

The Ministries of the Holy Spirit, Part 3

Scripture: Galatians 3:1–5

Code: 90-33

INTRODUCTION

Despite the sufficiency of the spiritual resources available to believers through the Holy Spirit, many Christians are attempting to reach spiritual maturity apart from the His power. They have unwittingly substituted psychology and pragmatism for true spirituality. Additionally, the controversy brought about by the Charismatic Movement has made many Christians reluctant to speak definitively about the Spirit's ministry for fear of offending those who disagree.

Pastors who teach the sufficiency of the Spirit to meet our needs and solve our problems have been accused of being unsophisticated and not understanding modern psychological principles. And believers who take the Holy Spirit seriously are often thought of as being esoteric and mystical, living on an unrealistic spiritual plane.

Each of those factors has contributed to the problem of attempting to perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit (Gal. 3:3). But the fact is, only the Spirit can finish and perfect what He began in the first place. All attempts to reach spiritual maturity through human means lack divine power and therefore produce weak Christians. That in turn weakens the church. Paul told the Corinthians, "I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). Correcting such a problem is difficult because fleshly Christians tend to resist spiritual counsel. Nevertheless we must continue to call Christians back to living on the spiritual plane.

REVIEW

We have seen that the Christian life begins in the power of the Spirit. It's a supernatural work that ushers you into life on a spiritual level. You've been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). You've been lifted out of the earthly realm into the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6). You function on a spiritual plane but you can't grow on that plane if you're living in the flesh. The Spirit must continue to perfect the work He started when He saved you. In addition to His initial work of salvation, the Spirit performs the ongoing work of sanctification:

I. THE HOLY SPIRIT PROVIDES ACCESS TO GOD

II. THE HOLY SPIRIT ILLUMINATES SCRIPTURE

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT GLORIFIES CHRIST

IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES BELIEVERS

Those are tremendous resources that are available only through the Spirit. But that's not all He does.

LESSON

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT MINISTERS THROUGH BELIEVERS

A. The Need for Mutual Ministries

1. The potential sufficiency of believers

When we consider the resources that believers have through the Holy Spirit, we might conclude that a Christian has everything he needs to live a godly life even without the support of other believers. In a sense that's true. Each believer is potentially sufficient because he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who is Himself sufficient.

2. The practical inadequacy of believers

Even though the Spirit is sufficient, sin prevents believers from fully appropriating their divine resources. Therefore God uses believers to stimulate one another toward making better use of the resources available to them through the Spirit.

B. The Manifestation of Mutual Ministries

There are several ways by which Christians can minister to one another.

1. Associating with other believers

It's obvious that we must associate with other Christians before we can minister to them. Hebrews 10:23 says, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." That's a call to consistency and faithfulness in our spiritual lives, and we do that by considering "how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together" (vv. 24-25).

Our goal in associating with other believers is to stimulate one another toward spiritual progress.

2. Using your spiritual gifts

We help one another grow spiritually by exercising our spiritual gifts within the context of righteous relationships. That's the foundation for mutual encouragement and accountability.

a. The definition of spiritual gifts A spiritual gift is a channel through which the Holy Spirit ministers to the Body of Christ. It's a "manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). When believers gather together they should do so to worship God and exercise their spiritual gifts in stimulating one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24). That's true Christian fellowship.

b. The analogy of spiritual gifts Paul said, "Just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). That's a simple analogy of a body and its various members. Each member performs a different function but each function is crucial for the overall health and effectiveness of the body. The church is the Body of Christ (v. 5) and its members (individual believers) function in ways that serve one another.

c. The diversity of spiritual gifts Verses 6-8 say, "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." Those are differing categories of spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12:4 says, "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit." There is only one Holy Spirit but He distributes a variety of gifts to believers.

d. The purpose of spiritual gifts Verses 7 and 11 say, "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." The Holy Spirit empowers us to minister to one another through our spiritual gifts. One day my son Mark said to me, "Dad, when you preach you're really something special, but at home you're nothing special at all." He meant that as a compliment and I took it that way. He recognized that something happens to me when I minister in the power of a Spirit-given gift. That's how it is with all spiritual gifts.

Are You Listening to the Holy Spirit?

