

Works of the Holy Spirit in the Believer

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Part I

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Some years ago I knew a Christian who often argued with God and was reluctant to obey His word. One day, as she was reading her Bible, the Holy Spirit, in a very clear internal voice, said to her, "Psalms 32:9 is my verse for you." Startled and excited she quickly turned to the verse. To her shock and dismay she read these words: "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you." (NIV) This was a warning to her and she knew she had heard it directly from the Lord through the Holy Spirit!

Most of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer isn't quite so obvious as what happened to this woman. Yet there are countless instances in which the Holy Spirit does work in each of us. In fact, His work is generally so quiet we often don't realize He is at work. Even while major changes, due to His workmanship, are occurring in our lives, we can be oblivious to His work.

I have often wondered why this is so. Let us examine the statement Jesus made about the Holy Spirit in John 16:13. He said, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: *for he shall not speak of himself*; but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." (Joh 16:13 KJV, emphasis added.) I believe this is one of the key verses to understanding the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

This verse tells us that to understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we must view Him as He relates to Jesus. Imagine for a moment that Jesus left a Last Will and Testament when He returned to the Father and that in His will, He appointed the Holy Spirit as His executor. From that moment on, as the executor of Jesus' will, it is the Holy Spirit's job to carry out every provision of that will.

Another way to look at the Holy Spirit is to see Him as God's agent on earth. An agent acts within the scope of his authority to carry out the will of the principal. In the case of the Holy Spirit, He moves about here on earth, acting on God's behalf, carrying out His instructions.

Notice that an executor or agent is never the focal point of attention. He or she simply serves a function. He remains in obscurity while the one whom he represents is the object of attention.

So it is with the Holy Spirit. As John 16:13 states, the Holy Spirit does not speak nor draw attention to Himself. He remains in obscurity while the Father and Son are spotlighted. Yet it is by the Holy Spirit that the will of God, our Father, and His Son, Jesus, is carried out. ". . . for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." (Phil 2:13 NIV)

Sanctification

Now let's ask the question, "What is the will of the Father and His Son in the life of every believer?" The overarching answer is that it is the desire of God that we be perfected or sanctified. Note that God calls His people to be holy as He is holy. (See 1 Pet 1:16.) To that end, it is the Holy Spirit, working in unity with the Father and Son, who comes to do the work in the life of the believer.

The Apostle Paul penned these words to the church at Corinth:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18 NIV)

The above words "are being transformed" in the original Greek text come from the Greek verb **μεταμορφοῦμαι**, or, *metamorphoumetha*. This verb is in the present tense, indicative mood, passive voice. This means that the transformation is taking place **now**, the indicative mood states a **fact**, and the passive voice says that the subject (we) **are receiving** the action. Thus, we are progressively being transformed into His likeness.

How the Holy Spirit Works

Now that we understand that God uses the Holy Spirit to transform the believer, the next question is, "How does the Holy Spirit do the work in us?" To find the answer to this question, we must first review the basic truths of what it means to be a child of God. When we are born again, we take Jesus Christ into our lives as our Lord and Savior. We also receive a measure of the Holy Spirit. When we become filled with the Holy Spirit, we have both Christ and the fullness of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Among other things, that means the Holy Spirit has access to our minds, our emotions, our will, and our bodies. In other words, He can impact our spirit, soul, and body. Because of this intimate relationship, the Holy Spirit can and does communicate with us. He can transmit thoughts into our minds. Because the Holy Spirit has access to our minds, He can also supernaturally quicken to us what we hear or read. And as He sends these thoughts and ideas into our mind, our own thought processes evolve. If we cooperate in this process we continually discard old sinful ways and seek more of Christ. The Holy Spirit can also read, understand, and use our emotions and our will to impart to us what the Lord wants imparted.

a. Holy Spirit Works in Change

Once we understand all that the Holy Spirit is able to do within our mind, emotions, will, and body, we must examine the vehicles God uses to cause us to become more holy and more Christ-like. The first and perhaps easiest means God uses is change. We live in an ever changing world. Our families, friends, church, employment environment, community, and our countries are constantly changing. Even our weather changes daily or hourly.

Yet most of us do not like change. We often reminisce about "the good old days." But very often, the will of God for our lives involves change. If we dig in and resist change, we will never really enter into the fullness of the life God has for us.

Certainly God used change for the nation of Israel as a means of purification and sanctification. Think of the changes that nation went through: from Egypt into the wilderness, from the complacency of their homes in Israel into Babylonian captivity, and then the Roman occupation of Israel during Jesus' time.

