

Living Life Led by the Spirit

Do the members of the CRC, in general, tend to ignore the Holy Spirit and His work? The charismatics say "yes. " And Holy Spirit conferences held in Ontario, which studied the phenomena of the Spirit, have drawn good crowds. They asked, "Can we be Reformed and charismatic of the same time?"

Has the CRC been too one-sided in its view of spirituality? One sidedness is a temptation we all face. In his little book *The Three Little Foxes*, Abraham Kuyper warned against it. Some, he says, reduce the Christian faith to believing correct doctrine. A close walk with the Lord and a radical change of heart do not receive the necessary emphasis; an orthodoxy without orthopraxis. Others look for a deeper spiritual life experience, often falling into an unhealthy mysticism. They sacrifice the intellect and thrive on emotions. And then there are those who have fallen into the trap of activism. They are always busy in some form of Christian activity, having little or no time for serious Bible study; let alone time to be still before God in meditation. As I see it, Christians need all three: doctrine, the deeper spiritual life and action.

No Life Without the Spirit

In the history of the church the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has often been neglected. It was not until the Reformation that Christians began the study of the Spirit. It was primarily John Calvin's rediscovery of God's sovereign grace that demanded a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit. And rightly so. The Holy Spirit is the source of our new life in Christ. And He is also the One who sustains it. The late Dr. Edwin Palmer once wrote:

"The Holy Spirit is to our spiritual lives what the Creator is to this world. Without God, the Creator, the world would never have come into existence, and without this continuing, sustaining, preserving work, the world would crash out of existence. Similarly, without the Spirit of God, the Christian would never have been born again, and without the Spirit's ever-present sanctifying influence, the spiritual life of the Christian would drop back into the spiritual deadness from which it came. "

How true! The Scriptures clearly teach that the natural man is spiritually dead. This state of spiritual death is spelled out in detail by the apostle Paul (Rom. 5:12-21). No man can have new life apart from the supernatural work of God in his heart. Jesus said, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). And this new birth is defined as "being born of the Spirit" (John 3:6). And as soon as we are born again we are indwelt by the Spirit.

Open to the Spirit

Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). But though we have all of the Holy Spirit He does not have all of us. The ministry of the Holy Spirit within us does call for a

response. We cannot sit back and wait for the Spirit to work. We must cooperate with Him. Therefore the command, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thes. 5:19 RSV). Quenching means to suppress, stifle, or otherwise obstruct the Holy Spirit. So in order to have the fullness and the enabling of the Holy Spirit we must yield to Him moment by moment. But don't we find here the reason for our, so often, meager spirituality? Many believers in Christ remain spiritual pygmies because they have never realistically surrendered themselves to God (Rom. 12:2). No real growth is experienced without total abandonment to God. No Christian can draw "nearer and nearer." to God if his life is spent in self-will, self-direction, self-seeking instead of seeking the will of God. But yielding to the Spirit does not mean withdrawing from the world, being lost in a mystical experience. True yieldedness implies a readiness to listen carefully to the Word of God, with its moral standards. The world can soon observe whether a Christian is yielded to the Spirit, or whether he is without the Spirit's direction and power. A yielded Christian is a practical Christian. His supreme example is Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:5-11). Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but thine be done." A yielded Christian makes this prayer his own.

The Place of Emotions

Reformed Christians are not known for showing their emotions. Some even claim that we deny emotions and feelings. True, Reformed Christians have tended to overestimate knowledge, the intellect. For example, Francis Schaeffer contended that one does not believe until one examines the evidence for the Christian faith, and is satisfied intellectually that its claims are true. Yet Schaeffer would also say, you can't come to Christ without the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Schaeffer stresses the mind, the intellect and purity of doctrine. Yet he also taught that pure doctrine alone is not sufficient. If we think that doctrine alone will save, we are sorely mistaken. Love and pure doctrine are intermingled. Loveless knowledge, suspicion of one another and even character defamation kill spirituality (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

No one has ever been reasoned into the faith. It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that a man lost in sin, blind to the truth, can understand and believe. The power of the Holy Spirit is revealed in the work of salvation, but the Holy Spirit applies Christ's work to our life. The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant is to mediate Christ's presence. The Holy Spirit points to Christ (John 16:14), leads believers into fellowship with Him, and transforms them into His likeness. The Holy Spirit always remains in the background. His ministry is truly Christ-centered. A Spirit-filled Christian does not long for more of the Spirit, but for more of Christ.

Since God has created us with emotions, we weep over our sin, rejoice in our salvation, praise the Savior. At times we feel the Lord so near that we are overwhelmed by His presence.

Special Revelations?

Do Spirit-filled Christians receive new revelations, new prophecies? The Holy Spirit has given us the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). God's revelation is completed. The

Bible is true. And the truth of the Bible neither grows nor changes. You can't add to it or subtract from it. In the Westminster Confession of Faith (VI a) we find this remarkable expression: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture . . ."

The Bible is the sure foundation upon which we build our faith and case. As a hymn writer said it so well:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled.

