

The Work of the Holy Spirit



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 16:8–11; Rom. 5:10; Heb. 4:15, 16; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; 1 John 5:12, 13; Ps. 31:24.*

MemoryText: “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (*Romans 15:13, NASB*).

As we come to the end of our study this quarter on the Holy Spirit and spirituality, we will focus on one other decisive work of the Spirit that has not yet received our attention.

When Jesus announced to the disciples that He would go to the Father, He promised to send them the Holy Spirit. “ ‘But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you’ ” (*John 14:26, NKJV*).

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is a *parakletos*, that is, a “Helper” or “Comforter” or an “Advocate” who intercedes for us. At the same time Jesus also announced the work that this Advocate would do: He will “convict” the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment (*John 16:8, NKJV*).

During our final week we will study in more detail this specific work of the Holy Spirit. We also will learn how this work of the Spirit is related to two other important aspects of His ministry for us: our assurance of salvation and the glorious hope that propels our life as disciples of Jesus Christ.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 25.*

Conviction of Sin

Read John 16:8, 9. What crucial work does the Holy Spirit do for us, and why is this so important?

Jesus has called the Holy Spirit the *paraclete*, a word rich in meaning and one that conveys the idea of *helper*, *advocate*, and *comforter*. The Holy Spirit does not enter into this important work of conviction as the accuser of the brethren or as our prosecutor. He is sent by Jesus not to condemn us but, rather, to help us see our need of grace.

Only a comforter will be received as a helper. It is a great tragedy that Christians, however well-intentioned, often approach sinners with an accusing spirit rather than a helping one. If we go around pointing out sin in the lives of other people, then we do something that Jesus has not called us to do. After all, who are we to point out sin in others when we are hardly sinless ourselves?

Read Romans 2:1 and Matthew 7:3. What message must we take from these verses?

We are His witnesses, not His prosecutors. We are called to be witnesses of His redemptive power, not to condemn others for their wrongs. In trying to convict other people of their sins, we assume a work that is not ours; it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is the Comforter—not us—who shall “convince” (*John 16:8, RSV*) the world of what sin really is. People who have not committed their lives to Jesus often have no real sense of what sin truly is, and just how destructive it can be.

The idea here is not that the Spirit will list specific erroneous acts. Instead, He goes to the most fundamental sin of all: unbelief in Jesus Christ (*John 16:9*). Our deepest misery and alienation consists not in our moral imperfection but in our estrangement from God and our refusal to accept the One whom God has sent for the purpose of rescuing us from this condition.

The fundamental problem of all sin is that we do not believe in Jesus and, thus, reject the only One who can save us from our sin and guilt. This is the sin that puts self at the center of things and refuses to believe the Word of God. Only the Holy Spirit can open our hearts and minds to our great need of repentance and of the Redemption that is found through Christ’s death in our behalf.

The Need of Righteousness

John 16:8 said that the Holy Spirit will convict the world, not just of sin but also of *righteousness*. In other words, the world, which does not know what sin really is, does not know what true righteousness is either.

Unconverted people imagine that external morality will suffice. They desire, not the righteousness of God but their own righteousness. They desire a righteousness that comes from their outward acts, such as obedience to the law of God. But our acts of obedience to the law can never justify us before God.

In Isaiah 64:6 the prophet describes all self-made righteous acts of the people of his day as “filthy rags.” Even our best religiously motivated, self-perceived righteousness is in fact the opposite: unrighteousness.

But the righteousness of Jesus is sufficient for us. It meets all the claims of the law of God. It counts with God the Father. And we can claim it for ourselves through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Read Romans 5:10 and Hebrews 4:15, 16. How is our righteousness related to Christ’s living ministry in the presence of the Father in heaven?

The righteousness that is demanded by the law is fulfilled by Jesus’ perfect life. He died in our behalf. Though rejected by those who put Him to death here on earth, He was welcomed by the Father in heaven. By means of the resurrection, God the Father placed the stamp of His approval upon Jesus’ life and redemptive work. Now Jesus lives to intercede for us (*Heb. 4:15, 16*), and He applies the merits of His death in our behalf because we do not have the righteousness needed for salvation.

