

The Holy Spirit of Promise

by H.J. Vine

The sermon explores the vital role of the Holy Spirit in sealing believers, unifying the body of Christ, and empowering them for life in Him.

Scripture: Romans 8:10

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Eternal Purpose"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the significant role of the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Ephesians, emphasizing His mission in securing the assembly as the body and bride of Christ, in alignment with God's eternal purpose. The Spirit's work revolves around revealing the glory and love of Christ, sealing believers, and providing a foretaste of heavenly glory while guiding, comforting, and strengthening them. The Spirit's ministry focuses on exalting Jesus, leading believers into truth, and maintaining unity and vitality in the body of Christ, ensuring that they are sealed until the day of redemption.

Transcript

The work of the Holy Spirit of God finds a large place in the Epistle to the Ephesians. This might be expected where the mystery concerning Christ and the assembly is so prominent, for the Spirit's special mission in the world during the present period is immediately connected therewith.

He is designated "that Holy Spirit of promise" in chapter 1:13; and twelve times is He spoken of in this epistle. His present service in securing the assembly, the body and bride of Christ, for her living Head in heaven is shown, and that in accord with God's eternal purpose in Christ.

That purpose concerning His beloved Son filled His heart and mind before the ages of time; and, though to the natural eye it appears otherwise, He works all things in regard to it: "according to the counsel of His own will" everything is resolved in relation to that unalterable purpose, for the deep joy of His own heart, and for the glory and satisfaction of His Son.

The Holy Spirit has come. Eternal redemption having been obtained in Christ through His blood, He seals those who believe in connection with the exalted Object of divine counsel, and gives them a foretaste of the glory to which they are going, while He comforts, cheers, and strengthens them on their way, ministering the unsearchable riches of our Lord Jesus Christ and His surpassing love to their expectant hearts. Christ is the glorious Object in view in all the Spirit's work, just as He is also of the purpose and counsel of God, and He becomes the one pre-eminent Object of our hearts too, as the Spirit is unhindered

and ungrieved within us.

Neither ourselves nor the Spirit are to be objects for us. It is His pleasure to show us the things of the Father and the Son. The Lord Jesus said, when speaking of His coming, "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine, and shall announce it to you"; adding, "all things that the Father has are Mine".

When Abraham counselled concerning his son, his eldest servant undertook the journey to a distant land to obtain a wife for Isaac. His whole mission and work had the son in view, and that according to Abraham's purpose. The rich gifts of "jewels of silver and jewels of gold and raiment" would impress the fair damsel: the golden earrings, and the golden bracelets with the other precious things, would tell her of the wealth to which Abraham's son was heir. The words of the unnamed servant, too, would extol the object of his service, and one whom she had never seen would become endeared to her as she journeyed to join him where he was.

The Spirit has also brought to us the jewels of divine grace, the silver riches of redemption--the golden treasures of righteousness--and the precious things of the excellencies of Christ. He tells us, too, of Himself, of His glory and His love, and so wins our hearts for the Son of the Father, that it can be said of us--before we see Him face to face--"Whom having not seen ye love; in Whom though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye exult with joy unspeakable and filled with the glory".

As we have previously seen, the mystery in the first place speaks of Christ's co-heirs; secondly, of the fellow members of His body; and thirdly, of the joint partakers of life in Christ. When Rebekah came to Isaac he dwelt at "Lahairoi", at the well of "the living one". There she shared in all that was Isaac's. As one with himself she partook of the same inheritance and of the same life. At the end of the Bible the Spirit shows us the bride of Christ--one with Him in glory--one with The Living One. Everything is seen to be marked by life in the energy of the Spirit. The Book of Life is there. The Fountain of life is there. The Tree of life flourishes there. The pure River of water of life flows there; and meanwhile, before the Bridegroom calls her, the Spirit and the bride say to Him, Come! She longs to see Him! Then, turning earnestly to those still "dead in trespasses and sins", she says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"!

Life and the Spirit are found together in the Word, and both are the portion of those who belong to Christ. Indeed, it is said in Romans 8:10, "The Spirit is life on account of righteousness". This is ours to know in divine power now, before the glorious day to which we are hastening onward. Therefore we may well allow our glad notes of praise to resound along the heavenward road

"Now by grace the Spirit's given,

Here to us these themes belong;

Let us sing the song of heaven;

'Tis our everlasting song!

Endless life in Christ possessing,

Let us praise His glorious Name,

Glory, honour, power and blessing,

Be for ever to the Lamb!"

The Spirit and Christ's Co-Heirs

The first mention of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians speaks of His sealing the co-heirs (chap. 1:13-14). This sealing is individual, but it is in view of what is collective. Each one who hears the Word of truth, the glad tidings of salvation, and believes in Christ, is immediately sealed with the Spirit of promise. It should not read, "After ye believed", but "having believed ye have been sealed".