The Holy Spirit does not work apart from the Word of God. That's why John Calvin and the Reformers pored over the Scriptures, carefully studying and expounding texts. That's why personal Bible reading is a must. How can we expect knowledge of God's will if we rarely read the only book which shows us what His will is? New truths we will not discover, but "old" truths will become new when we pray for the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds (John 16:13). Do we pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten the mind of the pastor as he prepares his sermons week after week? Do we pray for the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit in our witness to unbelievers? Perhaps much of our discouragement and lack of results are due to the fact that in presenting the Gospel we have not prayed for the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the one to whom we are witnessing. Dependent on the Spirit Christians are totally dependent on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We can't even pray on our own. The Spirit intercedes for the believers (Rom. 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to communicate with the Lord. How can Christians be prayerless? If we start replacing prayer with extra activities or business meetings to achieve church and spiritual growth, we are on the wrong track. The presence of the Holy Spirit is the source of our power. He helps us to use our gifts, and to produce the fruit of the Spirit as described in Gal. 5:22-23.

We need a revival of spirituality today. But we must resist at all cost the kind of spirituality advocated by Schleiermacher: "It matters not what conceptions a man adheres to, he can still be pious." According to Scripture, piety is centered in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. For Calvinists spirituality means the forms of holiness in the concrete life of the believer. A Spirit-filled life leads to practical godliness, exalting God through service. The deeper life does not lead to world flight, but to servant hood, to the way of the cross. It is characterized by sacrificial service to the sufferers in the world. The Holy Spirit does not work through bizarre manifestations or through the spectacular. The Spirit filled believer has a practical bend. Our Western society has become immune to the spectacular. The simple Spirit-filled life of a daily walk with the Lord, of kindness and goodness, will make a much greater impact than all the hoopla of the health and wealth TV evangelists.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is manifested in good works, in giving of the self to the other (John 7:38, 39). The result of a yielded Spirit-filled life is the promotion of holiness. God's honor comes first. The ultimate goal for the Christian is not first and foremost his own personal salvation, but the glory of God. Therefore a believer may not be preoccupied with his spiritual experiences. He lives to serve his God. John Calvin described the Christian life under two headings: piety and justice-that is love of neighbor. "Piety and justice express the two tables of the law; therefore of these two attitudes the wholeness of life is constituted."

Internal Strife

In our desire for doctrinal purity we must heed the biblical call for godly piety. In our current controversies in the church, too often personality clashes occur. Francis Schaeffer often said that our orthodoxy should be defended with love and tears. He was right. Too often tempers have flared up; language has been used which was intemperate, unbrotherly; churches have been torn apart; families have not been speaking with each other. This weakness is not new. You can find examples in the biblical times. The beautiful chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, was written because of controversy and strife within the Corinthian church. Differences within the church will always be there. But the world is watching how we handle our differences. If we lack love, show no interest in others, or true friendliness, we have failed. We may have numerous programs for building the church, but nothing will work until we ourselves are touched by God's love, and let His love flow out to others (Rom. 5:5).

The Bible Tells Me So

A Christian can be sure of his salvation. His basis for eternal security is neither experience nor emotion, but the promises given in Scripture. We know we have eternal life, that we are the children of God, that our sins are forgiven because of God's own written testimony (1 John 5:13). Experiences vary. Emotions and moods change, depending on the circumstances. But God's Word alone is sufficient, and we must accept it to start with. Then we have the testimony of the Christian life. We know that we are alive in Christ when we love our fellow Christians. Selfishness is death. The apostle John says that whoever loves his brother in the Lord, knows that he has passed "out of death into life" (1 John 4:7, 16). And to crown it all, we have the testimony of the Holy Spirit. One of the by-products of the ministry of the Spirit to each believer is the assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6). Of course a believer is a child of God before the Holy Spirit brings that assurance. The Holy Spirit leads the believer into an intimate relationship with the Lord, into a deeper and more dynamic sense of His presence. And the Holy Spirit gives the individual believers certitude of God's power.

Thomas Goodwin, one of the great Puritans of three hundred years ago, explained the difference between the customary assurance of the Christian and this extraordinary assurance. He describes a man and his little child, his son, walking down the road and they are walking hand in hand, and the child knows that he is the child

of his father, and he knows that his father loves him, and he rejoices in it. There is no uncertainty about it all, but suddenly the father, moved by some impulse, takes hold of the child and picks him up, kisses him, embraces him, showers his love upon him, and then he puts him down again and they go on walking together. And Martin Lloyd Jones, who relates this story in his book *Joy Unspeakable: Power and Renewal in the Holy Spirit*, comments: "That is it! The child knew before that his father loved him, and he knew that he was his child. But oh! this loving embrace, this extra outpouring of love, this unusual manifestation of it – that is the kind of thing. The Spirit bearing witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." In this article I have purposely not addressed the tongue speaking, and the signs and wonders phenomena. Spiritual growth and certitude come to the individual believer through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who uses His own Word. I believe that the most effective Christian witness is still a practical godly life-style, a spirituality of service within the world, while looking "forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).

Johan D. Tangelder
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