

The Self-Effacing Spirit

by G.W. North

The Holy Spirit's primary goal is to conform us to the image of Christ, and He requires our total co-operation to accomplish this task.

Scripture: John 16:13, Romans 8:9

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Transformation in Christ"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes the self-effacing nature of the Holy Spirit, who seeks to glorify the Father and the Son rather than Himself. He highlights the Spirit's various roles, such as Comforter and Teacher, and His commitment to reproducing the life of Christ in believers. North explains that the Holy Spirit's work requires total cooperation from us, as He aims to transform our entire being--spirit, soul, and body--into the likeness of Christ. The sermon underscores the necessity of living by the Spirit to experience the fullness of our inheritance in Christ. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as a powerful and humble agent of God's transformative work in our lives.

Transcript

Plainly the Holy Spirit is determined not to take to Himself any of the glory or credit which belongs to the Son or the Father; He intends that either the Son or the Father must have that. This characteristic humility is displayed almost unobtrusively throughout, as when He refers to Himself as the Spirit of God. This phrase is generally taken to mean the whole being of God under the headship of the Father, which is proper and natural, for the Father is the highest expression of authority in any family or society. Given His full title, the Holy Spirit should be spoken of as 'The God, The Holy, The Spirit'. This being recognized, He is at once seen to be a person most profound and august, totally beyond our powers of comprehension. Whether we call Him God the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, or just the Spirit, it is all the same (and all are quite proper expressions to use). He is quite happy with them. As long as He is fulfilling the work of the Father towards Jesus the Son, or fulfilling the role of the Son in us towards the Father, He is content. The Holy Spirit is a glorious person, adapting His own wonderful self to the wishes and requirements of God to us according to our need, and so magnifying Him. Whatever the office He must fill in order to do this, whether Comforter, Teacher, Leader, Empowerer or any of His other functionary offices, the blessed Holy Spirit is content as long as thereby the Father and the Son may be glorified; He is the ever-present self-sacrificing workman of God. What a wonderful person He is.

It is very noticeable that, in this lengthy passage about the person and work of the Holy Spirit, He is not called by His full name or given His full title. This is not a mark of disrespect; Paul would no more be disrespectful to the Blessed One than he would ignore or blaspheme Him. The apostle loved and honoured Him. This use of the shortened form of the name of the third person of God is not confined to references to the Holy spirit alone. In scripture the practice is more regularly used when referring to the Lord Jesus Christ than when speaking of the Holy Spirit. With either person, the general reason for this is to draw attention to, or lay emphasis upon, the particular position which that person is then occupying or the specific work or the nature of the work He is doing. It is the apostle's purpose throughout this entire section to emphasize the intensely spiritual nature of all he is saying. From the commencement of chapter eight and throughout, he uses the word spirit in various ways and connections many times (once with reference to man) and the full title, the Holy Spirit, once only. The insistence here is that everything is of spirit, whether of the Spirit of God or the spirit of man. That it is absolutely holy also must be unconditionally accepted; that goes without saying. The apostle's unshakable resolve here though is to make sure that everybody understands that nothing of what he is saying is addressed to the flesh; it is not of the flesh, or for the flesh, or in the flesh; everything is of, in and by spirit. God is Spirit, man is spirit; Paul is teaching things of spirit, whether they be things of God or things of man. He deals with things, powers, works and desires of the flesh in chapter seven, and leaves the subject there, showing his determination to do so by switching from flesh to body when speaking of human physical being in this section. He does this so as to eliminate from our minds all thoughts (whether they be suppositions or calculations) that anything other than spirit can possibly engage in what he now has to say.

How full of precious instruction is this chapter. Paul wrote it to enlighten us as to some of the more basic offices and ministrations of the Spirit: in it He is called the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; the Spirit of Him (the Father) that raised up Christ from the dead: the Spirit of leadership: the Spirit of adoption: the Spirit of witness: the Spirit of fruitfulness: the Spirit of intercession. He comes to men to enable them to walk after Him and not after the flesh. He has created such a variety of possibilities, and opened up such prospects for us -- joint-heirship with Christ, glory, love, power -- that we are almost overwhelmed by them. So great are the blessings, that for evermore we are indebted to God to refuse to live after the flesh any more. It is true that this is a negative commitment, but it is a very necessary one indeed. This is a personal debt we owe Him, which, if we fail to discharge on this earth in this life, we can never discharge hereafter. We can only discharge this by living positively for Him; until we do this we shall not be able to have and enjoy our inheritance as we ought. By the law of the Spirit of God we have to live by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus to such effect that the spirit of Jesus shall be reproduced in us -- then we shall not be held and motivated in any way by the law of sin and death.

The Holy Spirit has come for the whole man -- spirit, soul and body; not for a third, or two thirds of him, but for all of him, and the direct purpose of His coming is the reproduction of the life of Christ in every man bought with His blood. But, although He is so powerful, He cannot do this without our co-operation, and this must be total. We must be very attentive to Him and obey Him willingly and lovingly, for He will not force us to do so. Firstly it is necessary for us to recognize what God has in mind, namely that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. Everything else, whatever it may be, is subordinate to that. All the Holy Spirit's energies are directed to this end in every man; He has it always in mind, and all the time He is thinking how best to accomplish it. He was there in conference with Father and Son when it was decided that all God's sons should be predestinated, having already, in God's heart, been conformed to the image of the Son. That was the original determination, and it must have first place in every man's thinking. God's design is not to make us equal to the Son; that could never be. He is God and in His sonship He is unique;

but that uniqueness apart, the Spirit is come to conform each one of us to Him in the likeness of His glorious humanity -- the nature in which the Son subsisted as a man on earth.

This the Spirit cannot do unless He receives one hundred percent co-operation from us; He has to change and adjust spirit, mind and body totally and progressively to the end in view. Unless we allow the power of God to affect us in every realm of our being, His task is impossible; not even God can accomplish it. There is nothing else for it. Man is so utterly degenerate; his need so great and his case so hopeless, that apart from total re-making he is lost. Hope for man lies in God alone, and the Spirit of holiness and love has come to bring it. He is equipped with all the power of God, backed up by and enhanced with the redemption in Christ Jesus, with the fixed intention of re-making us entirely thereby. He (1) brings believing men the spirit of Christ to identify us with Himself; (2) imparts the mind of Christ that He may teach us; (3) develops (in us) the soul of Christ that He may fellowship with us; (4) quickens our mortal body that He may walk and work with us. The result is that our entire life, our whole human nature is renewed. This is the degree to which God will save men on this earth; Jesus came to justify us, Father comes to own us, the Holy Ghost comes to glorify us. God expects all our minds to be instinct with this and all our thoughts to be ablaze with it.

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