The Spirit is here designated "The Spirit of promise" because the heirs and the inheritance are before the mind. His coming was often foretold. He is yet to be poured out on "all flesh" (Joel 2:28). We have an example of it in Acts 2; but only one hundred and twenty were then baptized by Him. This was extended necessarily to Gentiles who believed (see Acts 11:15); nevertheless, there is no repetition of this baptism now as some seem to seek after.

By the gift and baptism of the Spirit at the beginning both Jews and Gentiles who received Him were made one. That was according to the truth of the mystery--fellow-members of the same body. Since that time He seals individuals (thus, too, they are vitally brought into the one body), and He gives them a foretaste of what is to come, when He will pervade all, for He is "the Earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession". In God's own time the inheritance will be actually possessed by Christ and His co-heirs. They have the firstfruits of the Spirit now, as being indwelt by the Spirit of promise; and these co-heirs are the sons of God, the brethren of Christ; therefore, because they are sons, the Spirit of God's Son has been sent out into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6). In Ephesians 2:18, their liberty of approach to the Father is said to be by "one Spirit", for though He graciously seals us individually as the sons and heirs of God, yet, what is collective is in view as we have said. Christ presents them with Himself before the Father. They are one with Him, and He is not ashamed to call them brethren. His own Spirit--the Spirit of God's Son--is in their hearts. All this subsists vitally.

Now, though the sealing of the co-heirs comes first in Ephesians, because the marking off of those who are to form the assembly is in view; yet, it is well that we should notice other things in connection with the work of the Spirit.

The preaching, which calls sinners out of darkness into this marvellous association, is by "the Holy Ghost sent from heaven"; and those who believe are "born of water and the Spirit". Scripture tells us that the water is the Word, and this is made operative in those who hear in faith by the Holy Spirit. A new nature is the consequence, and this delights in what is of God, in contrast to the old nature which finds pleasure in fleshly lusts. The love of God, too, is shed abroad in the heart, the love which was manifested when Christ died for us, "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord", the love which God commends to us.

Moreover, the Spirit abidingly indwells those who believe. He is the power by which they enter into, and do, those things in which the new nature delights. The truths of Scripture become living and real to them, for the same Spirit who inspired the one indwells the other. This explains the fact that such understand what the most educated students of Scripture, if unconverted, fail to grasp. Those who have the Spirit may be guided into all truth, but those who are in the flesh, still unsaved, cannot know these things. The normal way of the Spirit is to teach us through the inspired writings. He brings them home to us by ministry or by private reading of the Word of God.

We have said, the Object in view in all His service is the Son of God, for He is here to glorify Him before our hearts. Even in the ministry of the truth of Scripture, He leads our thoughts to the One who is Himself the Truth personally. He may bring many things before us; and, when grieved, give us a sense of what we

have done to so grieve Him; but, normally, His gracious work is ever to lead us to the Son of God, giving us to know His personal glory and love, and the portion which is ours with Him as His co-heirs.

The mystery itself was revealed at the first by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets. He is the Unction of 1 John 2:20, by whom we know all things. It is He also by whose power we are strengthened in the inner man so that Christ, the Centre and Sun of the coming glory, might dwell in our hearts through faith; so that the surpassing love of Christ may be our present portion. He it is who enables us to wield His sword--"the sword of the Spirit"--in the conflict with the powers of darkness, who would rob us of the enjoyment of our part with Christ. It is by Him we are maintained in the spirit of prayer and supplication; and in Him the kingdom of God is known--its righteousness, peace, and joy. How needful, therefore, is it for us to heed the exhortation, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption".

He would ever keep the Object of His mission, and the true Object of our hearts, before us; but the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. Those who are the sons of God are led by the Spirit, and the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in them as they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. It is the Spirit who witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God; and "if children, heirs also: heirs of God and Christ's joint heirs: if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:17). He is already glorified at God's right hand as Head of the assembly, and

"The Spirit doth unite

Our souls to Him our Head,

And forms us to His image bright,

While in His steps we tread".

The One Spirit and the One Body

We learn in Ephesians 3:6, that the unifying of all believers into one body is the second part of the mystery: called out from amongst Jews and Gentiles they are made one. Chapter 4:4 teaches us, "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling". The "one Spirit" is named again in chapter 2:18, in regard to our access to the Father; also in 1 Corinthians 12:13, in reference to the fact that "by one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or freemen, and have all been given to drink of one Spirit". This emphasizes the vital unity of all true believers, and the power by which this unity subsists.

