

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
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You know, when I first came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I started going to church. I kept hearing people talk about the Holy Ghost. Now you have to understand that I was born and raised Jewish. I never went to church growing up. The only ghost I'd ever heard of was Casper the Friendly. Do you understand what I'm saying? (laughter) I was like, "The Holy Ghost? What in the world is that all about?" Maybe some of you are like I was. Maybe you've heard talk about the Holy Ghost—that's the King James translation—or a better translation is the Holy Spirit, but you're really not all that sure who this person is or what this person is all about.

That's why today, in part ten of our series "How Firm a Foundation," we are going to talk about the person and the work of the Holy Spirit. Before we can really understand what the Holy Spirit does, we first need to understand who the Holy Spirit is.

There are two very important biblical facts that I want you to get about this. Number one, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit is a person. He is a "he," not an "it." The Bible says the Holy Spirit can be lied to (Acts 5), that He can be resisted (Acts 7), that He can be obeyed (Acts 10), that He intercedes in prayer for followers of Jesus Christ (Romans 8), and that His feelings can be hurt. He can be grieved (Ephesians 4). Folks, you can't grieve an "it." An impersonal force can't intercede in prayer for people. The Holy Spirit is a person. He is a "he," not an "it."

Second of all, the Bible says the Holy Spirit is God Himself, that He is as fully God as God the Father and God the Son are. We know this, number one, because every attribute that the Bible attributes to God, the Bible also credits to the Holy Spirit. For example, the Bible declares that the Holy Spirit is omnipresent in Psalm 139, that He is omnipotent in Isaiah 40, that He is omniscient and knows the deep things of God that only God knows in I Corinthians 2, that He is sovereign in I Corinthians 12.

What's more, number two, is that all the works the Bible attributes to God and God alone, the Bible also attributes to the Holy Spirit. For example, the Bible says the Holy Spirit took part in the creation of the world (Genesis 1), that He took part in the writing of the Bible (I Peter 1), and that He was responsible for the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 1). All of these things are things that the Bible says God alone did, and the Bible also says the Holy Spirit did them.

This explains why Jesus said in Matthew 28:19, "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations"—watch—"baptizing them in the name"—singular—"of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Notice the word name is singular, because there is only one God, but notice that this God exists in three equal persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

This is why at the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D., the early church fathers said this. "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the life-giving One, who is to be glorified equally with the Father and the Son."

This is who the Holy Spirit is. What does He do? Well, friends, I have to say that the work of the Holy Spirit is such an enormously broad topic that there's no way we can cover it all in one message. In particular today in this message, I am going to skip over discussing spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit awards, particularly the charismatic gifts of tongues, miracles, healings, prophecies, private prayer languages and all that kind of stuff, because I have a CD album you can pick up called "Tongues, Healings and Miracles: a Biblical Perspective," where I talk about all of this on 12 CDs. I talk about what these gifts are, how they operate, whether or not they're still operating today. You can get that in the BOOKstore after we're done.

Regarding the work of the Holy Spirit, what I do want to say today is that the Bible teaches that in the church age—which is where we are today—this age is almost exclusively the age of the Holy Spirit's ministry. To put it another way, almost all the work of God that's going on in the world today is not being done by God the Father or by God the Son; it's being done by God the Holy Spirit.

So what are some of these jobs? What are some of these ministries, if you will, that the Holy Spirit is carrying on here on earth in the twenty-first century? Well, I've

got just a few of them to tell you about. Number one, the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts people, who convinces people that they're sinners and that they're facing the judgment of God. You and I can argue with people all day long that they're lost spiritually and that they're facing God's judgment, but only the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit can convince them that this is really true of them. This is why Jesus said in John 16:8, "He"—the Holy Spirit—"will convict the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment." This is the work of the Holy Spirit, and no one ever comes to faith in Jesus Christ without the Holy Spirit doing this work in his or her heart.

Number two, the Holy Spirit is the one who regenerates us into being followers of Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again by the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:5 says that God saved us by the regenerating and rebirthing ministry of the Holy Spirit. Folks, when you and I repent and turn in faith to Jesus Christ, it is the Holy Spirit who actually seals the deal and turns us into new creatures in Jesus Christ.

Number three, the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us assurance of our salvation. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." As a follower of Christ, that sense that you have way down deep inside of you that you know that you know that you know that you belong to God? Well, that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit down deep in your heart giving you that confirmation each and every moment of every day.