Thus, we can live because He lives in us. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (*Gal. 2:20, NKJV*). When Jesus lives in us, we walk by the Spirit (*Rom. 8:4*) and receive new spiritual life through the power of the Spirit (*compare with Gal. 3:2–5; 5:16, 18*).

The Father’s exaltation of Jesus in heaven is revealed in Christ’s powerful presence among us through the Spirit. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, His disciples live in growing conformity to Christ.

Have you experienced the reality of just how filthy your own attempts at righteousness really are? What does this teach you about your need of Christ’s righteousness instead?

Conviction About Judgment

Read John 16:8, 11. What judgment is Jesus referring to? Why is this judgment good news?

There remains one last great conviction that is part of the work of the Spirit: the conviction about judgment. Here is where much of our preaching on this passage seems to go in a wrong and harmful direction. Often a discussion of sin and righteousness seems to lead many professed Christians to pronounce a warning about the judgment on those who reject Christ. In doing so, they want to warn sinners, often with fearful overtones, of the future judgment that awaits them.

And though that judgment is a reality, this is not what Jesus talks about in John 16:11. The language indicates that the Lord is not talking about future judgment, as He did in John 12:48. Instead, the aspect of the judgment that Jesus now refers to is the good news that Satan has already been judged at Calvary. The devil, the great enemy of truth, is now living on borrowed time. Judgment will come, but the focus here is on an awareness that the prince of this world now already stands condemned (*John 12:31*).

Read 1 Peter 5:8, 9. How is Satan described by Peter? How can we resist him?

The devil, knowing that his time is short and that he has been fatally defeated at Calvary, is nevertheless still alive. And he is furious, trying to devour as many as he can. But he is a defeated enemy. Jesus has won the victory. The blood of Jesus makes us free.

When, during World War II, the Nazi troops had received the decisive blow with the successful Allied invasion of France on June 6, 1944, it was clear that Hitler was defeated. Yet, the eleven months between D-Day (when the attack was initiated) and VE Day (May 8, 1945, when the war ended in Europe) were the bloodiest of all. Similarly, Satan knows that he was decisively defeated at the cross. Yet, he stubbornly fights and tries to devour as many as he can. In these challenging times we are called to be sober and alert and to cast all our anxiety upon Jesus, because He cares for us (*1 Pet. 5:7, 8*).

Why is judgment good news? Who is our surety in the judgment? How can we preach about the judgment in such a way that we instill hope rather than fear?

The Assurance of Salvation

Read 1 John 5:12, 13; Romans 8:15–17; and 2 Corinthians 5:5. Once we have accepted Christ as our Savior, why can we have the assurance of eternal life? What is the basis for this assurance?

The Holy Spirit is the One who leads sinners to Jesus. Jesus' substitutionary death has reconciled us with God. Jesus' forgiveness sets us free to live a new life as God's adopted children. Now we are no longer God's enemies (*Rom. 5:10*), but we walk according to the Spirit (*Rom. 8:4*) and set our thinking on the things of the Spirit (*Rom. 8:5*). If we did not have the Spirit of Christ, we would not be His children and would not belong to Him (*Rom. 8:9*). But now we have the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us. He testifies to us that we belong to Jesus and that we are heirs of God and heirs with Christ (*Rom. 8:17*). The same powerful life that raised Jesus from the dead is now active in us and makes us, who were spiritually dead, alive (*Rom. 8:10*). Even more than that, He also seals in our hearts the assurance that we truly belong to God. Having heard and believed the gospel of our salvation, we were sealed in Jesus with the Holy Spirit, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance (*Eph. 1:13, 14, NASB*). Every believer may have this certainty (*1 John 5:12, 13*).

Read Ephesians 1:13, 14. What does it mean to be sealed by the Spirit?

