

## Chapter Four

### The Gift of the Holy Spirit: 2

#### The Holy Spirit as Foretaste

*Purpose:* The purpose of this teaching is to start the process of situating the whole Christian life in the context of God's final goal of our glorification when Jesus comes in glory, to show that the gift of the Holy Spirit prepares us for the coming Kingdom and gives us a foretaste of the divine glory. It is the Holy Spirit that produces within us now the beginnings of the world to come, that gives us a longing and enables us to situate all our present hopes and desires in the context of the full and final hope.

*Presentation:* It is often appropriate to have a time of personal prayer ministry arranged at this point in the series, that is, following this talk. Before moving on, it is important that those hearing the teaching begin to experience the longing of the Spirit for the fullness to come. Many already baptized in the Spirit will already have experienced this, but may not have had the understanding to interpret it correctly. Again a testimony from someone witnessing to this desire and longing being awakened in them is often important.

#### Now and to Come

As Christians, the Father gives us his Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, when the hearers are deeply impacted by the message of Peter, they ask, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2: 37). Peter replies: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2: 38). After the day of Pentecost, they do not have to wait to receive the Spirit. There are many things that we have to wait for: we need time to grow in holiness. But when we truly believe in the promise of the Father, we can receive the Holy Spirit quickly. After that begins the process of growth. The apostle John writes: "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit." (1 John 4: 13).

Sometimes we hear it said that when we receive the Holy Spirit we have everything. It can even be implied that when we have the Spirit of Jesus all my problems will be solved and life will become a constant joy ride. It is true that joy is a fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5: 22). But it is not true that all problems disappear when we know Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit, and it is not true that there will be no more pain or suffering. This total deliverance from all that is evil will only happen when Jesus comes in glory. But when we receive the Spirit and become disciples, then we are given the strength and the hope with which we can face and overcome all the trials and disappointments that we will still suffer. The gift of the Holy Spirit now places us within us a taste of the total glory to come, and this experience and knowledge gives us the strength to persevere with confidence and inner joy. That is how Paul could write: "I consider that the

sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Rom. 8: 18).

Paul uses three different Greek words to express this anticipatory character of the present gift of the Holy Spirit. Each of these words brings out a different aspect of the gift of the Holy Spirit as foretaste and as the promise of the Father that is now partly but not fully fulfilled. We now look at each of these words in turn.

*Ἀπαρχή* (aparchē): This word is normally translated as first fruits. Paul uses it in 1 Cor. 15: 20: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.” It is an agricultural term, used to describe the first crop that is harvested from the fields. But for our purposes, the key verse is in Romans: “and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the **first fruits** of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom. 8: 23). In 1 Cor. 15, a chapter wholly devoted to the resurrection of/from the dead, first fruits refers to the resurrection of Jesus, who is already raised from the dead, as the start of the harvest that will lead “at his coming” to the bodily resurrection from the dead of those “who belong to Christ” (1 Cor. 15: 23). In Romans 8, the first fruits refers to the gift of the Spirit that we Christians have already received as the start of the harvest that will only be completed with the full and total gift of the Holy Spirit when we are raised bodily from the dead. In this context, we see how for Paul - and this is typically Jewish - our full adoption as sons (and daughters) of the Father takes place when we are fully redeemed, that is on the last day when our full humanity, body as well as spirit, is refashioned and filled with the glory of God.

*Ἀραβών* (arrabōn): This Greek word is slightly more difficult to translate with one clear English term, which was used to describe a transaction in which a significant part of a payment is given in advance as a security that the whole sum will be paid in the future. So it has been variously translated as an earnest, a guarantee, a first instalment, a down payment.

*Σφραγίς* (seal): This word means seal, referring to the stamp placed upon hot wax so as to seal a letter or a package that could not be opened without breaking the seal.

These two words are mentioned together because two of the texts to be examined contain both these terms. 2 Cor. 1: 22: “he [God] has put his **seal** upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a **guarantee**.” Eph. 1: 13 - 14: “In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were **sealed** with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the **guarantee** of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it [literally the redemption of the possession], to the praise of his glory.” Both these texts present the same teaching as in Romans 8, but they use different imagery. In both cases, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is given to the believer now, but that the gift received now is a

foretaste, a real beginning of the presence that will only be full and complete when the Lord comes in glory.

The seal placed upon official messages bore the image of the king or emperor. That image was the guarantee that the message was authentic and truly came with the authority of the king or emperor. The seal imprinted is not the Holy Spirit, but it is the likeness of the king imprinted by or through the agency of the Spirit. But, as we are told in Colossians, Jesus Christ is the “image” (*eikon*) of the Father: “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation” (Col. 1: 15). In other words, through the action of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ is stamped upon our inner beings. God sets his indelible imprint upon us.<sup>1</sup> This way of speaking is fully consistent with the way the New Testament speaks of the respective roles of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. But in the context of Ephesians 1, the seal is clearly connected with possession. When God places his seal upon and within someone, God is saying: “You are mine.” “You now belong to me”. This is really the same as saying that we are now citizens of the kingdom or the household of God (see Eph. 2: 19, Col. 1: 13 - 14). Linked to the first fruits or down payment dimension, the apostle is explaining that we already belong to God, but we are not yet fully with God. So when Jesus comes again in glory, he is coming to claim fully those who are already his possession. The Holy Spirit is “the guarantee of our inheritance” until God comes to redeem his possession.