I remember when I was a young believer in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. All my old drug buddies and drinking friends would all give me every contradiction in the Bible they knew about to try to talk me out of believing in Jesus. Now listen, I didn't have answers to all those contradictions they were throwing at me, but I knew that I knew that I knew something had happened inside of me and that I belonged to Jesus. What was that? That was the ministry of the Holy Spirit directly to my heart. That's a ministry He has to your heart if you're a follower of Christ.

Number four, the Holy Spirit is the person of the Godhead who indwells every follower of Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 6:19 says, "Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and thus you are not your own."

Number five, the Holy Spirit is the one who illuminates our minds and our hearts, so that we can understand the written Word of God. I Corinthians 2:14 says, "The unbelieving person cannot grasp truth that comes from God, for it is foolishness to him, because it must be spiritually discerned. But we as followers of Christ have received the Spirit who is from God, so that we can understand the truths freely given to us by God."

I'm sure you've had people say, "Well you know, I read the Bible all the time, and I just don't get it. I mean, it's like reading hieroglyphics as far as I'm concerned." Maybe some of you used to be like that, then you gave your life to Christ, and suddenly the Bible sprang to life. Every time you read it, you can't believe what you get out of it. What happened? Friends, what happened is that when you and I come to Christ, the Spirit of God takes up residence in our lives, and He begins illuminating our hearts and our minds so that we can understand spiritual truth. If you understand the Bible when you read it, if you get it when you read it, you can thank the Holy Spirit for that each and every day.

Number six, the Holy Spirit is the one who gives us spiritual gifts to serve God and the supernatural power to use them effectively (I Corinthians 12).

Number seven, the Holy Spirit is the one who comforts us in the trials of life (John 14).

Number eight, the Holy Spirit is the one who restrains evil in the world, Satan himself, so that the work of God can move forward in the world (II Thessalonians 2).

I have only one more. There are others, but I've got one more, and this one's really cool! Number nine, the Holy Spirit is God's down payment on us as followers of Jesus Christ. Now we all know what a down payment is, of course. It's a deposit that somebody makes as a promise that they're going to keep the deal, that they're going to follow through and finish the deal.

All right, now watch Ephesians 1:13. "After you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is God's down payment guaranteeing our inheritance." What inheritance is the down payment of the Holy Spirit guaranteeing? Well, II Corinthians 4 says, "We know that He who raised Jesus will raise us also, so that our

mortality will be swallowed up by eternal life. This is our inheritance in Jesus Christ”—now watch—“Now He who prepared us for this very purpose”—what purpose? For our mortality to be swallowed up in eternal life; that person who prepared us—“is God, who gave us the Holy Spirit as a down payment.

You see, my friends, the Bible says that the indwelling Holy Spirit is God’s guarantee, God’s pledge to us, God’s promise to us that you and I as followers of Christ are going to get heaven and get eternal life, precisely and exactly as God promised us. Folks, God does not make down payments unless He is utterly serious about finishing the deal. If that doesn’t pick your day up, I don’t know what will! I’m telling you, that’s cool! Thank God for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, amen? (audience responds)

Now that’s as far as we want to go in the theological treatment of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, because now we want to ask our most important question. You know what that is, so let’s go, nice and loud now. Come on! One, two, three—SO WHAT? That’s right!

You say, “Lon, so what? I mean, all that’s really good, and I appreciate all that theological information, but you know, honestly none of that is all that practical for me. I mean, none of that makes any difference tomorrow morning when I walk out of my house. Is there anything about the Holy Spirit that you can tell me that makes a difference tomorrow morning?”

Oh yes! I’ve got one more ministry of the Holy Spirit, and I promise you that you’re going to find this one intensely practical. Number ten, the Holy Spirit is the person who lives the Christian life through us as followers of Christ.

You say, “No, no, no, that’s not right. Christians live the Christian life.” No they don’t, not if they’re living it correctly. You say, “I don’t get that.” I want you to put your thinking caps on, and I want you to follow me as I walk you through this. Here we go.

Galatians 5:17 says, “For our sinful nature desires what is contrary to God’s Spirit, and God’s Spirit desires what is contrary to our sinful nature. These two forces are in conflict with each other, so that we often do not do what we wish.” The Bible says that when we become followers of Jesus Christ, that doesn’t mean that our sinful

human nature goes away. Oh, no! As followers of Christ, our sinful human nature is still alive and well, thank you. It is just as passionate and just as unruly as it ever was. This is why, even as followers of Jesus Christ, we all tend to eat too much, drink too much, sleep too much, spend too much, talk too much, gossip too much, lose our temper too much, act selfishly too much, and drive too fast on the Beltway. (laughter) This is why.

