



CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

Lesson 13

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The words of some people have much more authority than the words of others. For example, if you tell soldiers in a war to stop fighting, they will probably not listen. But if their commanding officer tells them, they will normally obey. Because God created the world, He has supreme authority, and His word, the expression of His will, is sufficient to ensure that something is done:

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made . . . he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Psalm 33:6-9).

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light’, and there was light” (Genesis 1:1-3).

‘The Holy Spirit’ is the term used in the Bible to describe this marvellous power of God. By His Spirit or power God created the world, and in His word He has made plain His intentions with regard to what He has created. In that word, the Bible, He has revealed Himself—at least as much as we are able to understand— so that we may learn about Him and try to obey Him.

Jesus and the power of God

The mother of Jesus was a virgin; the conception of Jesus was a miracle. The angel who came to tell her that she should have a child, said to her,

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy - the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

This is an example of how Hebrew poetry works. Ideas are repeated for greater impact:

The Holy Spirit will come upon you,

The power of the Most High will overshadow you.

These parallel statements reflect exactly what the Bible shows - that the Holy Spirit is the power of God. It is the means by which His will is fulfilled, especially in those things which have to do with His eternal purpose of salvation. At his baptism, Jesus himself received the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21,22). By the miracles which he did afterwards, we see in him the working of God’s power.

“Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee” (Luke 4:14).

“Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst” (Acts 2:22).

He was raised from the dead by that same power:

“His power . . .that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:19,20)

The power to work miracles

In the early years of Christianity the power to work miracles was given not only to Jesus, but also to the apostles, who could pass it on to others by the laying on of hands. In Acts we read that the apostles received the ‘power from on high’ promised to them by Jesus (Luke 24:49), and that they were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). They could speak in other languages and heal the sick, even bring the dead back to life. In the beginning this was necessary to help people believe that the gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God and of salvation which they preached, was indeed from God:

“It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Hebrews 2:3,4).

“. . . what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience – by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (Romans 15:18,19).

There are many today who claim to possess just those special gifts of the Holy Spirit. Of course, certain kinds of healing do occur, especially in the case of those illnesses where the body can be affected by the mind. But first it is to be noted that this happens not only in Christian circles, but also in the case of many other non-Christian religions. Secondly, these healings simply cannot be compared with the miracles of the first century, when for example a man crippled from birth suddenly began to walk and jump, and a dead person was brought back to life (Acts 3:1-10, 9:36-42).

It must be noted:

(1) The apostle Paul declared that the special gifts of the Holy Spirit would cease: "*As for prophecies (the gift of prophecy) they will pass away; as for tongues (speaking in other languages) they will cease; as for knowledge (the gift from God of special understanding) it will pass away*" (1 Corinthians 13:8).

(2) In Acts 8:4-22, we see that Philip, who was not an apostle, had been given the power to do miracles (13). But he did not have the power to pass it on to others. It was the apostles Peter and John, newly arrived from Jerusalem, who did this, and when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given **by the laying on of the apostles' hands** he said, "*Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit*" (17-19).

It follows that after the death of the last apostle the power to pass on the gifts of the Holy Spirit was no longer given, and those gifts disappeared within two generations. There is no evidence of such miracles in the 2nd Century AD.

On the other hand it must be remembered that although those special gifts are no longer seen, God is still active through His Spirit for the fulfilment of His purposes, and His power is still effective in the lives of the believers.

The Holy Spirit and the Bible

Once the New Testament was completed, sometime before the end of the 1st Century AD, there was no further need of the impressive powers which had convinced many that God was with the early Christian preachers. The record of the life of Jesus, and the inspired writings of the apostles and others, were sufficient to convince any open-minded person that Jesus was the Son of God, that he rose from the dead, and that eternal life is offered in his name. The Bible remains today the means by which we can find our about God's purpose and how we can be part of it.

Writing about prophecy in the Scriptures, the apostle Peter declared, "*. . . men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*" (2 Peter 1:21). In other words, the Bible was written by men guided by the power of God; it is therefore itself an expression of the Holy Spirit, and if we read, believe and obey its teaching our characters can be transformed by the power of the Word.

Paul urges his young friend Timothy to read the sacred writings of the Bible, "*which are able (Greek 'dynamic') to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 3:15). The Bible is indeed "*the word of God, which is at work in you who believe*" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Summary

The Holy Spirit is the power of God, which He used to create the world and to bring His Son into the world. By that power He raised him from the dead and gave him eternal life. The Spirit of God is still invisibly at work fulfilling His purposes. However, the special gifts of the Spirit, given to believers in the 1st Century AD to confirm their preaching, have now ceased. In the Bible we have the message of salvation, given by the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us. The word of God has the power to change us, if we let it.

Questions

N1 What is the Holy Spirit?

N2 In the early days of Christianity, special gifts were given to help spread the Gospel. What has taken their place since?