

2: One Spirit

There is very much that can be said about the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit, and it is not the intention here to give a full doctrinal exposition on the Holy Spirit. We will focus on those things that relate to our subject of unity and how we should understand the Spirit's ministry in this respect. Paul, in the first four verses of Ephesians chapter 4, makes the Holy Spirit central to the passage, for it is the "unity of the Spirit" which we are exhorted to endeavour to keep. All born-again Christian believers have received the Holy Spirit, it stands to reason therefore that there ought to be unity among them, for they are all called to be led by the one Spirit, and it is inconceivable to hold that He would ever contradict Himself. Let us then look at some of those important areas of Christian life where that unity of the Spirit ought to be evident.

Spiritual Understanding

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God ... the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. (1Cor. 2:12; 14)

Jesus made a very important point to Nicodemus, when He said to him, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3); with similar thought, Paul wrote that, "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God." The truth presented to us by such scriptures is that the kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom which cannot be discerned by the natural man. Only as the Holy Spirit works in a life can there be revelation, and the beginning of understanding of the true spiritual nature of God's kingdom.

That the natural man is very far from understanding the kingdom of God is clear from Jesus' poignant phrase, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). There is a great gulf between the natural man's understanding of life and that of the born-again follower of Jesus. Every true believer is aware of this, knowing it true from his own experience of receiving revelation of spiritual truth, and the subsequent deliverance from the power of darkness, and conveyance into God's kingdom of light and love (see Col. 1:12,13). This experience being so dramatic and life-changing that Scripture uses terms such as 'born-again,' 'converted,' and 'regeneration and renewing' to describe it. The born-again believer also recognises in his often unsuccessful attempts to explain even the simplest aspects of the kingdom of God to others, that the natural man is sadly void of any understanding concerning spiritual matters. It is only as the Holy Spirit ministers in a life and grants revelation, that anyone can begin to comprehend the true spiritual things of God's kingdom, and to understand their relevance personally because, "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (1Cor. 2:14). And once saved, it is part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to continue to reveal to the believer the "things that have been freely given to us by God" (1Cor. 2:12); every believer remains dependent on the

Holy Spirit for ongoing growth in understanding of the things of God's kingdom.

We should also note the place of the Word of God in bringing revelation of spiritual truth, because, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17), and it is the gospel of Christ which is, "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). The Holy Spirit is active where the word of God is taught and preached because it is, "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). We must always be mindful of the close association between Word and Spirit: the Holy Spirit uses the word of God to bring revelation of truth; the word of God tests for true work of the Holy Spirit, and provides confirmation of genuine works of the Holy Spirit.

The point here is that all truly born-again Christians have entered the kingdom of God, and the Holy Spirit has opened their spiritual eyes to the spiritual realities of the kingdom of God. The whole outlook on life is transformed, no longer bound by sin and worldly lusts and concerns, believers' eyes are to be fixed on things above (Col. 3:1,2), and their treasures laid up in heaven (Mt. 6:19-21). This heavenly outlook separates believers from the people of the world, and unites them in their common aspiration to seek and live for the things of God's kingdom.

Parakletos

The Greek word '*parakletos*' is familiar to most Christians, known for being the title given by Jesus for the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. Two Greek words come together in *parakletos*: *para* which means beside, and *kaleo* which means to call, the literal meaning of the two words is therefore, 'to call alongside,' and it has been translated variously as: to comfort, help, encourage, exhort and strengthen. In secular Greek the word had use for a legal assistant who aided others in court.

In Jn. 14:6, Jesus called the Holy Spirit, "another Helper," (Greek, "*allos parakletos*"), the word '*allos*' means 'of the same sort.' Jesus thereby indicated that the Holy Spirit would be very much like Himself in His character and ministry, the relationship and similarity is in fact so close that Jesus could say to those who would later receive the Holy Spirit, "I will come to you" (Jn. 14:18). The Holy Spirit indwelling the believer's life, supernaturally enables intimate relationship with the other members of the Godhead - Father and Son (see Jn. 14:18-21), which is tremendous subject for further study, here though we want to look at some ways in which the Holy Spirit, in His ministry as the *parakletos*, comes alongside and helps in the Christian life.