What's worse is, as hard as we try to control these passions inside of us, they are simply stronger than we are. Paul talked about this in Romans 7. He said, "For what I want to do, I do not do, but what I don't want to do, that's what I do, for I have the desire to do what is right and obey God, but I cannot carry it out, for what I do is not the good I want to do; rather it's the evil that I do not want to do. That's what I keep doing."

For the vast majority of Christians, this is our story. We want to try to do what's right. We try to go out and obey God every single day, but our sinful nature is just too strong, so we keep losing the battle. So we get discouraged and defeated, and we start feeling guilty. We read a verse like John 10:10, where Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it abundantly," and we say, "Well, I don't know who Jesus is talking about, but He's not talking about me, because as a Christian, my life certainly doesn't have the power, the joy, the vitality, or the victory over sin that He seems to be talking about."

You say, "Well, Lon, thanks. Now I'm really depressed." (laughter) Well, wait a minute, wait a minute! I have a solution to this. Hold on! Friends, don't miss this. The problem is that most of us as Christians were taught to live the Christian life incorrectly. We were taught to live it wrongly. See, God gave us the indwelling Holy Spirit to provide us with the power we need to subdue these sinful passions inside of us so that we can live the abundant Christian life, but as I said, so many of us were taught to live the Christian life incorrectly. We were taught to live it by depending on the power of our own human works and our own human efforts instead of depending on the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Galatians 5:16, Paul says, "If we live"—say the next three words with me—"by the Spirit, we will not gratify, we will not carry out the desires of our sinful nature." The Bible says if we want to live an abundant Christian life, then we have to "live by the Spirit."

As I said, most of us are never taught to live the Christian life this way. Most of us, like I was, were handed the wheel illustration and were told, "Hey, this is the blueprint for how you live the Christian life, the Word, Bible study, prayer, witnessing and fellowship." I was told, "Hey, you do these four things—Bible study, prayer, witnessing, and fellowship—and you will have the vibrant Christian life." But you know what? It doesn't work! You do Bible study, prayer, witnessing and fellowship, and you don't get the vibrant Christian life.

Now please don't get me wrong. Bible study, prayer, witnessing and fellowship are all great things, and they are all very important things, but listen. They are meant to be the overflow of an abundant Spirit-filled life, not the cause of that life. Friends, the cause of a Spirit-filled life is not Bible study, prayer, witnessing and fellowship; the cause of a Spirit-filled life is the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

But just listen to so many Christians talk when they're struggling in their Christian lives. Listen to what they say. They go, "Oh man, my Christian life's really not going well. Do you know what? I need to read the Bible more. I need to pray more. I need to go to church more. I need to fellowship with Christians more." When we say that, we may not realize it, but what we are really saying is that we are relying on these religious works, reading the Bible, prayer, going to fellowship group. We're relying on them to give us the abundant Christian life instead of relying on the Holy Spirit to do it.

I had a lady in my office several years ago. She was telling me about her growing up years and said, "You know, my dad would go into his room and spend two hours having quiet time. Then he would walk immediately out of the room and blow his stack at Mom, at me and the other kids." All right, so what did this gentleman need? Did he need two more hours of quiet time? No, no! Listen, the Christian life is a supernatural life. It is a life characterized by supernatural joy, by supernatural peace,

by supernatural patience, by supernatural self-control, by supernatural love, and supernatural boldness in witnessing.

Listen, if the Christian life were a natural life, then we could produce it on our own with Bible study, prayer, witnessing and fellowship or some other action, but it is a supernatural life; therefore, it must be produced inside of us by a supernatural being. That's why God put the Holy Spirit inside of us, because the supernatural Holy Spirit is the one who has to produce the Christian life inside of us and then live it out through us.

Now you say, "All right, how do you do this, Lon? All right, this is wonderful. God bless you up there. How do you do it? Put some handles on it and tell me how to do it!" Well, I'd love to. The way we do this is by living the Christian life by faith. It's by faith. In Galatians 2:20, Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live but it is Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit who lives in me, and the life that I now live in this body, I live by faith."

What is faith? Folks, faith is depending on God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Follow me here. We began our Christian lives by faith, right? I mean, we began our Christian lives depending on Jesus to do something for us that we couldn't do for ourselves, depending on His work on the cross to forgive our sins, to reconcile us to God and to give us eternal life, which we couldn't do for ourselves.

