

God's Answers For Today

is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), and are therefore quite unacceptable before God. He need for this robe was emphasized by Jesus in His well-known parable of the man who sought the joys of the wedding feast without previously putting on the appropriate garment. The garment he wore was doubtless the very best he could produce, but it was not good enough. The only garment which could fit him for the feast was the one provided freely by the bridegroom. That unhappy man was therefore forcibly evicted from the nuptial feast. (Matthew 22:11-13.)

The wedding celebrations of this parable represent "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19 : 9) which all the saints will enjoy when welcomed to the heavenly home at last. If we would be there, we must be clothed with the garment provided by God. Any garment of our own would be quite inadequate, for "there is none righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:10. Immediately we put on this garment, however, we are accounted worthy, righteous, and perfect, by God. We are justified.

This wonderful experience is possible through Jesus. As Paul remarked: "For He [God the Father] hath made Him [Jesus Christ His Son] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21. The transaction is brought to view in a most appearing way in Zechariah 3:1-5.

Thus we see that the command of Christ: "Be You therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is a possibility, and indeed an accomplished fact for all who have faith. (Matthew 5:48.)

This acceptance of Christ's righteousness is the work of a moment. But having this robe, there thenceforth begins a work of personal purification, known as "sanctification." 1 Thessalonians 4:3. Justification means that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us; sanctification means that His righteousness is being imparted to us. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime. For though robed with salvation we still have weaknesses to overcome. Daily the Lord will give us strength sufficient for our struggles with sin, and if we stumble and fall at any time, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2:1.

A person who is truly justified, who is arrayed with the raiment of salvation (Isaiah 61:10), will be obedient to God's commandments. "If You love Me, keep My commandments," said Jesus (John 14:15); and again: "If You keep My commandments, You shall abide in My love." John 15:10. A person may claim to love and know God, but is knowingly and willingly disobedient, his profession is empty. (1 John 2:4.)

For every one of us this glorious transaction is by far the most important issue we face. Without accepting God's provision, we are heading for eternal loss. But with His-merciful provision, we can confidently anticipate the joys of eternal life.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

THE Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost is the third Person of the Godhead. The Spirit's activities are vital in the work of salvation. Without the Spirit, there could be no sense of sin, no repentance, no means of resisting evil, no reconciliation with God, no hope of eternal life. Sin against the Spirit, as Jesus said, is the unpardonable sin. (Mark 3:29) Therefore we should know what the Bible says about the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, like Jesus Christ, is one with God the Father. He united with the Father and the Son in the work of creation (Genesis 1:1, 2), and He is associated likewise in the work of redemption. When giving His Gospel commission Jesus bade His disciples to "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Matthew 28:19.

Speaking of the human body, Paul says that it is "the temple of God." And he later declares it to be "the temple of the Holy Ghost." 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19. When those early Christians, Ananias and his wife Sapphira, defrauded the church treasury, the apostle Peter rebuked them thus: "Why hath Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost? Thou has not lied unto men, but unto God." Acts 5:3, 4. Such texts as these, show clearly the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. (See also 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; 1 John 5:7) The Holy Spirit is not an emanation from God. He is not an intangible, unfeeling, unintelligent, impersonal influence. The Holy Spirit is a manifestation of God, possessing all the personal attributes of the

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Father and the Son. But His precise nature is, to us, an undisclosed mystery.

We can hear and see and feel the effects of the wind, but cannot actually see it. So it is with the Spirit. His effect is felt and seen in individual lives. This proves conclusively, that though we are unable to understand the Spirit's form, yet the Spirit is very real. (John 3:8.)

Do We Need the Holy Spirit?

THE Bible says: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Romans 8:9. This means that those without the Spirit are separate from God, and such separation means that all hope of future bliss and happiness must be relinquished. It even means that our present welfare is in greater jeopardy than it otherwise would be. Accordingly, for present happiness and success, and for heavenly sonship, we need the Holy Spirit.

Paul says: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Romans 8:14. Allowing the Spirit into the life, to purge and purify, to guide and control, elevates us to the honorable status of sons and daughters of God. Whatever may be our social or financial status matters little compared with this exalted relationship which all may attain-and indeed must attain-if lasting happiness and eternal life is our goal.

Realizing his need of the Spirit, David prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." Psalm 51:10,11. Not that the Spirit willingly deserts anyone. As we have seen in previous chapters, God is very reluctant to be separated from His creatures. But separation will come unless sin is abandoned in the life. The Holy Spirit cannot dwell side by side with sin.

More than anything else, more than money, clothing, homes, or possessions, more than work, health and strength, or education, we need the Holy Spirit. God knew this, and therefore recorded in His Word those timely warnings: "Quench not the Spirit "and "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby You are sealed unto the day of redemption."¹ Thessalonians 5:19; Ephesians 4:30.

What Is the Holy Spirit's Work?

