

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK IN THE CHURCH

Theme: The Holy Spirit is active in the formation, unity, ministry and growth of Jesus' church.
(All Scripture is taken from The New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.)

We had been considering the work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of our Lord on earth. And now we consider His ministry in our Lord's precious bride—His body on earth—the church.

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When it comes to the body of Christ, we see the Holy Spirit's work¹ in . . .

I. ITS FORMATION.

- A. The Holy Spirit was—and is—deeply involved in the formation of the church. He not only regenerates those who believe on Jesus, but also unites them into one body. As the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”² This ‘baptism’ refers to a spiritual baptism (for which a physical baptism in a local church is meant to be an outward symbol). To be “baptized” into the church, in the sense that is meant by Paul in this verse, is to be placed into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit and permanently identified as a member of it. And along with being placed by the Holy Spirit into the church, each believer is also a full partaker of the same Holy Spirit. What a basis for unity!
- B. This spiritual institution—the church—is made by God; and it is made specifically to be His dwelling place through the Holy Spirit. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:5; “you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” It's certainly true to say that each individual believer can be considered ‘the temple of the Holy Spirit’; just as it says in 1 Corinthians 6:19, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” But more; it is also true to say that the full number of all His redeemed people together constitute His dwelling place. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19-22,

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

We also see the work of the Holy Spirit in the church through ...

II. ITS UNITY.

- A. There is a wonderful bond of unity between those who have been truly redeemed in Christ. That's why one of the tests of a true believer is whether or not he or she loves their brothers and sisters in Christ. As the apostle John powerfully puts it in 1 John 4:20, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" That's putting it in a negative frame; but that wonderful unity in Christ is also declared in a positive sense through the Holy Spirit—a unity so deep that it crosses all social, gender and ethnic boundaries. Galatians 3:27-28 says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Similarly, Colossians 3:11 says that we are renewed in the image of Christ, "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." It's the Holy Spirit Himself who brings about this profound, all-encompassing unity. We are not called upon to create unity in the church; but rather, as it says in Ephesians 4:3, we are to endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". This we can do, because, as the next verse asserts, "There is one body and one Spirit ..." (v. 4).
- B. This wonderful unity, however, is not the same thing as uniformity. It is a unity that is characterized by a Holy Spirit-empowered diversity; and thus a diversity that is expressed in perfect unity. There are differing spiritual gifts among us; but as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:11-12, "one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ."
- C. This unity within the body of Christ is so great that it transcends national boundaries. Jesus said that He had "other sheep ... which are not of the fold"; that is, the fold of Israel (John 10:16). Peter encouraged his believing Jewish brethren to resist the devil; "knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world" (1 Peter 5:9). And in the end, when all the redeemed saints stand together before the Lord Jesus Christ praising Him, they will be constituted of a great, immeasurable number "of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" (Revelation 7:9-10). Not only does this unity transcend the boundaries of nations, but also the boundaries of time. Jesus prayed not only for His apostles, but also "for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one ..." (John 17:20-21). Hebrews 12:1 describes "the cloud of witnesses" that cheer the saints on; and this cloud is constituted of the saints who are described in chapter 11—saints from many different generations over many different centuries. And this unity even transcends the boundaries of heaven and earth; for as it tells us in Hebrews 12:22-24;

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Can there be a more ‘transcending’ unity than that which the Holy Spirit brings about in the church?

We further see the work of the Spirit through the church in ...

III. ITS MINISTRY.

A. As we’ve already seen, it’s the Holy Spirit who gifts the individual members of the church for ministry as He chooses (1 Corinthians 12:11). But these gifts are not given for the benefit of the individuals who receive them, but rather for the benefit of others in the body who benefit from those gifts being faithfully put to use; “that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another” (v. 25). It is not for the gifts themselves that we are to be “zealous”, but “for the edification of the church” that we are to “seek to excel” (1 Corinthians 14:12). With reference to the gifts that our Lord gives His church through the Spirit's ministry, the apostle Paul wrote these wonderful words:

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:11-16).

B. Not only does the Holy Spirit gift the church for ministry; but He also governs the ministry it fulfills through those gifts. It was the Holy Spirit who appointed the early missionaries; and Who told the church, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). They therefore went as missionaries “sent out by the Holy Spirit” (v. 4). They even found that the Holy Spirit would forbid them from going to one place or prevent them from going to another (Acts 16:6-7). The Holy Spirit was the one who was said to have made particular men to be “overseers” in the churches that were formed; because Paul spoke to some of them and told them to “take heed” to themselves “and to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28). The Holy Spirit even guided the church in its important decisions; so that leaders could say that a course of action “seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us ...” (Acts 15:28).

C. In addition, the Holy Spirit has an ongoing ministry of protecting the doctrine of the church. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would “guide” the apostles with regard to the doctrine the church was to hold to and teach (John 16:13). In Revelation 2-3, “he who has an ear” was told to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:7, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Even today, the Holy Spirit ministers to the church as

the anointing which you have received from” Christ, “and that abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him (1 John 2:27).

Finally, we can see the work of the Holy Spirit in the church with regard to ...

IV. ITS GROWTH.

- A. Where the Holy Spirit is at work in the church, there is growth. In Acts 9:31, we’re told, “Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.”
- B. As Rene Pache wrote,

This is easy to understand; the Spirit conveys to those who witness for Jesus Christ His power and wisdom, He convinces men of sin, regenerates them, makes them members of his Body causing them to grow in faith and sanctification. It is indeed by the assistance of the Spirit and not by human effort alone that the Church increases. This holds good for the present day; a greater number of workers, more abundant material resources, administrative reorganization, more frequent meetings and more urgent addresses will not of themselves bring an advance in the work, whose progress springs from the profound working of God’s Spirit in all the members of the Body, who together hold themselves in submission to His will and faithful to His Word. May God grant us this for herein is true awakening.³

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Taking all this together into our hearts should change our attitude toward the church. The world around us looks down upon the church or sets it on the sidelines as irrelevant. But because of the truth of what the Scriptures tell us, no one should ever despise the church, or say that it’s an outdated institution, or declare it to be unnecessary to a true life in Christ.

The gracious work of the Holy Spirit in the church, as presented to us in the Scriptures, should be proof enough of how precious and powerful and relevant a thing it truly is.

¹Much of the material from this lesson was drawn from Rene Pache, J.D. Emerson, trans., *The Person and Work of The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), pp. 163-172.

²All Scripture readings are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

³Pache, pp. 170-171.