

Whatever Happened to the Holy Spirit?

Scripture: Galatians 3:1–3

Code: 90-30

INTRODUCTION

When I was a young man preaching around the country, I received constant requests for messages on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Christians talked about walking in the Spirit and what it was to be filled with the Spirit. The manifestation and use of spiritual gifts was a topic of great interest.

However that has changed. The Holy Spirit now seems to be the forgotten member of the Trinity. Therefore the priority of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church must again be asserted. Galatians 3 does just that.

A. The Passage

In verses 1-3 the apostle Paul says, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

B. The Problem

All Christians acknowledge that life in Christ begins by the work of the Spirit. It cannot be perfected or brought to maturity through the flesh. Yet many in the church today seem to believe that it can. In Galatians 3:1-3, Paul wants his readers to understand that sanctification comes by trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit by faith. He called the Galatians foolish for trusting in God for salvation, yet compromising the gospel of grace by relying on human effort for personal holiness and spiritual maturity.

Paul asks in verse 1 whether the Galatians have been "bewitched" (Gk., *baskaino* [baskaino], "to fascinate" or "charm someone in a misleading way"). They had been misled by people who told them that sanctification was something they needed to accomplish on their own. The Galatians had by faith received and been empowered by the Holy Spirit, but were now willing victims of a flesh-pleasing brand of sanctification.

C. The Point

If a person receives eternal salvation and the fullness of the indwelling Holy Spirit through

wholeheartedly trusting in the crucified Christ, why in the world would he trade in supernatural power for human effort? That's what Paul wanted to know in Galatians 3. You cannot achieve a spiritual goal by natural means. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual life initially and He also sustains it. The Holy Spirit is to the Christian what the Creator is to the creation.

Without God the world would never have come into existence. And without His sustaining it, the world would go out of existence. Similarly, without the Holy Spirit none of us would ever become saved. And without His constant sanctifying, sustaining, and preserving work, the spiritual life of the Christian would drop back into the spiritual deadness whence it came. Paul said, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Indeed, "we live by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25).

In the evangelical church today so many are attempting to perfect in the flesh what was begun by the Spirit. Systematically and subtly, the Holy Spirit is being eliminated from the matter of sanctification. That poses a monumental threat to the church. Unless we are perfected by the Holy Spirit, all our efforts are in vain.

LESSON

I. CONFUSED CREED

A. A Misrepresentation of the Spirit's Work

The Charismatic Movement has contributed to the current deemphasis of the Holy Spirit's role in sanctification by misrepresenting the ministry, baptism, filling, and illuminating work of the Spirit. That has led many to attempt to perfect in the flesh what was begun by the Spirit. We need to understand what the Bible teaches about the Spirit's work if we're to grow spiritually.

B. An Overemphasis on the Miraculous

A chief way that the Holy Spirit has been misrepresented is His exclusive association with miracles, signs and wonders—anything extraordinary. He is presented as the magical member of the Trinity who moves in ways that are either seen, felt, or heard. As a result the internal, sanctifying, purifying work that the Spirit does in the heart has been severely downplayed.

C. An Unwillingness to Confront

Many Christians are now fearful of speaking the truth for fear that someone might be offended. Therefore there's very little talk, teaching, or preaching about the Holy Spirit anymore.

II. CONFUSED CONFIDENCE

A. The Rise of Pragmatism

Pragmatism has replaced supernaturalism in many of today's churches, and our reliance on the Spirit has correspondingly suffered. A pseudo-Christian humanism has infiltrated the church and we have become man-centered. That development is paralleled in history.

From about A.D. 500 to 1500 according to some reckonings, Western culture experienced what is known as the Dark Ages. The Roman Catholic Church as a political and religious authority dominated Western civilization. It controlled what men thought. The printing press was invented only toward the end of that period, so the distribution of information was very restricted.

The Reformation changed all that. There was an explosion of independent thinking and the chains of Romanism were shattered. The invention of the printing press made large quantities of information available. People could see, study, analyze, criticize, and evaluate biblical and other issues. In the Enlightenment man moved away from theological issues and focused on himself. The Industrial Revolution confirmed man's brilliance through his creativity and invention. The child of those developments was rationalism. Man came to worship his intellect. One example of that trend is Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, in which the eighteenth-century political theorist debunked the Bible and exalted the human mind.

Out of rationalism came liberal theology. Theologians examined the Bible in the light of human rationality and threw out the parts they deemed irrational. Man's mind became his own divine standard. When man focuses on his own achievements, he turns from the supernatural to the natural. We're in such a time right now, with achievements far surpassing those of the Enlightenment. Our present time has seen tremendous progress, and the result has been narcissistic self-worship. Many have come to believe that man has all the answers, a form of humanism that I call pragmatism.

B. The Results of Pragmatism

1. A disinterest in prayer

We understand the theology of prayer, that we are commanded to pray, and the various elements of prayer. The problem is that we have come to believe we don't need to pray. Who needs to pray for their daily bread in a society of plenty? We have developed systems to deal with practically everything. Desperate people don't need lectures on prayer—only those who think they have the solution to everything.