Throughout all the present period the Spirit maintains this vital organism, whatever failure may come into the professing assemblies of Christ: during the time of Christ's rejection, of His bodily absence from the world, of His exaltation at the right hand of God as the Head of the assembly, the Spirit never fails in His gracious work.

When Christ ascended to the Father, the Spirit came down at Pentecost upon about one hundred and twenty believers who were gathered together in one accord at Jerusalem. That was the beginning of the body, the assembly. It was the baptism of the Spirit. From that moment it could be said, "There is one body and one Spirit". It could not have been said previously, for redemption had not been secured, and risen life in and for man was unknown. Moreover, the Head of the assembly, the body, was not exalted, nor the Spirit given. Both were necessary for the forming of the one body and the uniting of it vitally to its glorious Head. It is said of our Lord Jesus Christ in resurrection, "He is the Head of the body, the

assembly, who is the Beginning, Firstborn from among the dead". The assembly could not have been in being before this.

The truth of the one body was not unfolded till long after Pentecost, though the body was itself there. The truth was given to the apostle of the Gentiles to minister. There had been national dealings with Israel, and individual dealings with Abraham and others, but nothing of a corporate nature before Pentecost. Such a thing as the members of one body being vitally united together by the Spirit to a living Man in heaven was not and could not be previously known. The very gifts which are peculiar to the present dispensation are for "the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). They had no existence till Christ was ascended to God's right hand. Those, too, which are in the assembly itself derive their diverse abilities and operations from the Spirit given at Pentecost.

The importance of the peculiar and special constitution of the assembly needs to be better understood, and the functions of the members of the body in the Spirit's power also. "All these things operates the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular according as He pleases. For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ. For also in the power of one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:11-13). This aspect of the truth not only preserves from clericalism, but also from independency; for all the members of the one body are necessary; and where the Spirit is unquenched collectively He manifests His activities through the members for the profit of all. If all the gifts in the assembly were thus happily in function there would be oneness and yet diversity in ministry, and the distinct operations of the Spirit therewith would be for the comfort, cheer, and blessing of the whole.

The apostle Paul often refers to himself as the persecutor of the assembly. He, above all the others, became its devoted servant for Christ's glory after his conversion. Then, we are told in Acts 9 the assemblies had peace; being edified and walking in the fear of the Lord, they increased through the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Where the Spirit is unhindered in His gracious and encouraging work, prosperity in the assemblies is sure to be present. He is called the Comforter, also the Spirit of Truth. He leads, He guides, He teaches, and He glorifies Christ. He is in us and with us, nor does He leave us even when we grieve Him, for we are sealed by Him unto the day of redemption. May we therefore have grace and solicitude to see that no hindrance exists on our side. May we be self-judged, and free in heart and mind to be led and guided by Him.

In speaking of the gifts named in Ephesians 4 we said they had the edification of the assembly in view. The first two named had to do with the foundation; the second two (for they are not three) with the continuation of the work. We are distinctly told that "the apostles and prophets" laid "the foundation" (Eph. 2:20). These were given from Christ ascended, and have no connection with Old Testament prophets. The "evangelists" and "shepherd-teachers" are the two gifts remaining today, and will remain till the work is complete. There is also, as we have indicated, the functions of the body for its self-building up, through the working in its measure of each member and part, and thus it makes "the increase of the body to its self-building up in love".

There is still one body and one Spirit today: one living organism energized by the Holy Ghost: every member is livingly joined to the exalted Man, the Head of the assembly; and it is to Him we are to grow up in all things, as we await His coming again, for

"'Tis thence--now Christ is gone on high,

Redemption's work complete--

The Spirit brings His glory nigh,

To those who for Him wait".

The Spirit and the Life

We have spoken of the Spirit of promise and the co-heirs also of the one Spirit and the one body; and it now remains for us to consider the Spirit and the life.

We saw that, primarily, the truth connected with the co-heirs was individual, but that the collective was in view, according to the first part of the mystery of Christ and the assembly. Likewise that the corporate aspect of the truth was contained in the second. In that which is now before us we have the vital side, according to the last part of the mystery.

The assembly could have no being at all apart from life in Christ Jesus. This is a fundamental matter, as Ephesians 4:17-25 shows. Either we are altogether "alienated from the life of God", or we are of "the new man" and "members one of another", partaking together of divine life. The Spirit is the power of this new life; therefore progress in every grace is to be expected; nevertheless, we either have life or we have not.