One of the ways the Holy Spirit speaks to us is through the ministry of other believers. Do you receive their ministry in that way? For example, when someone encourages you toward greater faithfulness in the study of God's Word, prayer, church attendance, or ministry, do you recognize the Spirit's voice through them or do you see it as nothing more than their opinion?

One of the great riches of being in full time ministry and spending each day with the members of our church staff is the constant stimulation and accountability they bring to my life. It may come by way of exhortation, instruction, or encouragement, but I see it as God's Spirit ministering to me through them. To be in that kind of environment is a wonderful gift from God to those who bear a great

spiritual responsibility and need a high level of stimulation and accountability.

Even though you may not be in a pastoral ministry, you still need to recognize the Spirit's ministry through other believers. Remember, a true stimulator (Heb. 10:24) speaks on behalf of the Spirit. Are you listening to what He says to you through fellow believers?

e. The conduit for spiritual gifts All spiritual gifts must be channeled through the conduit of love. 1) Romans 5:5 "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." There is an inextricable link between God's Spirit and God's love. When we received His Spirit, we received His love as well. We must therefore minister our spiritual gifts in love. 2) Romans 15:30 "I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit." Again we see a connection between the Spirit and love. 3) Colossians 1:8 Paul commended the Colossian believers for their "love in the Spirit." 4) Ephesians 4:15 We are always to "[speak] the truth in love."

3. Fulfilling the "one anothers" of Scripture

a. The principle explained The Spirit also ministers through the "one anothers" of the New Testament: we're to love one another, pray for one another, edify one another, comfort one another, exhort one another, rebuke one another, teach one another, and many more. Those are our spiritual responsibilities toward other believers. b. The principle illustrated In Galatians 6:1-2 we have an example of mutual ministry within the church: "Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." That's a reference to a Christian who has fallen into some kind of sin. The Greek word translated "caught" speaks of being trapped or in bondage. Today we would say he has an addiction. Paul instructed believers ("brethren") to deal with such problems. He did not say, "Find a local Greek philosopher who can help him." Spiritual Christians bear the responsibility of restoring those who are caught in a sinful addiction. In doing so we fulfill the law of Christ, which is the royal law of James 2:8 (cf. John 13:34-35).

Whom Should Christians Turn to in Times of Trouble?

The Bible says nothing about professional help for Christians in turmoil, but it does say that Spirit-filled believers are to minister to such people. I think part of the reason people go outside the church for help is that many churches have failed to gently restore fallen believers and lovingly bear their burdens (Gal. 6:1-2).

When Christians fall into traps of despair, discouragement, depression, immorality, and substance abuse, the church should function as a healing community to such people. Spiritual believers have the responsibility of helping to restore them.

True biblical counseling to Christians in need is the process by which a Spirit-controlled Christian leads another believer to spirituality through prayer and the Word. There's no fleshly way to accomplish that. It's a spiritual ministry. In addition, I believe that although certain people are wonderfully gifted counselors, the restoration of sinning Christians is a ministry of the whole congregation rather than just one individual.

One writer drew a helpful analogy that illustrates the point: "Do not let discouragement drench your spirit, or fear flood your soul. Despite the howling winds of circumstance and the undercurrents of the enemy, press on in the power of the Holy Spirit as you hold firmly to the rudder of faith. Scan your horizons for a fleet of like-minded ships: vessels who adore and serve their King, the Lord Jesus. Once you find them, forsake your isolated wanderings for their protection, fellowship and instruction: The old ships will teach you reverence.

- Battered vessels are a practicum in compassion.
- Fast clippers, leading the fleet under Christ, instill obedience.
- Slow barges instruct you in patience and kindness, for they often bear the heaviest burdens.

- Front line battleships evoke respect and humility.
- A broken boat will enlarge your heart for meeting needs.
- And even a collision with another freighter will alert each member to stay on course and faithfully follow love."

No one person be he pastor or counselor can teach all that. But when the church functions in the power of the Holy Spirit, all those ministries take place. That dynamic stimulates each believer toward spiritual growth.

One of the tragedies of our day is that many Christians have drifted away from depending on the Spirit because they get in the habit of depending on themselves. When they finally discover their own inadequacies, they turn to the world for solutions rather than seeking God's provisions through the Spirit and through fellow believers. Whom do you turn to in times of trouble?

