

HOLY SPIRIT POWER

SCRIPTURAL TEACHING REAFFIRMED

Preface

- 1 The purpose of this booklet is to reassert traditional Christadelphian teaching, and by that we mean Bible teaching, about the influence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. We feel this to be necessary because of the views which have been promulgated within the Brotherhood, which are inconsistent with Bible teaching.
2. One of the difficulties of a work of this size is that it is not possible to deal comprehensively with all the passages that might be introduced as evidence that the spirit operates directly on the hearts of men to enlighten and produce good works. It is for this reason that the bibliography at the end of this booklet is so extensive as reference to these works should cover all the various aspects of the subject and give explanations of all the relevant passages.
3. We write in the hope that those who have espoused this error, may yet consider the implications of their beliefs and return to the true Spiritual teaching on this important subject.

Introduction

There are many brethren and sisters who, faced by the question of how God will work in the life of a believer, feel unable to say categorically that God will never work directly by His Spirit. They have no clear view of the matter but feel that, if circumstances require it, He might so operate on specific occasions. The psalmist says, "Strengthen thou me according unto thy word" (Psalm 119: 28). Consequently, we believe that God works in our lives in the ways revealed in His word, and we must not presume that He will act differently. However, we wish to assure brethren and sisters who fall into the category described above that nothing that is written here should be thought of as directed against them, although we hope that it will help to clarify their views on this important issue. The concern is with those who propagate, not vague possibilities, but a well defined and formulated doctrine which has no part in Christadelphian teaching, and which — because it undermines, in a number of respects, our basic understanding regarding the power of God's written word and the clearly defined means by which "all things work together for good" in the life of the believer — poses a threat both to the salvation of those who hold the views and those whom they seek to influence by them.

Many believe that the issue is really one of semantics and that we all mean the same thing in the end. It must be appreciated that this is not so. Again, others assert that the differences are not important and that we must simply tolerate each other. It should be noted, however, that those with whom the doctrine of the direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of believers originated, do not share this tolerance. For them it is an essential aspect of God's work for the salvation of men, and those who deny this experience are effectively outside the scope of that work. We believe that many brethren and sisters who have been influenced by this orthodox church doctrine believe it to be essential for their own salvation. Most maintain a low profile on the implications of their beliefs, but the logical outcome is that those who do not share them are, to put it in its simplest terms, putting their eternal future at risk.

As one brother expressed it in written discussion, "it might be that God will save you despite yourself". Again in the context of endeavouring to prove that the words of Acts 2: 38 refer to the operation of the Holy Spirit directly on the hearts of believers a well known brother quotes

a series of New Testament passages in support of his claim. He asserts "Any attempt to make these and many other passages refer only to miraculous powers, or only to the first century, would result in **tearing the heart out of the Gospel**". Needless to say, the traditional Christadelphian view would regard some of these passages in just that way and where passages are understood as referring to the experience of all believers, it is never in the sense of direct spirit influence. Numbered amongst those who are considered consequently as having torn the heart out of the Gospel are Bro. John Thomas and Bro. Robert Roberts, to whom we are indebted, under the good hand of God, for our understanding of the Truth, and brethren C.C. Walker and John Carter, former editors of "The Christadelphian".

Our Pioneer Brethren

Just how zealously our pioneer brethren withstood these teachings about the Holy Spirit is not emphasised enough, and those who have espoused the doctrine are usually reticent to face up to the implications of their belief. We reproduce below passages from the writings of Bro. Thomas and Bro. Roberts to illustrate their views in the matter.

1. Clerical Theology Unscriptural (1850) Page 17, Bro. John Thomas.

"We are renewed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3: 5) through knowledge." The Holy Spirit renews or regenerates man intellectually and morally by the truth believed, "Sanctify them through thy truth," says Jesus, "thy word O Father is truth" (John 17: 17). "Ye are clean," said he to his apostles **"through the word** which I have spoken to you" (John 15: 3). God's power is manifest through means. His Spirit is His power by which He effects intellectual, moral and physical results. When He wills to produce intellectual and moral effects, it is by knowledge revealed by His Spirit through the prophets and apostles. This knowledge becomes power when received into "good and honest hearts"; and because God is the author of it it is styled "the knowledge of God" (2 Peter 1: 2) or "the word of truth" (James 1: 18) by which He begets sinners to Himself as His sons and daughters."