In fact, Jeremiah strongly confirmed God's use of change to accomplish His will when he prophesied against Moab.

Moab has been at rest from youth, like wine left on its dregs, not poured from one jar to another--she has not gone into exile. So she tastes as she did, and her aroma is unchanged. (Jer 48:11 NIV)

In view of this Scripture it is helpful to understand the process used by wine makers to make wine. The wine is placed in large vessels to ferment. During this process the solids, or "dregs," settle to the bottom of the container. Every twenty-eight days the wine maker carefully pours the wine into another vessel, leaving the dregs behind. For the finest wine, he repeats this process for several months. Thus, the wine is continually subject to change. It is within this context that Jeremiah stated that Moab had settled on its dregs.

One more bit of information about wine making - what happens if the wine is not poured from vessel to vessel but is left with its dregs in it? It turns to vinegar! So also it can be with the believer. If we resist change, not only do we miss the fullness of life that God has for us, we often become pretty unpleasant to be around.

Let me tell you a story about how God used change in my life. When I was a teenager, I wasn't really interested in whole heartedly serving the Lord. Oh, I went to church most Sundays, but my heart just wasn't in it. I was more drawn to worldly friends and activities than I was to Christ. But when I was fifteen, my family moved to a new area about 250 miles from my old home. This move was

hard for me. But it was during this transition period that a new desire was birthed in me to seek more Godly friends. I didn't understand it at the time but I later came to realize that it was the Holy Spirit communicating to me concerning my lifestyle. It was the Holy Spirit stirring in me the desire for Godly friends. He simply continually bombarded me with thoughts about wanting righteous friends and, as I responded, my own thought processes changed. I came to personally desire more Godly friends and sought them out. He also led me to discard old, sinful habits that accompanied my old lifestyle!

Notice that I still had the choice of whether or not to listen to and obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In other words, my will was very much a part of that process. Each one of us are always free at any time to reject the leading of the Holy Spirit. God never forces us. The Holy Spirit never forces us. It is always up to us to obey.

We need to view every change that comes into our lives as an opportunity to allow the faithful work of the Holy Spirit. . .pouring us into another vessel! As we co-operate with this process, we leave some of the dregs of our old life behind and become more pleasing to our Father.

b. The Holy Spirit Works Through Suffering

This is one of the most difficult concepts to communicate to believers because of the excruciating pain and suffering many are enduring at this very moment. At the outset let me emphatically state that I don't believe that God causes our pain and suffering. We live in a fallen world. John tells us, ". . .the whole world is under the control of the evil one." (1 Joh 5:19 NIV) As followers of Christ, we are shining lights in a dark world.

But we still live in this world, so suffering does come in varying degrees to all of us at one time or another. God doesn't cause the suffering, but the Holy Spirit seizes the opportunity, using the suffering to crucify more of our flesh.

We are very vulnerable during times of suffering. The Holy Spirit can tune into our emotional and mental anguish. In this context He can draw us to the Lord. The Holy Spirit always directs us to Jesus in our suffering, if we only will listen. It is during this vulnerability that the Holy Spirit can do things such as to remind us that Jesus is our rock, our supply, and our staying power.

The Holy Spirit also can use friends, church, and others in our life to comfort us in times of suffering. It is through others that we often hear comforting verses or words of encouragement which are prompted by the Holy Spirit.

It is also during times of suffering that the Holy Spirit can teach us to have more comprehension and appreciation

of the bigger picture. He enlarges our vision of such things as life on this earth, death, and eternity.

Peter has an interesting and confirming insight on suffering. He wrote:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. (1 Pet 4:1,2 NIV)

To many of us it is painful to even read these verses. But some of the most godly people I have ever known have endured great suffering.

Unfortunately, most of us have looked poetically or romantically rather than realistically at Jesus' invitation to, "follow me." But let's look at His whole statement:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Mat 16:24 NIV)

Suffering is a very large part of taking up our crosses while continuing to faithfully follow Jesus. Our suffering may be physical, emotional, mental, relational, financial, or any combination thereof. Many of us ask, "Why?" in our suffering. The gentle, quiet voice of the Holy Spirit answers, "Because you are being transformed into the image of Jesus." (Remember, the Holy Spirit can speak to us anytime He wants.) As in the circumstances of change, the Holy Spirit continually communicates to us, our spirit, soul, and even our body. He faithfully points to our loving, caring Jesus in the midst of our pain.

c. The Holy Spirit Works Through Control

I believe that breaking our fleshly desire to be in control is the most active way in which the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer. God is spirit. He created man with a spirit, soul and body. It was God's original intent to instruct and train man's spirit and only then was man's spirit in turn to control his soul and body. This is known as "self-control." Peter tells us that self-control is to be desired, "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, *self-control*; and to *self-control*, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. (2 Pet 1:5,6 NIV, emphasis added.)