2. Spiritless programming

We often act as if "the weapons of our warfare are ... of the flesh" (contrary to 2 Cor. 10:4). People who tell others to solve their problems by getting in touch with themselves, rather than the Spirit of God, are using the pragmatic approach. They are attempting to solve problems by programs and methodology rather than spiritual power.

3. A preoccupation with church growth

I am often asked what I think about church growth techniques. My standard answer is that I have absolutely no desire to build the church. That generally surprises people until I remind them that Christ said He would build the church (Matt. 16:18). I don't want to compete with Him.

When people talk about church growth, they generally mean some methodology by which the church grows through human ingenuity. But Scripture says it is the Lord who adds to the church (Acts 2:47). Man never adds to Christ's church through his own cleverness. There is great danger when the church thinks it is rich and has need of nothing (Rev. 3:17), when it replaces supernaturalism with pragmatism—a sophisticated methodology to deal with every issue in the church, the family, and our personal lives.

4. A decline in God-centered preaching

Today's preaching reflects the pragmatic approach. So much of it is man-centered, dominated by a relational mentality that reconciles man to man, not man to God. It's directed at teaching you techniques to implement in your life so you can get what you want.

5. A lack of biblical understanding

a. Theological error

1) The sovereignty of God

Pragmatism is a failure to understand basic theological truth. The pragmatic approach to problem solving does not account for the sovereignty of God. Because He is sovereign, only God can solve problems.

2) The depravity of man

Pragmatic problem solving also fails to account for the depravity of man. Man can't solve his problems. His only hope is to get in touch with God. Two people working together will not help each other unless one has God working through him on behalf of the other.

b. Methodological error

1) The problem

Man is a fallen creature. Human depravity is so deep and pervasive that we cannot do anything for ourselves in the spiritual realm. So the use of human means to solve spiritual problems will inevitably result in failure.

2) The solution

However if you understand that God is absolutely sovereign and that man is totally depraved, then you're going to seek a supernatural solution to your problems. The weapons of your warfare will be spiritual not fleshly.

III. CONFUSED COUNSELING

A. Psychology: The New Approach to Problem Solving

A new approach to spiritual problem-solving is what I call psychological sanctification. A product of humanism and pragmatism, it is the belief that deep-seated problems will be solved only if you go to a counselor. The counselor supposedly helps you get in touch with your problems, and then helps you reach inside yourself and dig out the answers that are there.

Is Biblical Counseling Valid?

Absolutely! There are many wonderful people who counsel from the Word of God, intercede in prayer, and are used by the Holy Spirit to help the heavy hearted. The gift of exhortation is a

wonderful gift by which the Holy Spirit ministers through believers to other believers. We are all called to help, stimulate, and encourage one another in the Body of Christ.

However this new definition of sanctification is outside the Bible and operates apart from the Holy Spirit. I have noticed that in many seminaries pastoral majors have been replaced by psychology majors. Biblical emphasis has been replaced by an emphasis on psychology. The ministry of the Holy Spirit has been disregarded. Self-esteem, self-worth, and a man-centered orientation have led many into a greater confidence in their own ability than they should have—a greater confidence in themselves than in the Holy Spirit.

B. Scripture: The Final Authority for Problem Solving

1. The Psalms—David wrestled with every imaginable problem in life. He had happy and sad times. He wrote of experiences in his life where the pain was so deep he could hardly bear to live—as when his son Absalom tried to kill him. He suffered from horrible guilt because of immorality and murder. He wrestled with understanding his heart and the nature of God. Of God he said, "Holy and awesome is His name" (Psa. 111:9), while of himself he said, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Psa. 51:2). He told God what he felt and cried out for relief—though he admitted God had the right to punish him. Sometimes at the end of one of David's psalms you see the window of hope, and sometimes you don't. But David went to God because he understood the sovereignty of God and his own depravity.

2. Jeremiah 17:9-10—"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind." In verse 10 we see "heart" and "mind" used interchangeably, which means our capacity to think, ability to analyze, and competence for evaluation are all producers of deceit. Problem-solving by self-examination results in deceitful answers. The sin that is in us is biased in our favor against God, and lies to us about what we are really like. It exalts us in our own eyes, and absolves us of responsibility for sin. The answer to Jeremiah's rhetorical question, "Who can understand it?" is in verse 10: "I, the Lord."

3. 1 Corinthians 4:4—Paul said, "I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord." Paul couldn't find anything against himself, but he knew he couldn't rely on that.

4. Proverbs 16:2—"All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives."

5. Proverbs 14:12—"There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." When we reach down inside ourselves to get answers, we get lies. That's why we have to depend upon the Holy Spirit and not ourselves.

Who Are We Kidding?

What happens when we substitute therapists for the Holy Spirit? We may reason that if we shouldn't trust ourselves, perhaps we can trust other men. But if we can't get the truth out of our own hearts, how will someone else who also has a deceitful heart be able to help? We can fool a therapist all day

long while we fool ourselves. While we sit trying to discover what's inside of us, our hearts tell us lies. Can we expect a therapist to figure out the lies he is being told, and then tell us what we ought to do with our deceitful hearts? Who are we kidding?