Let's go all the way to the other end and say that we're going to end our Christian life by faith, by depending on God to do something for us that we can't do for ourselves. Hey, when you and I are dying, we don't know where heaven is. We can't find heaven on our own. We can't get ourselves into heaven. We're going to depend on Jesus in that moment, however He does it, to come get us and take us there. True?

Okay, now listen. If we began our Christian life by faith, and if we're going to end our Christian life by faith, please explain to me why, in between those two points, God would change systems to a human works system? The answer is that He doesn't. The whole thing is by faith. We start by faith. We live by faith, and we die by faith.

What does it mean to live by faith? Well, what did we just say? We live by faith means that we live every day depending on God to do for us what we cannot do for

ourselves. This is what Paul said in Galatians 2:20. "I live by faith. I go out of my house every day, consciously depending on the Holy Spirit to do for me what I can't do for myself, to give me the power I need moment by moment to subdue my sinful nature, so that I can obey God like I really want to." That's living the Christian life by faith. (applause)

A few years ago, I had the privilege of serving for two weeks as the chaplain of a campaign for Jews For Jesus up in New York City. If you don't know what summer witnessing campaign is, during the month of July, teams of people go out on the street with tracts in hand, and we hand out tracts all over the street and in the subways in New York City. I went out with a team every day. We go out four times a day, wearing these bright T-shirts that have "Jews For Jesus" emblazoned on them. Here's a picture of me with one of them.

When you go out on the streets of New York City like this, well, let's just say it's an interesting experience. (laughter) Folks, I was cursed out royally. I heard words in this particular diatribe that I don't know that I have ever heard in my entire life, and it was a woman doing it to me. I was literally spit on, threatened, pushed around, shoved, laughed at, ridiculed, mocked, and insulted. One day I was on Wall Street, out in front of the Stock Exchange at noon. This gentleman came from my left side; I never even saw him coming. All of a sudden, I turned, and what I saw coming at me was a fist. He hit me in the face and knocked me completely on the ground; I was totally not expecting it. It's interesting on the streets of New York City!

I have to tell you that I walked out onto those streets realizing that I didn't have the power to do this in my own strength, so I didn't even try. I walked out of the Jews For Jesus building where I was staying every day, not trying to have love for these people but asking the Holy Spirit to produce supernatural love inside of me for these folks. I walked out every day not trying to have patience with these people but asking the Holy Spirit to produce it inside of me every moment that I was out there. I walked out not trying to have boldness in witnessing, but saying, "Lord, You give me a supernatural boldness in witnessing." I am here to tell you that I found that the grace of God is sufficient for the streets of New York City, amen? (audience responds) It is.

Now, why were things working well for me out there? Because I was living the Christian life the way it was supposed to be lived. I was living it by faith. I was living it by reliance on the Holy Spirit. While I was out on the street, fifty times a day, I was like, "Lord, give me patience. Lord, give me patience." That's how you do this, friends.

I didn't go out every morning saying, "I will not lose my temper. I will not be discouraged. I will not go to jail from punching one of these people in the face."

(laughter) Friends, if you go out like that in the energy of your own strength, and you're going to lose every single time. Instead, I went out saying, "You know, Lord, I can't do this, but if You do it in me, if You live these values and these things through me, then I can just be a conduit, and You can live the Christian life through me today, Father."

Listen, it was easy for me to realize that I needed to live this way on the streets of New York City. I mean, it was obvious that I was in way over my head, but I'll tell you, during those two weeks, I had the Holy Spirit speak to me as clearly as a bell and say, "You know what, Lon? What you need to understand is that you are just this over your head in Washington, D.C., every day. You're just this over your head. It's not as critical, so you don't believe it. You don't understand it, but you're just as over your head there when it comes to showing patience with your children, patience with your family, driving on the Beltway, or caring for people at work and in your family. Lon, you're just over your head. You're not able to do that either."

God really spoke to me about the fact that I needed to come back to Washington, D.C., after being in New York with the same dependence on the Holy Spirit moment by moment and day by day in my daily life here as I did in that one crisis incident on the streets of New York City.

And you know what, friends? So do you. You are over your heads in your daily life in Washington, D.C. You can't do this on your own. You can't live the Christian life on your own here in this town. Only the Holy Spirit can do that through you, because it's a supernatural life. You can't live a supernatural life; only a supernatural being can.