But when sin entered man he became separated from God and his soul became the dominant force. Once

separated from God, man quickly became attached to non-spiritual things, that is, himself and the world, along with the sin of the world. The translators of the King James Bible call this kind of man "carnal," meaning that his primary concerns in life are the things which gratify himself and his physical desires. This is the absence of Holy Spirit led self-control. Paul wrote to the Roman church concerning the carnal man:

For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom 8:6-8 KJV)

Here Paul contrasts the carnal path that leads to death with the spiritual path that leads to life.

Remember that God has called each of us to holiness. When we allow the Holy Spirit, as God's agent, to work in us and our carnal self, He can accomplish two things. First, we turn more and more from sin and the ways of the world. And second, through the renewing of our minds, we become more Christ-like. ". . . until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:13 NIV)

Let us first look at how the Holy Spirit deals with our carnal selves. When I do something I know is wrong (sin), the Holy Spirit lets me know. I am rebuked in my spirit. It is almost like a second person voice telling me I am wrong and that I must repent and make amends.

The Holy Spirit can confront us in two different ways. I believe that He always first confronts us internally. It is that inner voice or inner knowing that we have sinned. The world calls it our conscience. The other way the Holy Spirit can confront us is externally. I believe that, when we continue to ignore the internal working of the Holy Spirit, He then uses others to confront us. We are caught in our sin and exposed in some way. If we respond to the internal prompting of the Holy Spirit to repent, etc., then we never get to the external rebuke because there is no need for it.

Part of this breaking of the carnal self is through the discipline of the Lord. The Holy Spirit, through the writer of the book of Hebrews states,

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? . . . Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best;

but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:5-7, 10,11 NIV)

Here Scripture uses the words "discipline" and "rebuke" liberally. The writer of Hebrews shows us the fruit of this discipline: *we share in the Lord's holiness and enjoy a harvest of righteousness and peace.*

The choice is ours, isn't it? Again, our will comes into play. If we choose the way of the Lord, and are thereby willing to let our own flesh die, we become more Christ-like.

Look at the remarkable statement Paul makes in Romans.

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. (Rom 8:9 NIV)

Here Paul is saying that certain of those to whom he is writing are "controlled by the Spirit."

To be controlled more and more by the Holy Spirit is God's ultimate will for us. It should also be our own goal. Let me illustrate how this works with a true story. I know a woman who received \$200 from an unexpected source. When she received the check she said, "Lord, this is not my money. It is your money. I will give it to whomever you direct. Just show me who should get it." Several weeks went by and nothing happened. The woman went to church camp and one night in the service the Holy Spirit pointed out a young woman in the seat ahead of her and said, "She is the one. Give the \$200 to her." My friend

didn't even know the young woman's name but she knew the Holy Spirit had spoken. She tapped the woman on the shoulder and asked her name. After she had been given her name, she sat down in her chair and wrote out the \$200 check. She folded it and gave it quietly to the young woman and said it was from the Lord.

The next morning the young woman approached her with tears in her eyes. She told my friend that she was a single parent with a small son. She had been saving her money to try to get a bigger apartment but was having trouble getting ahead. The Lord had directed her to come to the camp and bring her son. She took the money out of her small saving account to pay for the camp. And you already know the ending. The amount of money she withdrew from the saving account to pay for the camp was exactly \$200! There was absolutely no question in either woman's mind that the Holy Spirit had orchestrated this entire series of events!

I believe these kinds of true stories would be a lot more common if we were more tuned into the voice of the Holy Spirit. Yes, it was a supernatural occurrence, but God is in the business of the supernatural. As we allow our minds and wills to be more and more controlled by the Holy Spirit, we will experience more of these kinds of occurrences.

Holy Father, we humbly ask You to make us more sensitive to the work of your precious Holy Spirit in our lives. Help us to recognize His voice and grant us the ability to be quick to obey Him. For we know that you have sent Him into our lives to perfect us. Lord, use the Holy Spirit to so fully set our minds and hearts toward you that we hear and obey all that He commands. Amen!

Part II will continue with the works of the Holy Spirit in the believer.

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