The Holy Spirit is so completely identified with this life, that in the first part of Romans 8, where the truth of freedom from the law of sin and death is prominent, He is Himself said to be life. Not only is the mind of the Spirit "life and peace" in contrast to the mind of the flesh which is "death"; but, we are distinctly told, "The Spirit is life on account of righteousness". A new principle of life in Christ Jesus, the risen Man, which makes free from the old principle of bondage, is ours. This new principle is called, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus". Eventually, at the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ, the very bodies of the saints will be "quickened", made alive, raised or changed (for quickening covers both) "on account of His Spirit" which dwells in us. Freedom from sin and death will be actually and altogether enjoyed then. Spirit, soul, and body will be blameless, and glorious too, for we shall be like Christ in scenes of incorruptibility, immortality, and glory, where the Holy Spirit pervades all in heavenly perfection.

Even now, those who partake together of life in Christ Jesus, are variously spoken of as having "eternal life", "passed out of death into life", "quickened with Christ", "alive from the dead", "living stones," etc. At the present time such are built together in the Lord, we are told, "for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). What cannot be found in a house of lifeless material God finds in this living structure. There He receives heart response to the "great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins" (chap. 2:5); "worship in Spirit and in truth" rises to Him in that habitation of divine life and love.

In this connection the Spirit is spoken of as being in us, and as "springing up into everlasting life", like water rising to its source's level. In the death of our Lord Jesus Christ the "great love" of God has been fully told out: its manifestation is seen at Calvary's cross; and those who appropriate the death of Christ in faith have eternal life (John 6:54). The love and the life go together; and worship flows from the knowledge of God's love, and of the One whose love it is. The Spirit sheds abroad that love in the heart, therefore worship rises responsively to God in life and love by the Spirit in His habitation, in the house of God. He dwells in the praises of His own. These are grateful and melodious to Him, for all subsists in vitality and love.

It is there also that His glory is known. All within speaks of it, for all is in Christ. The tabernacle is the type. Every board of it was covered with gold, speaking of Christ being our righteousness. The blue, the purple, the scarlet, and the fine twined linen tell of His heavenly, royal, and human glories. It was set up on sockets of silver, speaking of the redemption ground on which God's living habitation now rests in Christ, through the blood of the cross. The oil, too, as well as the blood, had its place in relation to the tabernacle. The anointing oil indicates the Spirit of God. He it is whose gracious ministry brings the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ, before us. He glorifies Him and shows His things to us. These things are seen by those who dwell in God's habitation in the power of the Spirit. The natural eye sees them not. Creation and Horeb show God's glory in a measure--His power, His divinity, and His holiness, but

"ALL His glory shines resplendent

In the person of the Son,

Jesus Christ His well-beloved,

Who redemption's glory won".

Moreover, we are told, "The Anointing which ye have received of Him abides in you, and ye need not that any man teach you" (there was no natural light in the Tabernacle, it was provided by the oil). "The same Anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, ye shall abide in Him". There is no need to turn elsewhere. Eternal life is here. The Father is known, because the Son has declared Him, and the Spirit leads us into the deep reality of it all. The Anointing teaches us. God is known in His sanctuary. This could hardly be said of creation simply, in the same way and measure.

The Spirit is often associated in Scripture with "living water", "springing water", "rivers of water", "running water", "breath", "wind" and "oil" or "unction". Movement is characteristic of the Spirit. He is called "the eternal Spirit". We do not get the names "eternal Father" or "eternal Son" in the Bible. The truth of the eternal Father and the eternal Son is abundant in Scripture, though not the designations. Figures of love, grace, and strength and glory are associated with these. The flow of the Spirit carries into the current of eternal realities. Fruit, too, is produced in living grace amongst those who are the subjects of His work. Mere religionists and others may try to imitate this today, but there is an entire lack of the heavenly and pious character of the other, even though austere rules are observed to produce it. The fruit of the Spirit which is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, self-control", against which there is no law--is borne with becoming grace and for the honour of God. Love is necessarily first, and it is striking that joy should be the second named. "Full of joy" and "full of the Holy Ghost" go together.

We are exhorted to be "filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). If we are filled thus the right condition and the right Person will be characteristic of us. To be full of the Spirit is the very opposite of being full of ourselves, our joyful feelings, or anything else. Our joy will be full indeed, but the Son of God will be before us, for the Spirit glorifies Him when He is unhindered. He will direct our gladdened gaze to Him and His things. Nor are we filled like a lake, or like the dead sea which has no outlet. The living grace of the Eternal Spirit flows into our rejoicing hearts that it may flow out as "rivers of living water": to all around the refreshing and vivifying waters are to flow: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and chanting with your heart to the Lord; giving thanks at all times"; and to "whosoever will" the water of life is to be free: to the weary and the fainting, to the heavy laden and burdened; to the lost and the sinful, to the "dead in trespasses and offences" the fresh, living, bountiful rivers are to flow out: the word of life is to be gladly proclaimed in the gracious energy of the Spirit.

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