THERE is an experience every one must have who desires to be saved. We "must be born again." John 3:7. This experience is known as "regeneration," and means that there is a completely new outlook in the life. It means that the head which was previously controlled by self, is now controlled by God. It means that the "old man "of sin has been dethroned, and that the "new man "of holy living has taken his place. It means that the dominion previously enjoyed by Satan has now passed to the Lord. (See Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9, 10)

This "new birth," this "regeneration," this putting on of the "new man," is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a work that is absolutely vital. Without it, heavenly hopes must fade. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," said Jesus to Nicodemus. (John 3:3) And commenting on this wonderful experience which even the greatest sinner may have, He added: "The wind blows where it does, and thou hears the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." John 3:8. This new birth breaks the fetters of old sins and evil habits as nothing else can. The tyranny of sin is such that resistance in one's own strength leads only to failure, and, in extreme cases such as drug addiction, to mental, nervous, and physical breakdown. But the Holy Spirit breaks all the chains of sin without breaking the mind or the body. A new power and life and zest and joy result from the Spirit's work of regeneration. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."² Corinthians 5:17.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven He promised that the Holy Spirit, or Comforter, would come to His disciples with abundant power. "When He is come," Jesus said, "He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." John 16:8. Here is an indication of the Spirit's methods in urging us to submit to His regenerating influence. The first step is to convince of sin. We must recognize that sin is sin, that it is ugly, unreasonable, inexcusable, and abhorrent to God. This is the first requisite in our return to God.

Secondly, the Spirit, having roused our sense of sin and guilt, shows us the way out. He points us

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to Christ. He reveals our Lord's righteousness which is freely imputed to those who have faith in Him.

Lastly, as an inducement to us to accept God's merciful provision of righteousness, the Holy Spirit seeks to convince us that there is a judgment to come. "For we must all appear before Christ's judgment seat in our true characters, in order that each may then receive an award for his actions in this life, in accordance with what he has done, whether it be good or worthless." 2 Corinthians 5:10 (Weymouth).

Having Performed His work of regeneration, the Holy Spirit begins the life-long task of purifying, strengthening, and ennobling our hearts and minds, a process which we have already referred to as "sanctification." Peter speaks of "the sanctification of the Spirit." 1 Peter 1:2. God's promise through the prophet Ezekiel was: "I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and You shall keep My judgments, and do them." Ezekiel 36:27. The work of sanctification, or growing in grace (2 Peter 3: 18), is one whereby this promise is worked out in our lives. With the Spirit's help we become more and more completely obedient to, and in harmony with, God's laws.

Furthermore, the Spirit will purify us by giving us an understanding of the will of God as described in the Bible. "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come," said Jesus, "We will guide you into all truth." John 16:13. Of course, whether God's plan works successfully in us or not, depends largely on us. We shall not be guided "into all truth" if we fail to read and study the Bible for ourselves. God does not force enlightenment on us. Neither can the Spirit guide us if we are prejudiced, or unwilling to surrender pet theories or ideas. Because of prejudice, many of Christ's "disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." John 6:66. If we have open, willing hearts, then the Holy Spirit will gladly perform His transforming, educating, purifying work within us.

And the fruitage in our lives will be such as to give us a joy and peace and happiness, and a buoyant freedom from fear, such as would normally be considered impossible in this modern world. "The fruit of the Spirit," said Paul, "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Galatians 5:22, 23. For want of these very virtues the world is languishing today.

How May We Receive the Holy Spirit?

WHAT the Lord said to His disciples, He says also to us: "Receive You the Holy Ghost." John 20:22. He is not reluctant to give us His Spirit. Indeed, Jesus compares our heavenly Father's attitude with that of an earthly father: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will you give him a stone? How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Luke 11:11-13. It would be an inhuman father that substituted stones for his child's bread. Parents are instinctively anxious for their children to grow strong and healthy, and are willing even to sacrifice so as to attain this end. God is even more anxious that we, His children, shall grow spiritually strong and healthy. Therefore there can be no question as to His willingness to give us the Holy Spirit.

The great secret is, as James says, that we "ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed." James 1:6. Paul likewise expresses his wish - that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Galatians 3:14.

This means that we must ask God for the Holy Spirit to possess our hearts, and then, regardless of our feelings in the matter, we must believe that the promise has been fulfilled. This is faith. (Mark 11:24) Of course, with such a request, there must be a willingness to forsake all sin, and willingness to go all the way with God. Such a faith as this will bring great power into the life.

"You shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you," was the Lord's last promise before ascending into heaven. (Acts 1:8.) John the Baptist had power, for He was "filled with the Holy Ghost." Luke 1:15. On that spectacular day of Pentecost, the disciples had power for they "were all filled with the Holy Ghost." Acts 2:4. Peter was "filled with the Holy Ghost." Acts 4:8. Paul was "filled with the Holy Ghost." Acts 13:9. It is our privilege, too, to be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Our conflict with evil, our plan to grow in grace and to do successful service for God will be accomplished "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, said the Lord of Hosts." Zechariah 4:6.