

The Doctrine of the Church In These Times

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Chapter 5

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

"Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and the Lord would put His Spirit upon them" (Numbers 11:29)!

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all" (II Corinthians 13:14).

"There is nothing mechanical, automatic, or self-sustaining about the Church, however; it either lives by the constant supply of power from on high, or it ceases to exist." J. R. Nelson (*The Realm of Redemption*, p. 178).

"The HOLY SPIRIT is the very life of the Church as a spiritual society. He is the Spirit of life; and where He is not energetically present, spiritual life is utterly impossible. Exclude the HOLY SPIRIT from a so-called Christian assembly, and, though it may remain strictly orthodox, absolutely loyal to its early traditions, and may retain the punctual observance of the New Testament forms of worship, spiritually it will be as dead as an Egyptian mummy. Even accession to such an organization only increases the bulk of the carcass." Wilson T. Hogue (*The HOLY SPIRIT*, pp. 284, 285).

"The danger of the older, larger, and more thoroughly organized Churches is always in the direction of usurping the place of the Holy Spirit." W. H. Griffith-Thomas (*the Spirit of GOD*, p. 263).

"Is it not sad to see the extent to which the equality and priesthood have been lost sight of in the Church of CHRIST? Instead of gathering immediately to CHRIST and seeking the light and power of His Spirit, to qualify us to worship Him aright, we must still look - virtually, if not actually - to some human head or leader, pope or bishop, priest or minister, to do our worshipping for us. We must have buildings, splendid in their architecture and costly in their decorations; we must have beautiful attractions for the eye, and artistic music for the ear; and the time of the public worship must be taken up largely with seeing, and hearing, and doing certain things which have been prescribed and prearranged by others." Dougan Clark (*The Offices of the HOLY SPIRIT*, p. 206).

"The HOLY SPIRIT is our only Saviour from the perils of machine administration. Only when

He is the motor is the machine worth while." John Humpstone (*The HOLY SPIRIT in Life and Service*, by A. C. Dixon and others, p. 115)

1. The Church was formed by the HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2). The New Testament records the constituting of the Church on the day of Pentecost by the HOLY SPIRIT (I Corinthians 12:13), and thereafter the Spirit abides in every Church composed of true believers, governing it, providing for its spiritual needs and blessing its efforts for CHRIST.

2. The HOLY SPIRIT abides in the true Christian Church. Every believer is a temple of GOD (I Corinthians 3:16; 6:9). Each believer is joined with other believers in a true Christian fellowship which becomes a habitation of the Spirit of GOD. It is idle to talk of fellowship in the Church, or fellowship between the Churches, apart from the Spirit of GOD. Christian fellowship is not simply the expression of common interests, but love for a common Lord and CHRIST, and indwelt by the same Spirit. Religious organizations not composed of true believers possessed of the HOLY SPIRIT are not true Churches.

3. The HOLY SPIRIT builds up the Church. **"By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body"** (I Corinthians 12:13). **"They that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls"** (Acts 2:41). **"And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved"** (Acts 2:47). By adding believer to believer to CHRIST and the Church, the Church is enlarged and the local assembly strengthened. It is clear that the New Testament Church is a gathered Church, consisting of those who are saved and baptized. The New Testament knows nothing of any other pattern. When Churches are built up by purely human means, apart from the Spirit of GOD, a worldly, compromising Church is created which dishonors the Lord and corrupts the Christian faith.

4. The HOLY SPIRIT administers the true Church. **"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them"** (Acts 13:2). **"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches"** (Revelation 3:6). The HOLY SPIRIT has been called the "Executive of The Godhead" and He is the One who makes the Lordship of CHRIST real to the local assembly and effective in its affairs. Liberal groups of our day, denying the personality of the HOLY SPIRIT and consequently His sovereignty, have only an idealistic conception of the Lordship of CHRIST over the Church which lacks effectiveness.

Evangelicals acknowledge the personality of the HOLY SPIRIT, but too often refuse to accept His sovereignty and proceed presumptuously to expect His blessings on their humanly devised schemes. The history of the Church is filled with the wrecks of men's ideas, ill-conceived projects which failed and the religious notions of men which have no divine sanction. The true Church acknowledges JESUS CHRIST as Head and the HOLY SPIRIT as Administrator.

5. The HOLY SPIRIT maintains the unity of the Church. The family of the redeemed have a spiritual unity because of their relationship, but local groups of believers must depend upon the HOLY SPIRIT in their midst to give and keep them in spiritual unity with CHRIST and each other. W. H. Griffith-Thomas says truly, "He who unites each believer to CHRIST and to his fellow-believers undertakes the work of maintaining those believers and communities united in CHRIST as the prime secret of blessing and power." (*The HOLY SPIRIT of GOD*, p. 171)

Paul writes to the Ephesians: "**I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in you all**" (Ephesians 4:1-6).

The unity here is not organic but spiritual; it is not based upon compromise but truth - it is a unity of obedience to one Lord, of people holding one faith. Local assemblies of believers who follow human leaders instead of one Lord; who become a collection of self-willed individuals instead of obedient children; who do not seek and follow the leadership of the HOLY SPIRIT, will not enjoy this unity which is the privilege of every group of true believers. The HOLY SPIRIT unites the Church on one faith. Any other unity is of man and will not have the blessing of GOD.

6. The HOLY SPIRIT preserves the Church from apostasy. Churches lose the presence and the fellowship of the HOLY SPIRIT before they lose their orthodoxy. Wilson T. Hogue (*The HOLY SPIRIT*, p. 294) says, "Those who quench the Spirit, grieve the Spirit, resist the Spirit, vex the Spirit, by following after carnal things, by the indulgence of fleshly dispositions, by manifesting unholy tempers, words, or actions, by any kind of compromising with iniquity, cannot enjoy the immunity from being corrupted, or led astray by error, of which we have been speaking. He is preeminently the HOLY SPIRIT; and to enjoy His ministry in the heart whatsoever is known or believed to be unholy must be put away forever from our lives." The HOLY SPIRIT properly recognized and honored is the best security against false doctrine and apostasy. The HOLY SPIRIT grieved, neglected, sinned against weakens the defenses of the Churches against apostasy.

Today the professed Church is filled with a collection of believers, heretics, apostates, and worldlings of various shades and degrees, and spiritual discernment seems to have sunk to a new low in Christendom. Even many evangelical believers have a strange blindness which prevents them from detecting the false and identifying the true.

The cults of the day have drawn their strength from the Churches, Churches of low spiritual state and doctrinally untaught. The rapid spread of heresies and the prevalence of apostasy in religious circles is undoubtedly related to the low spiritual state of the Churches. It is the HOLY SPIRIT who preserves Churches from apostasy, more effectively than creeds and the soundest of confessional documents, for there is no affinity between the HOLY SPIRIT and the prevailing unbelief in religious circles. "**Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption**" (Ephesians 4:30).

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