Because the Spirit ministers to us through other believers, we must never cut ourselves off from that vital source of stimulation and accountability. Unfortunately some Christians can attend church or Bible study week after week and make little or no contribution to the lives of other believers and receive little or nothing from them. Others spend time with Christians but the topic of conversation may not be of any spiritual significance. Be sure to make the most of the Spirit's ministry through other believers!

VI. THE HOLY SPIRIT STRENGTHENS BELIEVERS

Just as a battery operated toy needs power to run properly, Christians need supernatural power to function on the spiritual plane. Even though the Spirit gives us access to God, illuminates His Word, glorifies Christ, guides us, and ministers through us, our ability to trust Him to accomplish those things in our lives is limited by sin. Therefore He also gives us the strength to live a victorious, joyful, and productive Christian life.

The Bible mentions several specific things that the Spirit enables believers to do:

A. To Accomplish Great Things

1. The scope of His power

Paul said, "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:14-16). Paul prayed that his readers would be strengthened in equal measure to the riches of God's glory. Since God is infinitely rich in glory, Paul was asking for infinite spiritual strength for believers. The scope of God's power is illustrated in verse 20: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." That's an unimaginable, incalculable amount of power yet it's available to every believer through the indwelling Holy Spirit. What a tremendous reality!

2. An illustration of His power

Paul had firsthand knowledge of God's power because he lived a very difficult, lonely life and depended on the Spirit's power to fight the many physical and spiritual battles he faced. His personal testimony was: "We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone: we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out! Every day we experience something of the death of Jesus, so that we may also know the power of the life of Jesus in these bodies of ours.... We are always facing death, but this means that you know more and more of life.... This is the reason that we never collapse. The outward man does indeed suffer wear and tear, but every day the inner man receives fresh strength" (2 Cor. 4:8-10, 12, 16; Phillips). Whatever trials we face, the Spirit provides fresh strength each day. That's important because any level of ministry can be painful, discouraging, and heartbreaking at

times. On the outside you can be getting quite a bruising, but if you live on the spiritual level there is a constant supply of fresh strength. That's the ministry of the Spirit.

B. To Win at Spiritual Warfare

The Spirit also gives us strength to fight against Satan and his forces. Paul said, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses." (2 Cor. 10:3-4).

We are human but we can't fight spiritual battles with fleshly weapons. Therefore God has given us spiritual weapons such as prayer, His Word, and His wisdom. Such weapons are so powerful they can destroy every spiritual fortress that Satan attempts to build in this world through satanic ideas, ideals, values. Paul said, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (v. 5). By the Spirit's power we can win every spiritual battle.

C. To Cope with Burdens

The French Reformer John Calvin noted that the Spirit lifts us up as He places Himself under our heavy burdens. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Comforter (John 14:16), One who helps carry our burdens (2 Cor. 13:14).

D. To Overcome Sin

In Galatians 5:16 Paul says, "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."

E. To Evangelize the Lost

Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

F. To Maintain Hope

The Spirit gives us the assurance of our eternal hope. Paul prayed, "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" (Rom. 15:13).

G. To Serve God

Ephesians 3:20 says, "[God] is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."

H. To Praise God

Ephesians 5:18-19 says, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."

I. To Establish Proper Relationships

In Ephesians 5:22-6:9 Paul gives a list of interpersonal relationships that flow from Spirit-filled lives. Included are wives who submit to their husbands, husbands who love their wives, children who obey their parents, parents who don't exasperate their children, employees who serve their employers with respect and integrity, and employers who are gracious to their employees.

Those are all ways that the Spirit strengthens believers. There are no human means by which they can be accomplished. For example, there's no technique for overcoming sin and there's no method of evangelism that is effective apart from the Spirit's power.

VII. THE HOLY SPIRIT INTERCEDES FOR BELIEVERS

Even with all the resources of the Spirit at our disposal, we can fail Him by falling into sin. During such times He does not forsake us but ministers to us through intercessory prayer.

A. The Purpose of His Intercession (Rom. 8:26a)

"The Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should."

The context of Romans 8 is the day when we will see Christ and when all creation will be set free from the bondage of sin (v. 21). It's the culmination of our salvation. The Greek word translated "weakness" in Romans 8:26 speaks of our inability to keep ourselves saved. Our weakness extends to the point that we don't even know how to pray effectively for ourselves. In fact, if we had to depend

on our own prayers to keep us saved, we'd be lost. But when God saved us He promised to secure our salvation for eternity. We can trust His promise because He has the power to fulfill it. God exercises His power to accomplish His promises. We are eternally secure because The Holy Spirit is working within us to effect salvation.