2. Faith in the Last Days — Article: "Baptism of Spirit" Page 217. Bro. John Thomas

"A man truly and scripturally enlightened would never claim to be baptised of spirit in the dry time that intervenes between the early and latter rains. He claims only to have been begotten of the truth which is spirit, not to be indued with any of its baptismal powers."

3. Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come (1861) Pages 277/8 Bro. John Thomas

"John the apostle says, "the spirit is the truth". He had learned this from Jesus, who said, "It is the spirit that quickeneth: the words that I speak unto you are spirit and life;" and because the apostles believed this, Peter declared that the words he delivered were "the words of eternal life". Paul's testimony upon this point is equally forcible: "the word of God" saith he "is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart". This word was developed by the Spirit moving holy men of old to write the purposes, promises and teaching of God in a Book called the Scriptures. Hence the truth revealed in these is styled "Spirit", because it came by spirit, and is quickening. He that is quickened by the truth, then, is quickened by spirit, and he that is not quickened by the truth, is not quickened by spirit. Hence, Paul declares the converting power to be in scripture given by inspiration of God, in testifying that it is able to make wise to salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus. When we consider what he states the scripture is able to do, we must be satisfied that no other agency in conversion is needed than the scripture in the mouth of faithful men who are able to teach others. He says, "it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Our proposition, then, is this, He that is taught of the written word is taught of God; and that a man hath just so much of the Spirit of God in him, as he hath of the truth in him intelligently and affectionately believed."

4. Herald of the Kingdom — "The Work of the Spirit" (1861) Page 283 Bro. John Thomas

The genuine "fruit of the spirit" is composed of the admirable qualities specified by Paul, which result from the truth intelligently and affectionately embraced. The spirit in its moral aspect "is the truth" and the truth is spirit and life. The fruit of the spirit is therefore the fruit of

the truth which varies in the degree of its development according to the heart in which it is sown, Matt. 13: 23. The Christian graces termed faith, hope, charity and so forth, are the work of the truth upon the heart."

5. Christadelphian (1870) Page 123

In answer to a correspondent who asked, "What about plain statements of scripture bearing on the direct operation of God on the human mind?" Bro. Roberts printed a letter written by Bro. David Handley of Malden describing it as "all the more valuable" because Bro. Handley had once espoused these views himself.

"We cannot be Christians unless we have the mind of Christ, which is the mind of the spirit, and we cannot have this mind of the spirit unless we know what it is; and that mind has been revealed at different times in various ways, through the prophets and apostles. In order to be spiritually minded, we must know and attend to the voice of the spirit, in the word Deity has, by His spirit, made known to man..."

To Bro. Handley's letter Bro. Roberts added some comments of his own.

"If the act of faith were due to the volition of Christ acting upon us, there would be no need for the exhortation contained in the very place where the expression occurs. "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus." If a faithful state of mind were preternaturally engendered from without, after the manner of inspiration, there would be no need for those precautions and exercises which tend to preserve us "grounded and settled, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel." (Col. 1: 23)

5. Further Seasons of Comfort — The Power of the Scriptures Pages 57, 59, 60, 61, 62. Bro. Robert Roberts

How then, are the heirs of salvation guided by the counsel of God in the days of their sojourn in the present evil world? Timothy is an example, to whom Paul declares that "from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures **which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.**" Paul's parting benediction to the brethren of Ephesus contains the same answer "I commend you to God, and to **the word of his grace, which is able to build you up,** and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." The Psalmist gives the same idea plainly in the words we all know "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Finally Christ affirms it in those words of petition concerning his disciples:

"Sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth".

We live in an age when it is particularly necessary to recognise and insist upon this truth, that the counsel by which God now guides His people, whom He shall afterwards receive to glory, is contained in the book written by holy men of old, "who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

...I can imagine a rejoicing enemy of the orthodox type seizing hold of these admissions, and using them against our profession, and in favour of the surrounding systems. "See," he might say, "you admit the spirit of God is not with you; you condemn yourselves. He is with us. He visits our meetings, waters our operations, strengthens our hearts, converts our hearers, helps our prayers and gives a blessing to our cause"... I can only say that if the Spirit of God were working with the popular systems, I for one should gladly and instantly cease my opposition to them... It is wise, therefore, though disagreeable, to repudiate the popular claim to the possession and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is a false claim and a mischievous one. It leads people to look in the wrong direction... In fact, the result of the popular error on this point cannot better be described than in the language of the prophet concerning Israel's departure from the living God. "They have forsaken the fountain of living waters and hewed themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water"...