Those who accept Christ are born again; that is, born “‘of the Spirit’” (*John 3:3, 5*). The Holy Spirit seals this fact in our hearts so that we can have assurance of being saved and experience the joy that comes from being a child of God. The Holy Spirit identifies us as belonging to Christ. “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ” (*Rom. 8:9, NIV*). We now have a consciousness that God is our loving Father and we are His dear children. The Holy Spirit is the down payment, the deposit, or the pledge toward the ultimate gift of eternal life and immortality that will be given to us at Jesus' second coming (*1 Cor. 15:51–54*). This is the hallmark of authentic faith. It is difficult to see how Christians can witness with convincing power without having such assurance.

“Talk courage, talk faith and hope, and you will be all light in the Lord. Keep thinking of the open door that Christ has set before you, that no man can shut. God will close the door to all evil, if you will give him a chance. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up for you a standard against him.”—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 16, 1889.

The Holy Spirit and Hope

Read Romans 5:4, 5; 15:13; and 1 Corinthians 13:13. How are love and hope related to each other? How is the Holy Spirit instrumental in giving us love and hope?

The Holy Spirit is the One who has poured out the love of God within our hearts. He connects us to God and makes God's love dwell in us. God's steadfast and unchanging love is the reason and the bedrock of our hope. Without love there would be no hope. Only love generates hope. Because God's love is combined with His faithfulness, we have the wonderful hope that He will come again and take us home to where He is.

Read Psalm 31:24. What effect does hope have on us?

Hope inspires. Hope gives new strength. Hope lets us sing and be joyful. Hope is essential for life. Without hope, what is the purpose of life?

Having hope, however, is something different from being optimistic. The optimist thinks that everything will get better: the weather, the economy, the school grades, the finances, et cetera. Hope, instead, is not blind optimism. Rather, it is grounded in God's faithfulness and in the promises that He has given in the past. Hope believes that God will fulfill what He has said because He is faithful and true. God has proven to be dependable, and He does not waver. His steadfastness and truth are the foundation for our hope.

No question: the foundation of our hope is found in Jesus on the cross. When we look to the cross, we can see in the most powerful way possible the reality of God's love for us. The Cross, with Jesus dying for our sins, gives us and the universe an unparalleled revelation of just what our God is truly like. Thus, as fallen and temporal beings in a vast cosmos, we can find hope, not in ourselves or in whatever "great" things we accomplish but in our God—a God who has revealed Himself to us on the cross.

How is the Advent hope grounded in God's faithful promises? How does hope influence our lives? How can we develop a lifestyle that reflects hope instead of despair?

Further Thought: Read selections of Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power*, especially the October section, “Ready for the Spirit,” pp. 283–313.

We can summarize the activity of the Holy Spirit by saying that the Holy Spirit works harmoniously together with God the Father and God the Son to accomplish our salvation. The Holy Spirit awakens us from our spiritual death. He leads us to an awareness of our sinfulness and opens our eyes to the fact that we are in and of ourselves lost. He kindles in us the desire for change and leads us to Jesus Christ, who alone can meet the needs of our innermost being. He gives us assurance of salvation because He always points us to Jesus and to what Jesus has done for us. He conforms us to be more like Jesus. He keeps us faithful in our walk with God. He enables us to fulfill God’s will and effectively engage in mission. He generates the Written Word of God as our safe guide and norm for our Christian life and doctrine. Where would we be without the Holy Spirit? What could we do without the Holy Spirit? We would be miserable and lost and could do nothing that would give God the glory and honor. Thanks be to Jesus for having promised and sent the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit was the highest of all gifts that He could solicit from His Father for the exaltation of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power*, p. 13.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the questions of what is sin and what is righteousness. Why should we, as Christians who believe in the Bible as the Word of God, have a different understanding of what sin and righteousness are than do those who don’t believe in the Bible? What are those differences? What does the Bible teach us about sin and about righteousness that other sources do not?
- 2 Share with the members of your Sabbath School group what aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit has been most valuable to you. Why was it so important, and how has this impacted your life?
- 3 In class, talk about the hope that we have in Jesus. What are the reasons for this hope? That is, if someone were to ask about the “reason for the hope that is in you” (*1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV*), what answer would you give, and why? How convincing an argument could you make?
- 4 The lesson this week talked about the question of assurance of salvation. What is assurance of salvation? And if we have it, why do we have it? On what must it be based? And how does it differ from presumption?