6. Psalm 7:9—"Let the evil of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; for the righteous, God tries the hearts and minds." Only God can test, evaluate, and know the truth of a man's heart.

7. Psalm 26:2—"Examine me, O Lord, and try me; test my mind and my heart." David didn't want a human counselor. He turned to God and wrestled in prayer. He was repentant, broken, and contrite.

8. Psalm 139:1-7—"O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou dost know when I sit down and when I rise up; Thou dost understand my thought from afar. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, Thou dost know it all. Thou hast enclosed me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain to it. Where can I go from Thy Spirit?" God doesn't get any skewed signals—He knows everything about you. If you want to get in touch with the real you, get in touch with the Spirit.

9. Psalm 32:6-8—"Let everyone who is godly pray to Thee in a time when Thou mayest be found; surely in a flood of great waters they shall not reach him. Thou art my hiding place; Thou dost preserve me from trouble; Thou dost surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." Before trouble the godly pray to God, and in the midst of trouble they turn to Him. They are assured deliverance, instruction, and counsel from God. If you want accountability, only God will do it absolutely. If you want counsel, only God will give you advice you can fully trust.

10. 1 Corinthians 2:12—"We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God." The Holy Spirit is the source of our supernatural resources. When we want to know the truth about ourselves and the solutions to our problems, we need to go to the Holy Spirit.

11. Job 12:13—"With Him [God] are wisdom and might; to Him belong counsel and understanding." We substitute human counsel for God's truth because we believe we can solve our problems by our own cleverness, ingenuity, and systems. But that is to substitute our own abilities for the power of the Spirit.

12. Job 12:17-20—"He [God] makes counselors walk barefoot"—He strips them—"and makes fools of judges. He loosens the bond of kings, and binds their loins with a girdle. He makes priests walk barefoot, and overthrows the secure ones. He deprives the trusted ones of speech, and takes away the discernment of the elders." The wisdom of God is so far beyond man's that the greatest counselors are stripped naked before God's glory.

13. Job 12:24-25—"He deprives of intelligence the chiefs of the earth's people, and makes them wander in a pathless waste. They grope in darkness with no light, and He makes them stagger like a drunken man."

CONCLUSION

Our counselor must be God. The great tragedy of the church today is that it is filled with sin and weakness—a situation that will continue to get worse until we realize that spiritual warfare is fought with spiritual weapons. Techniques, theories, and therapies will never restrain the flesh because they appeal to the flesh. Solutions to personal, family, and church problems are found in God's counsel ministered through the Spirit of God. We must turn to the Spirit of God and learn to walk in the Spirit and know the power of the Spirit. We must reject man-centered, humanistic, psychological solutions to problems. Built into such solutions are false impressions of man's ability, which create the illusion of sanctification by intellectual achievement. The Galatians tried to perfect in the flesh what began in the Spirit, but it was a false solution then and it is a false solution now.

Focusing on the Facts

1. According to Paul, how is sanctification accomplished in the life of a believer?
2. What led Paul to ask if the Galatian church had been "bewitched"?
3. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is to the Christian what God as Creator is to the creation (Gal. 3:1)?
4. What monumental threat faces the evangelical church today?
5. What movement has led to the practical elimination of the Scriptural emphasis on the internal sanctifying work of the Spirit? How did that happen?
6. Instead of reliance on the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, what philosophy of problem-solving has infiltrated the church today?
7. What did Thomas Paine do in his *The Age of Reason*?
8. What happens to the prayer life of a self-reliant Christian?
9. How does church growth occur according to the New Testament?
10. What two theological errors does the pragmatic approach fall into? Explain each.
11. Psychological sanctification promotes self-esteem, self-worth, and man-centeredness. What happens to our reliance on the Holy Spirit when we accept such systems of thought?
12. Where are the answers to man's problems to be found? Support your answer with Scripture.

Pondering the Principles

1. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones summed up the plight of man in this way: "Man believes in his own mind and his own understanding, and the greatest insult that can ever be offered to him is to tell him, as Christ tells him, that he must become as a little child and be born again" (The Plight of Man and the Power of God [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982], p. 23). Paul asked the "foolish" Galatians if they thought they could perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit (Galatians 3:3)? If man's plight is so bad prior to conversion, what effect will self-reliant strategies for spiritual growth have on those who profess conversion? What or whom do you rely on as your guide for spiritual growth?

2. In John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the character "Shameful" says that it is "a pitiful, low, shameful business for a person to surrender his will and life to become a servant of [Christ]; that a tender conscience was an unmanly weakness; and that for a person to watch over his own words, attitude, and conduct, tying himself down to rules that destroyed his liberty ... would make him the ridicule and laughingstock of present-day society" (*Pilgrim's Progress in Today's English*, James H. Thomas, ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1964], pp. 73-74). Many in the church today agree with Shameful, and promote the idea that the fundamental problem with mankind is lack of self-esteem. However Jesus said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:11-12). Where is your sense of worth centered—in yourself or in Christ? What effect does your answer have on a true sense of self-worth?

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