"Supposing David's guidance had been altogether direct and personal by the spirit (which it was not) and, therefore, out of the category of our experience, we should **still** be in a position to apply the words to ourselves. We should be able to say, if diligent students of the Holy Oracles, "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel"... "But some will think, "Surely there is more guidance than this. Surely God does not leave us to the Bible merely"..."

"It is the teaching of the word that if we draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us; that if we choose the things wherein He delights — and those things are all embodied in the Bible — He will have His eye upon us and regard our way; that if we commit our way to Him, He will direct our steps; that if we are broken and contrite in heart and tremble at His word, He will look to us and help our infirmities, and succour us in temptation, and supply our needs, and chasten us in our errors, and forgive our sins, and strengthen us in the way of righteousness, and

make all things work together for our good. But all this is dependant on our waiting on the word in daily reading and meditation. He hath magnified His word above all His name. He has appointed it as the means of our sanctification, the place of our meeting with Him. Honouring His word we honour Him. Despising His word; we despise Him."

It is a strange anomaly which is rarely addressed by those who have accepted these false ideas on the work of the spirit that Bro. John Thomas totally rejected the views they hold, as belonging to the apostacy, and yet he rediscovered the Truth. All about him were so called Christian denominations who, in one form or another, believed they were directly influenced by the spirit, independently of the word of God. They believed that it worked on their hearts to produce those qualities that would guarantee their salvation and yet "they believed a lie"; they preached, "another Gospel". They lived in ignorance of the way of salvation and were characterised by a spirit of error. We suggest that if Bro. Thomas had not at a very early stage in his investigations appreciated that these views of the work of the spirit were unscriptural it is extremely unlikely that he would have come to the knowledge of the Truth, for the spirit cannot be wrong and consequently the "churches" could not have been apostate but must, essentially, have held the Truth. Logically these facts seem so self-evident that it is difficult to imagine what answer there can be to them unless it be to assert that, after all, it does not really matter what we believe.

The Gifts of the Spirit

We must not be deceived by the fact that the majority of those amongst us who believe in the direct operation of the spirit upon the hearts of men in this present dispensation do **not** believe that they possess Spirit Gifts. Most would readily agree that the miraculous powers of the first century are not given at this present time. Often this is quoted as evidence that there is no real problem, but to place the emphasis on Spirit Gifts is something of a "red herring" and serves to divert attention from the real issue which is far more dangerous in its implications. It has always been accepted that Spirit Gifts did not affect the moral standing of the individuals who possessed them. The doctrine with which we are concerned, however, teaches that man himself is unable to produce the good works in which God delights but they can only be produced by the operation of the spirit on the hearts of men independently of the written word of God. This teaching is dealt with more comprehensively in the next section.

It is, however, necessary to deal in general terms with the passages that relate to Spirit Gifts for these are wrested from their first century context and used as if they refer to a direct moral influence in the lives of believers today. We suggest that one of the great misconceptions about Spirit Gifts is to believe that they were limited in their distribution. The apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost said, "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2: 38). Peter meant what he said and he was speaking of the miraculous gifts of the spirit.

That the gifts were not limited but widespread in their distribution is evident from the fact that on three occasions in the New Testament the ecclesia is likened to the human body with all its various parts contributing to the growth and wellbeing of the whole. Each of these three illustrations occurs in the context of Spirit Gifts.

"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given unto us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching." (Rom. 12: 4 to 8).

"For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit. To another faith by the same spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same spirit... But all these worketh that one and selfsame spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ... For the body is not one member, but many... But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him. And if they were all one members where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body... Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular. And God hath set some on the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after

that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." (1 Cor. 12:8-31, please read the whole chapter).

"For unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men... And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up unto him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body is fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Ephesians 4:7-16).

An appreciation of the implications of the foregoing passages will make plain that such passages as 1 Cor. 6:16, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you," and Romans 5: 5, "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us", have clear and undoubted reference to the first century gifts of the spirit which were freely given to the believers but are not part of our experience today.