So as we close, I have a little assignment I'd like to give you for this week. Here's your assignment. I'd like you to consider taking one specific area of your life

where you've been struggling to obey God and been losing, whether it's eating, cursing, looking at women lustfully, Internet pornography, gossiping, or losing your temper. Pick one area where you're struggling. This week, I want you to go out every day, saying, "Lord, I'm not relying on myself today to beat this, but I'm actively and consciously going to rely on Your power to give me the victory in this area of my life. I'm not going to try to beat this in my own energy and strength. I'm not going to try to say, 'I will not do it. I will not do it. I will not do it.' No, no, no, Lord, I'm going to say, 'Lord, You at every moment in my day give me the power to live above this.'"

So when they put that piece of chocolate cake in front of you at lunch, you need to say, "Lord, help me, Lord. Lord, give me the power to say no." We chuckle at that, but do you know what? For a lot of people, that is the greatest challenge of their day, right there, controlling what they eat. It's one of my problems.

Hey, being really serious now, when we're tempted to sit in front of that computer late at night and go places on that computer that we've got no business going, that's when we need to say, "Lord Jesus, this is wrong. I really don't want to do this. This is sin, but Lord, this is too strong for me. Right now, Holy Spirit, You need to give me the supernatural power to overcome this and to live the way I want to live, with purity instead of doing this."

When somebody cuts you off on the Beltway or when your child pushes your patience to the limit, we need to say right then, "Lord Jesus, right now I need patience from You, Lord. I don't have it, but You can give it to me." When that beautiful blonde comes walking down the hallway at work right at you, you need to say, "Lord Jesus, this is serious now. Give me the power to look someplace now, Lord, up, down, all around, but not at her."

Do you know what you'll find when you do that? It's amazing what you'll find. If you'll ask the Holy Spirit to give you the power and depend on Him for the power instead of yourself, you'll get it! Even if you have to do this fifty times a day, what difference does it make? You ought to be carrying on a moment-by-moment conversation with the Lord all day long anyway. Do it fifty times. Do it a hundred times a day. What difference does it make? Test God, and you see if this new way of

living the Christian life, depending on the Spirit instead of yourself, doesn't work a whole lot better than the way you've been doing it.

Then what we do is begin doing this area by area by area of our life until depending on the Holy Spirit becomes the habitual way that we live our whole life! Now you'll never get it 100% right. I mean, something will always come along where you'll go, (snaps fingers) "Doggone it, if I'd stopped at that moment and asked the Spirit for power, I wouldn't have eaten that piece of cake!" Yeah, that will happen to all of us, but I'll tell you what. I guarantee you that if you learn to do this consistently, your Christian life will take on a whole new dimension of victory and power.

Listen, friends, the Christian life, lived correctly, works. It does. The way we live it correctly is by faith. We live it by depending on the power of the Holy Spirit every day to overcome our sinful nature and give us the resources we need to obey God instead of depending on Bible study, prayer, witnessing, fellowship or our own ability to gut it out.

Do you know what you'll find if you live this way? Something else you'll find is that your Bible study, your prayer, your witnessing, and your fellowship will take on a whole new joy, a whole new excitement and a whole new vitality, because you're not doing them now to try to produce something in you that can't be produced through these things; rather you'll be doing them as the overflow of a Spirit-filled, Spirit-driven life, and they will become a whole lot more fun and a whole lot more rewarding.

Friends, let me repeat in closing that most of us were taught to live the Christian life wrong. If you've been living it wrong, I've got great news for you. You can change and begin living it right. In fact, the Holy Spirit is just waiting for you to ask Him to give you the power and depend on Him. It took me years to figure this out, friends; it really did. My life was not what it should have been during those years until I did figure this out, and I'm happy to share it with you. I hope this will change the whole way you live the Christian experience. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, thank You today for talking to us about how to live the Christian life correctly by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now Lord, You know so many of us here are living Christian experiences where, frankly, we come into church, look at other people,

and say, "Well, it must be working for them, but it's not working for me. There must be something wrong with me." What we don't realize is that so many of them are looking at us and saying, "Well, it must be working for her, but it's not working for me."

Lord Jesus, what we really need is to be honest and admit that based on human effort, it doesn't work for anybody, but when we live the Christian life based on the power of the Spirit in our lives, when we let Him live the Christian life through us as we actively trust Him to do for us what we can't do for ourselves, then the Christian life works.

So Lord Jesus, change the very way we approach Christian living because we were here today and sat under the teaching of the Word of God. Thank You for the Holy Spirit, Lord, who does all of these ministries we talked about. Lord, we worship You today, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and we pray these things in Jesus' name, and what did God's people say? Amen!

All right, thanks for being here. Lord bless you guys.