

View

The Holy Spirit in Conversion

By R. L. Whiteside

Some religious groups are putting renewed emphasis on the doctrine of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion. And some put great stress on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual gifts. They seem to prefer to say "Holy Ghost" rather than Holy Spirit; perhaps they prefer Holy Ghost, because it sounds more mysterious, weird, and ghostly than Holy Spirit, and therefore more suitable to their peculiar brand of religion.

The Holy Spirit is an intelligent, speaking Being. The word person is not a very suitable word to apply to the Holy Spirit; for the Latin word from which it came was a stage, or theater word—"a mask (used by actors), a personage, part, or person."

Later any human person; and Father, Spirit were persons. better word speaking of Father, Spirit; but realize that these Beings has to do. A recognize

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being was a then the Son, and Holy said to be For want of a we all use the person in either the Son, or Holy we need to each one of heavenly a distinct work failure to this has

involved some people in much confusion. If you ever attended meetings in which they prayed long and loud for mourners, you likely heard them pray indiscriminately for God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to "come down and save these mourners."

There is an analogy between the first creation and the new, or spiritual creation. In Hebrews 1:1-2 we read, "God, having of old time spoken unto the Fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds." God planned, the Son executed the plans. (See also John 1.1-3, 10; Col. 1:16). The Spirit was the finisher, the organizer, bringing order out of chaos. In the beginning it is said that: "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The marginal reading is more significant: for "moved upon," it has "was

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brooding upon." Job 26:13: "By his Spirit the heavens are garnished." Psalms 104: 30, "Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground."

In bringing into existence and operation this great scheme of human redemption each member of the Godhead performed in creating the world. It was done according to the

Father's plan. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through him." (John

3:16-17). "For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38). In his prayer Jesus said, "I glorified thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do." (John 17:4). "But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). But the death of Jesus left the disciples in despair, and even his resurrection left them in darkness as to the significance of all that went before. And after he ascended, they knew not what blessings to the world were made possible by his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. How was this spiritual darkness to be removed? If they remembered what Jesus had told them, they had grounds for hope that light would come. (See John 16:6-13).

Before Jesus ascended, he commissioned his apostles to preach to the whole world, but charged them to tarry in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:45-49). He also said to them, "Ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence." (Acts 1:5). Still in the dark, "They therefore, when they were come together, asked him saying, Lord dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, it is not for you to know times or seasons, Which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you." (Acts 1:6-8)... (read Acts 2:1-4)

A great multitude came together. Then Peter, being filled with the Holy Spirit, preached to them, as the Spirit gave him utterance, proving to them

that they, by the hand of lawless men, had crucified the Messiah, and closed with these words: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified." But they were still in the dark, for Peter had not told them what to do about it. So they, being pricked in their heart, said unto Peter

and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" They realized that they must do something.

Peter did not tell them, as many false guides do today, that there was nothing they could do.

"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Now the plan

of salvation had been completed, and these sinners had been told how to come into possession of its blessings. The next move was theirs and Peter exhorted them to make that move, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." The responsibility was now theirs; would they save themselves by obeying the Holy Spirit? "They then that received his word were baptized; and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls."

Read carefully Acts 2; here you learn how the Holy Spirit operates in the conversion of sinners. Of course we need not expect such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on preachers today as came upon the apostles. That was God's way of revealing the gospel of Christ; without it they could not have preached the gospel, but the gospel has been fully revealed, and we have it recorded in the Bible. The multitude was not present when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit. When the people came together the apostles preached the gospel to them, or rather the Holy Spirit took possession of the vocal organs of the apostles and used them to speak to the people. Hence the Holy Spirit was operating on them by means of his words. By means of his words he brought conviction to many, and they asked what to do. The Holy Spirit told them plainly what to do, and they did it.

The Holy Spirit did not say, "You must be regenerated," or, "You must be converted." The Holy Spirit told them what to do; and when they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit—when they obeyed

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the words of the Holy Spirit, they were regenerated, born again, became new creatures, were converted.

The gospel preached on that day was, and is, God's power for saving people. As the gospel is God's power for saving people, then a direct operation of the Spirit is not his power for saving people. It is true that the Spirit quickens, that is, gives life; but how? "This is my comfort in my afflictions; for thy word hath quickened me." (Psalms 119:50, 93). With those who respect what the spirit says, statements like these end all controversy as to how the Spirit quickens; but strange it is, that those who talk loudest about the Spirit pay little attention to what the Spirit says.

Now read carefully and thoughtfully the parable of the sower, recorded in Matt. 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:4-15. "The seed is the word of God," and the human heart is the soil. Life is in the seed; to germinate, the seed must be sown in the soil. That is why the gospel must be preached to all sinners; for there can be no spiritual life in them, till the seed is sown in their hearts. But it has been argued that the soil has to be prepared; and it is assumed that the soil is prepared by a direct operation of the Spirit, though such operation is not even hinted at in the parable or in the explanation Jesus himself gave of the parable. Stranger still, it is assumed that this preparation of the soil puts life in the soil. The fact is, you may put your soil in a perfect state of cultivation, but there is no life in it till the seed is planted.

And even if there were such a thing as a direct operation of the Spirit on the sinner's heart, the seed, the word of God must be sown in it to produce spiritual life—no seed, no life. Besides, the Lord holds every intelligent being responsible for the condition of his heart. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23).

In explaining to his disciples why he spoke in parables, Jesus said: concerning the people to whom he had spoken, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should turn again, and I should heal them." Their heart waxed gross, they closed their eyes; they were not born in such condition. If the sinner closes the eyes of his understanding and refuses to receive this spiritual seed, the word of God, then he alone is to blame.

"Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." (James 1:21).

The Lord does not say, "I will take all filthiness and wickedness out of your heart so that you can receive the implanted word"; the individual is to put these things away himself, and receive the word. When Paul and Silas preached at Berea, the Bereans "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so." (Acts 17. 1:1). They laid aside everything that might hinder their receiving the word. "Many of them therefore believed." (v. 12).

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth. For, all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth; but the word of the Lord abideth forever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you." (I Peter 1:22-25).

The word which abides forever, the word by which these brethren had been begotten, was the word which had been preached to them; it is an incorruptible seed. It is the Implanted word of James 1:21, the word sown in the heart. The only seed therefore that produces Christians is the word of God, which was announced through men that preached the gospel by the Holy Spirit sent forth from heaven. (See I Peter 1:12). This word lives and abides; it has life in it—it lives, and therefore can impart life to the heart in which it is sown.

If the word of God did not have life in it, it would not be seed. Those who claim that the sinner must have life imparted to him by a direct work of the Spirit before he can receive the word cannot regard the word as seed.

We are told by some that the word is food for the Christian, but cannot put life into a sinner; but the truth is, it is both seed and food. The direct operation theory contradicts the statement that the word is seed.