A Helper

Every born-again believer has received the Holy Spirit, and can therefore expect the Spirit to be with him, and assisting in various aspects of the Christian life, this is true for every believer. Here then, some of the main areas of "help":

i) *Convicts of sin (Jn. 16:8)*: A genuine Biblical understanding of sin and its consequences, along with deep conviction of one's own sinfulness in the eyes of God, is an essential part in the process of genuine salvation. It is the Holy Spirit who gives that conviction in the heart, which in turn leads to recognition of the need of Jesus as Saviour, and to repentance. As the gospel of repentance and

remission of sins is preached faithfully, the Spirit will be at work seeking to convict hearers of their sinfulness before God. True believers are united in their determination to preach the true gospel with the help, and in the power, of the Holy Spirit.

ii) *The Spirit of truth (Jn. 16:13)*: All born-again Christians should have received “the love of the truth” (2Thess. 2:10). None of us can know all the truth, but to have a love of the truth is the right attitude, it means an openness to the Word of God, and a willingness to be led by the Spirit of truth in study, and in seeking to understand and apply the implications of God’s word in personal situations. Where the Spirit is not leading into truth, there will be error; where the Spirit is leading there will be sensitivity to error, and willingness to reject the false. True believers are united in their desire to understand and to uphold sound, essential Biblical doctrines.

iii) *Glorifies Jesus (Jn. 16:15)*: The Holy Spirit does not seek to promote Himself, He seeks to promote Jesus. A life filled with the Holy Spirit is one that manifests the presence of the Lord Jesus. Ministry and/or witness that does not exalt Jesus, or that denies Biblical truth about Jesus, is not led by the Holy Spirit (1Jn. 4:2,3). True believers are united in their desire to exalt the Lord Jesus, and to testify to the truth about Jesus.

iv) *Overcoming sin (Rom. 8:13)*: By the Spirit, the believer puts to death the deeds of the body. Sin is a powerful force which cannot be overcome by human will alone, the help of the Holy Spirit is essential. Those who “walk in the Spirit ... shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). True believers are united in their desire to resist and overcome sin, and to live righteous and holy lives that are pleasing to God.

v) *Assurance of adoption (Rom. 8:15,16)*: The Holy Spirit here called, “the Spirit of adoption,” gives assurance to the believer of His place in God’s family, by which we know God as “Abba, Father.” This assurance is great comfort, and the Holy Spirit in our hearts gives a guarantee of “things to come” (Eph. 1:13,14; 2Cor. 5:5). That guarantee is like having a taste of heaven in our hearts, where we experience the love, joy and peace of God’s kingdom, it creates a “groaning” as we longingly await, and look forward to the fullness of redemption (Rom. 8:23). True believers are united as brethren in the family of their heavenly father, and together share the experience and longing for the coming of His kingdom (Mt. 6:10).

vi) *Helping our weaknesses (Rom. 8:26)*: Though this scripture is often taken to mean the Spirit’s help in a general sense, the context is specific to prayer, and in particular when we, “do not know what we should pray for as we ought.” There are situations for which as we seek to pray, we do not have clear knowledge or understanding of the circumstances, or of the specific will of God, but we can expect the Spirit to help by interceding on our behalf. At such times God sees the cry of the heart (Rom. 8:27), and seeing genuine concern, the Spirit takes the unspoken cry and shapes it in accord with the will of God for the situation. It is a wonderful aspect of the Holy Spirit’s ministry,

uniting believers in their dependency and willingness to be led by the Spirit in prayer.

vii) *The gifts of the Spirit (1Cor. 12:4-11)*: The right and proper use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit brings edification to the members of the church, and can be a tremendous blessing to the church family, both individually and corporately. While there is diversity in the kinds of gifts, they are given for the profit of all, and when operating under the leading of the Holy Spirit must have a uniting effect for it is, “the same God who works all in all” (v.6), and “the same Spirit works all these things” (v.11). Neglect of, or denial of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is to miss out on a tremendous source of help and blessing from the Holy Spirit. We should not allow the wrong use of the gifts and manifestations of counterfeit gifts, which are divisive and destructive, to rob us of the very real benefits of proper understanding and use of the gifts.

I have presented a brief overview of some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit helps us to live the Christian life. It should be evident that being led by the Spirit is a real mark of true Christianity, and that those who are truly led by the Spirit will share unity in the areas mentioned in the list above. The flesh lusts against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), and we must be aware of the temptation to give into the flesh and thereby be found to be at enmity with the Spirit and with those who are being led by the Spirit. Works of the flesh will for sure lead to division and disunity, and promotion of human achievements which are not pleasing to God (Rom. 8:8); those truly led by the Spirit will be united in their humble submission to the Spirit, and their willingness to let Him take the lead, in so doing Jesus is glorified, and they show themselves to be true children of God (Rom. 8:14).