Two points about translations of Eph. 1: 13 - 14. First. I have altered the translation of verse 13 to read “the Holy Spirit of promise” (the Greek is τῷ πνεύματι της επαγγελίας) instead of “the promised Holy Spirit”. To translate the Greek as “the promised Holy Spirit restricts its meaning to the Holy Spirit promised in the past, that is in the Old Testament, that has now been realized. The correct meaning is rendered by “the Holy Spirit of promise”, which means that the Holy Spirit has been and remains the Spirit of promise, so that there is a part-fulfilment in the present with a complete fulfilment to come. That this is the right understanding is shown by verse 14. Second, the right meaning of verse 14 is “which is an earnest (guarantee) of our inheritance until (literally towards or into) redemption of the possession (εἰς ἀπολύτρωσιν τῆς περιποιήσεως)” Some translations have until we acquire possession of it”, whereas in the Greek it is God who takes possession of us, not us taking possession of “our inheritance”.

Another use of the word “seal” occurs in Eph. 4: 30 which is very similar to 1: 14: “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Here as in Eph. 1: 14, redemption is referring to the final deliverance on the day of Christ Jesus or the day of the Lord. This usage is similar to that in Romans 8: 23 mentioned above that speaks of “the redemption of our bodies” clearly meaning the day of eschatological fulfilment. The apostle is teaching that through the Holy Spirit the Christian is sealed or marked indelibly for

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<sup>1</sup> See the passage in the Gospel of John: “For it is on him [the Son of Man] that God the Father has set his seal (ἐσφράγισεν).” (John 6: 27).

the day of redemption. So the teaching of Ephesians is clearly that the Lord says to the Christian: I have marked you with My Spirit; you are now my possession, and I will come to take full possession on the day of resurrection.

The other passage that mentions the down payment or guarantee is in 2 Corinthians 5. Here the first five verses are relevant to our theme. Verse 1 speaks of “the earthly tent we live in”, clearly referring to our mortal bodies, as when that is destroyed we will have “a building from God, a house not made with hands”. St Paul then says “For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (5: 2). In other words, in this life that is subject to death the Christian groans, longing to be clothed with the spiritual body of the resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15: 44). This groaning comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. This same thought is repeated in verse 4: “For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed [i.e. to lose our bodies through death] but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” See also 1 Cor. 15: 51 - 54. Then Paul arrives at his sum-up statement: “He who prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” (5: 5). In other words, God has always destined human beings for the glory of the resurrection, and it is precisely the role of the Holy Spirit to prepare us for this fulfilment. When we receive the Holy Spirit to prepare us for the glory of the coming Kingdom, the Spirit plants in us a deep desire and longing for the kingdom and for our final deliverance with the resurrection of the body.

The gift of the Holy Spirit to the Christian now does not bring us immediate freedom from all evil, an end to all temptation, a removal of all suffering. But the Spirit does plant in the heart of the Christian this longing which is the longing of the Spirit of God for the full accomplishment of the work of salvation won by Jesus on the cross. In fact, in Romans 8, Paul makes the remarkable statement that the Holy Spirit is groaning: “the Spirit intercedes with unutterable groans” (8: 26).

Many of you who have experienced being filled with the Holy Spirit have had the experience of groaning in prayer. Sometimes I find people who think as a result that something has gone wrong. But that is a serious misinterpretation. There is this groaning inside that comes from the Holy Spirit and that is a work of the Holy Spirit inside us. Often it may be associated with the gift of tongues. This groaning in the Spirit in us is a participation in the groaning of the Spirit for the realization of the Kingdom of God and the total completion of Jesus’s work of salvation and deliverance. This groaning is very purposeful. In Romans 8: 22, St Paul says that “the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now”. This travail is comparing God’s work of deliverance in his entire creation to the climax of a woman’s pregnancy. The groaning is not just an expression of pain, but belongs to the process of the bringing forth of new life. It is the same with this groaning in the Holy Spirit: it is a significant way in which the Holy Spirit brings praying

believers into the pregnancy of all creation, as the climax of the birthing of the Kingdom approaches.

If as you hear this message you sense an inner desire to enter into this groaning prayer of the Spirit, you do not have to do anything special to experience it. If you have received the Holy Spirit, then the prayer and longing of the Spirit for the coming Kingdom is already in you. Maybe we need to surrender more fully through the Holy Spirit to the Lordship of Jesus over our whole lives, emotional and affective as well as rational. Perhaps the surest way to enter into this intercessory process is to praise the Lord more fully with our whole being: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name!” (Ps. 103: 1). If we have received the gift of praying in tongues, then we need to exercise it. This exercise of our human spirit makes us more ready and capable of entering more deeply into the longings of the Holy Spirit.

#### Questions for Discussion Groups

1. Do you think of the blessings of the Holy Spirit you experience now as a foretaste and preparation for the fullness to come?
2. Do I see my body as loved by God and as destined for full salvation? If not, why do you think that is?
3. Have you ever experienced this groaning of the Holy Spirit in you? Or yourself groaning and trying to express things that go beyond our ability with words?