires into, or operates in, a Christian, and over and above his imperceptible influences; I do intend all mankind should understand me to assert ... every Christian believer hath a perceptible testimony of the Spirit that he is a child of God. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. VI, p. 641.

"The same Spirit beareth witness with our spirit." (Rom. viii, 16.) With the spirit of every true believer, by a testimony distinct from that of his own spirit, or the testimony of a good conscience. Happy they who enjoy this, clear and constant. -- Wesley's Notes on Rom. viii, 16.

WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT PRECEDES THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit, that they are children of God. And it is not questioned whether there is a testimony of the Spirit, but whether there is any direct testimony; whether there is any other than that which arises from a consciousness of the fruit of the Spirit We believe there is ... because, in the nature of the thing, the testimony must precede the fruit which springs from it. -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. II, p. 99.

WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT -- IMPORTANCE OF THE DOCTRINE

It more nearly concerns the Methodists, so called, clearly to understand, explain, and defend the doctrine; because it is one great part of the testimony which God has given them to bear to all mankind. It is by his peculiar blessing upon them in searching the Scriptures, confirmed by the experience of his children, that this great evangelical truth has been recovered, which had been for many years well nigh lost and forgotten. -- Wesley's Works, Vol. I, p. 93.

THE METHOD OF THE SPIRIT'S DIRECT WITNESS

Meantime let it be observed, I do not mean hereby that the Spirit of God testifies this by any outward voice; no, nor always by the inward voice, although he may do this sometimes. Neither do I suppose that

he always applies to the heart (though he often may) one or more texts of Scripture. But he so works upon the soul by his immediate influence, and by a strong though inexplicable operation, that the stormy wind and troubled waves subside, and there is a sweet calm, the heart resting as in the arms of Jesus, and the sinner being clearly satisfied that God is reconciled, that all his "iniquities are forgiven, and his sins covered."

Now, what is the matter of dispute concerning this? Not whether there be a witness or testimony of the Spirit; not whether the Spirit does testify with our spirit, that we are the children of God; none can deny this, without flatly contradicting the Scriptures, and charging a lie upon God. -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. II, p. 94.

THE DIRECT WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

What, then, is the other witness? This might easily be learned, if the text ("The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," (Rom. viii, 16) were not sufficiently clear, from the verse immediately preceding: "Ye have received, not the spirit of bondage, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." (Rom. viii, 15) It follows, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

This is farther explained by the parallel text, Gal. iv, 6, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Is not this something immediate and direct, not the result of reasoning or argumentation? Does not the Spirit cry, "Abba, Father," in our hearts the moment it is given, antecedently to any reflection upon our sincerity? Yes, to any reasoning whatsoever! And is not this the plain natural sense of the words which strikes any one as soon as he hears them? All these texts, then, in their most obvious meaning, describe a direct testimony of the Spirit. -- Wesley's Sermons, Vol. I, p. 95.

But this only applies to the direct witness of the Spirit, for before the fruits of the Spirit are really and fully manifest as set forth in Gal. vi, 22, 23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance," there has come to the soul the direct witness of the Spirit to the fact of adoption. The fruits of the Spirit attend and follow this direct witness of the Spirit to the one blessed fact of personal adoption. As long as the fruits abide the Spirit will continue his testimony, so that the abiding and abounding fruits of the Spirit accompany the direct testimony of the Spirit. And at this point Wesley certainly would not object to "reasoning or argumentation." He would certainly reason, if I have the fruits of the Spirit I may justly conclude that I have the direct witness of the Spirit; and, further, if I have the direct witness of the Spirit to my adoption, I may anticipate and expect the fruits of the Spirit in my heart and life.

Nor does this view taken by Wesley at all militate against the changes of feeling experienced by the penitent and believing soul. Nor does it in any sense exclude the intellectual process by which an intelligent and responsible person concludes that when, to the fullest extent of his light, knowledge, and conviction, he turns from all his sins and believes the Word of God, of the God who can not lie, that then his sins are pardoned, and he is freely justified, and that his peace is made with God.

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