

The Holy Spirit 5

Restoring the image

If I were to ask you what is God's plan for you, I wonder what you would answer. Fairly soon there would be the comment "to save me." Yes, but save you for what?

"To be with him for ever."

As you are?

"Oh no, to change me."

Now we're getting there. To change you to what?

"Into a better person."

Yes, but how much better?

Let's come at it another way - from the beginning. When God first decided to create humankind what was the template? What was the picture in his mind on which he would model man? Himself. God decided to make mankind in his own likeness.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 NKJV)

(Incidentally, with all the talk these days of equality of the sexes and speaking of God as 'he', notice that in order to express the image of himself in humankind God made us male and female. There is as much femaleness in God as there is maleness. But I cannot keep saying he/she and I am certainly not going to refer to God as 'it'.)

Initially mankind was sinless; a true expression of the image of God. We know that because when he had finished creation he saw everything he had made and it was very good. But mankind sinned and that image was marred, fatally marred. What God is

about now is restoring that image. The reason he has chosen you, the reason he has saved you, is to restore that marred image. Every single thing that happens to you God plans to use for the purpose of making you like him.

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. (Romans 8:28-9 NIV)

Many Christians know the first part of that verse, that in everything God works for good, but they don't go on to see what the particular good is that God has in mind. He is making you Christlike. Let that really get into you. No experience need be wasted. When you are in a desperate situation, however dark and difficult it may be, remind yourself, "God can use this to make me more Christlike, if I will let him." It will transform your attitude to life and make sense of so much that otherwise seems meaningless. God can use every experience you have to make you like Christ.

We know that Jesus was crucially involved in the work of creation:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:1-51 NKJV)

But the Holy Spirit was also involved:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2) NKJV

and Job said:

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4 NKJV)

So the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life:-

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2 NKJV)

The life he gives is the Life of Jesus for Jesus is the resurrection and the Life, but that life is brought to us by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit was the executive agent in the work of creation so he is the executive agent in the work of re-creation. Let me repeat that, just as the Holy Spirit was the executive agent in the work of creation so he is the executive agent in the work of re-creation. In both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New, one of the words used to describe the Holy Spirit is wind or breath, it can be translated by either word. So we read in the second chapter of Genesis:-

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7 NKJV)

And you will remember that when Jesus commissioned the disciples after his resurrection and brought the Church into being:-

He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:22 NKJV)

And of course there is the text we have looked at before where Christ is speaking about being born again to new life:

"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8 NKJV)

Then, again you will remember that on the Day of Pentecost following Christ's ascension

Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:2-4 NKJV)

The point I am making is that the Holy Spirit is described or revealed as a wind or as the breath of God or the breath of Christ. Each member of the Godhead is distinct and fulfils a different function but they are so united, so at one, that they *are* One. Let me show you what Jesus said about this.

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-15 NKJV)

Do you see? The Holy Spirit will not act on his own, anymore than Christ acted on his own. He, like Christ, will speak or reveal only what he is told by the Father. His work will glorify the Son because he will take what belongs to the Son and what belongs to the Son is everything that the Father has.

Let me illustrate this. Where did Life originate? In the Father. And where is this Life to be found?

God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1 John 5:11 NKJV)

How did we get this eternal life? By being born again of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the eternal life which is in Jesus.

What about love? Where does love originate? In God.

God is love (1 John 4:16 NKJV)

Where is that love revealed? In Jesus:

By this we know love, because He (Christ) laid down His life for us. (1 John 3:16 NKJV)

How do we receive that love?

The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:5 NKJV)

There are many other illustrations of how the Holy Spirit takes what belongs to Christ, which includes his victory on the cross with all that that means, and applies it to us. But let me show you just one more illustration which is very important in the matter we are looking at now of making us like Christ. We saw in our previous session that we all are products of our pasts; the things that happened to us as children, sometimes even in the womb. We have hurts and fears and habits which are the consequence of events of long ago and which we may have forgotten. Let me assure you that you need not be bound by these things, there is hope for you. Jesus said:-

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:36 NKJV)

We can be set free from our pasts. How do we obtain that Freedom? How is the freedom which Christ gives applied to us?

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Cor 3:17 NRSV)

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to apply to us the freedom that Christ gives. Now what does this mean practically in our personal lives?

Well, let's take one fear - the fear of judgement. (Incidentally, this is not as universal as once it was; men and women act today as though they will never have to give account of themselves for what they do in their lives.) I find that many Christians, who claim that they believe that Jesus died for them, still have a fear that they are not really accepted. I have discovered that very often this is because their human parents were always on at them, making them feel that they never really attained the standard they required of them. They feel that they were a disappointment to their parents and so they feel that they must be a disappointment to God also. But listen to what St. Paul said:

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (Romans 8:15-16 NKJV)

Do you see? Jesus won our salvation and when we trust him we become God's children. But it is the Holy Spirit working within our spirit applying that wonderful truth to our understanding. We have that assurance within; it suddenly hits us. "I really am a child of God. God, the Almighty creator of all that there is, knows me personally, he calls me by my name and I can say to him, 'Abba.'" That is still the word that a Jewish child will use to his father, it is like our word 'dadda'. So we do not need to fear

judgement. There will not be any condemnation for the believer. For us when we meet God it will be coming home.

And that leads me to another fear which is universal, the fear of death; but we have a promise about that also:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself (Jesus) likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14-15 NKJV)

Jesus has released, set free, those who live their lives in the fear of death. But that promise has to be made real in us by the Holy Spirit applying the truth within us if it is to be real. Maybe you will want to say, "But I'm not sure how much I really do believe this. I think I am still afraid of death." Let me tell you what the problem is. Paul put his finger on it in his letter to the Thessalonians:

Do not quench the Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 5:19 NKJV)

The Spirit is applying that truth to you but God will never force himself upon you, you have to receive him. How do we receive him? How do we receive, everything that God desires to give us? How do we receive our salvation? - by faith! If you are afraid of death you have stopped believing the promise of Christ which the Holy Spirit is seeking to set within your heart. Stop quenching the Spirit. Maybe you need to cry out with the father of the demonised boy, "Lord I believe, help me where my faith falters."

My wife suffered a stroke and shortly afterwards she said to me, "I thought I didn't fear death, but after having had that stroke, I know I don't." I didn't think I did, but I had a little niggles of doubt. Now that she has died I realise that I don't either. That

niggle wasn't fear of death, but a reluctance to leave her to have to cope by herself. Now that that won't happen I am free. I never actually thought I would be able to echo Paul's words that he didn't know whether he wanted to go on living or to die to be with Christ which is far better. But I find I can. Not in order to be with Sheila, as though we will take up our life together where it was broken off; but to be with Christ. Of course, Sheila is there already and I believe we shall see each other again, but our unity will be in worshipping him, not in living out our lives together as we did here on earth.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Tim 1:7 NKJV)

There are all sorts of fears he deals with; fear of the future, fear of persecution, fear of failure, fear of poverty. One of the freedoms which the work of God needs today is the freedom of giving. The work of God is hampered because of lack of funds. As someone has commented, God has plenty of money; the problem is that so much of it is shut up in our handbags our pockets and our banks.

God is at work in you, making you more Christ like. He is restoring his image his likeness in which he created you. This morning we have been thinking about how he sets us free from the negative things which hold us back. We must go on to consider how he sets within us the positive attributes of his own nature - the fruit of the Spirit.