B. The Process of His Intercession (Rom. 8:26b 27)

"The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

From within us the Holy Spirit is constantly interceding to the throne of God on our behalf with utterances too profound to put into words. Because He is in perfect communion with the Father and understands the Father's will perfectly, the Spirit can pray perfectly about our needs.

C. The Product of His Intercession (Rom. 8:28 39)

"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (v. 28).

The result of the Spirit's intercessory ministry is the ultimate working together of all things for the believer's future glory. Therefore you will one day be fully glorified and conformed to the image of Christ (vv. 28 30). It's guaranteed! Nothing can thwart God's purpose or separate you from His love (vv. 31 39).

Despite our sins, failures, inability to pray as we should, and all the obstacles we face on the human level, the Spirit continues His intercessory ministry. In addition, Jesus Himself "always lives to make intercession for [us]" (Heb. 7:25). Is it any wonder why all things are working together for our eternal glory?

The Believer's Assurance of Victory

The Spirit's intercessory ministry is the guarantee of our spiritual victory. We cannot ultimately fail because He prays for us, and God answers His prayers and strengthen us. The Holy Spirit sees sin in our lives and prays to the Father to cleanse us as He brings it to our attention and leads us to repent of it. The Father then forgives us and the Spirit empowers us to live more godly each day. However, that marvelous reality doesn't relieve us of our responsibility to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is sufficient for all our needs, but many Christians turn to fleshly solutions for spiritual problems rather than drawing from divine resources. Remember, you cannot perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit (Gal. 3:3). Therefore daily draw upon the power of the Spirit through fervent prayer and the study of God's Word.

Focusing on the Facts

1. All attempts to reach spiritual maturity through human means lack divine power and therefore produce _____ Christians.
2. Even though the Spirit is sufficient, _____ prevents believers from fully appropriating their divine resources.
3. Identify three ways that Christians minister to one another.
4. Why is it important for a Christian to associate with other believers (Heb. 10:24 25)?
5. What is a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7)?
6. What analogy did Paul use to describe the function of spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:4 5)?
7. Is there more than one spiritual gift? Explain (Rom. 12:6 8; 1 Cor. 12:4).
8. One of the ways the Holy Spirit speaks to us is through the ministry of _____.

9. What is the conduit for spiritual gifts?
10. _____ bear the responsibility of restoring those who are caught in a sinful addiction.
11. Define biblical counseling.
12. What was Paul's prayer request in Ephesians 3:14-16?
13. Identify three spiritual weapons God has given to every believer.
14. How does the Holy Spirit help believers cope with their burdens?
15. According to Ephesians 3:20, what is God able to accomplish through believers?
16. Why is it necessary for the Holy Spirit to intercede on behalf of believers (Rom. 8:26)?
17. How does the Holy Spirit intercede for believers (Rom. 8:26-27)?
18. What is the result of the Spirit's intercessory ministry (Rom. 8:28-39)?
19. How does the Spirit's intercessory ministry guarantee the believer's ultimate spiritual victory?

Pondering the Principles

1. We have seen that the Holy Spirit equips every believer to minister to the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:7, 11). Our spiritual gifts may differ but each of us have an important contribution to make to the overall spiritual health and effectiveness of the church. Are you a good steward of your spiritual gifts? Remember, other believers are counting on you!
 2. Many Christians want to accomplish great things for God but become discouraged by feelings of inadequacy. The truth is, in ourselves none of us are adequate for spiritual service. But God is "able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3:20). Moses is a biblical example of someone who needed to learn that lesson. Read the account of his calling in Exodus 3:1-4:30. What did God want to accomplish through Moses (Ex. 3:10)? How did Moses express his feelings of inadequacy (Ex. 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13)? How did God assure him that he would not fail (Ex. 3:12, 14-23; 4:2-9, 11-12, 14-17)? Did Moses succeed at what God called him to do (Ex. 4:29-31; 12:29-36, 51)? What are you trusting God to accomplish through you today? Have you committed it to Him in prayer?
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