The False Teaching Stated

The doctrine of prevenient grace is almost universally believed by all "Christian" denominations other than Christadelphians. The word 'prevenient' means "to come before". Hence, before a man can understand, believe, repent and do good works, he must first be the object of grace by the direct physical operation of the Holy Spirit in his life. This doctrine is, of course, included amongst the "Doctrines to be rejected" in our Statement of Faith. No. 25, "That a man cannot believe without possessing the Spirit of God."

In the interests of accuracy and fairness it should be stated that there is a wide range of differing views within the definition given above among brethren and sisters with a disposition towards these "orthodox" teachings. There is, however, a logic of error, and to begin to move away from the traditional Christadelphian Biblical position is to run the very real risk that eventually the implications of that departure from Truth will lead to the embracing of the doctrine in its more extreme forms.

There are serious implications that have to be recognised:

1. It has much in common with the doctrine of Calvin that men are predestined unconditionally to salvation or condemnation. Without the operation of this grace in their hearts men cannot be saved. The implications must be faced. If this is true, those who do not believe or obey the gospel call cannot be held responsible for their acts.
2. As the spirit produces the good works, those who have failed to develop the "fruit of the spirit" in their lives can reasonably claim that it is not their fault. One of the foundations of this false teaching is that human nature is incapable of performing any good works, and consequently these works can only be produced by the direct operation of the Spirit of God. This is a fundamental error, for a good work is by its very nature what it is, and men who have no relationship with God often show compassion and perform acts of kindness. Cornelius is a case in point, "A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway". He had achieved these things before his baptism and before the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon him. (Acts 10:2,44-48). The truth is that although men perform good works they can never by these deeds commend themselves to God. They are separated from Him by their sins, and it is only through the Lord Jesus Christ and his sacrifice that men's works can be acceptable to God.
3. It turns men's attention from the real source of their enlightenment and the power that can transform their lives. See Ps. 19:7-11; Ps. 119:9,11,50,92,98,104,105,130; Rom. 1:16;10:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12; James 1:18.

Beware of the argument that claims some references to the Word of God working in the life of the believer are not to the written word, but to the Divine fiat as in creation. "God said" — and it was done. In this connection note particularly the words of Peter, "Being born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever....and this is the word which **by the Gospel** is preached unto you" (1st Epistle 1:23-25).

The issue then is this. God has given to men the power of choice. A will that they can bend to His will. The call of Scripture is "Whomsoever will, let him come." Men respond to the Word of God. That Word received into good and honest hearts becomes power for it reveals the thoughts of God. When men are influenced by that Word for good, then the mind of God (or Christ) is formed in them. They then think as God thinks and see things as He sees them, and that Word becomes a transforming influence in their lives producing "the fruit of the spirit."

Spirit in Romans

Although space does not permit a detailed examination of relevant passages, a brief resume might be helpful, as this epistle, perhaps more than any other, is used by those who believe in the present direct activity of Holy Spirit power on the human heart. It is good advice to study the context and not to go straight to Romans 8 without considering the argument that precedes it. This is one reason why some have misunderstood the words of the apostle in that chapter.

Note, for instance, that the Lord Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:4). We have no difficulty in understanding that these words refer to his holy character and it would not be amiss to describe it on the basis of this passage as "the spirit of Christ."

Later in the same chapter, Paul says, "For God is my witness whom I serve with (AV margin 'in') my spirit in the gospel of his son" (verse 9).

Again there is no difficulty in understanding the words or of confusing them with Holy Spirit power. In fact, it should be noted that far from his heart being controlled by the Holy Spirit it is his own individuality that the apostle emphasises. It is "**my spirit**".

The same kind of language is used at the end of Chapter 2. "For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter;" (verses 28 and 29). Paul is speaking of the "inner man", "the new man", and of course it is these early allusions that are developed later in the Epistle, "Even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4) and "that we should serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Chapter 7:6). Clearly, just as the spirit of Christ is another way of describing his character, so also the newness of spirit in which believers serve is descriptive of their Christ-like characters.

At the end of Chapter 7, Paul writes in similar vein, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (verse 22) and after emphasising again the conflict between "the law of his mind" and "the law of sin" (verse 23) he concludes, "So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (verse 25). Again, there is no hint of Holy Spirit influence but again an emphasis upon his individuality, "**I myself**".

Note how, as the argument moves into chapters, two verses later Paul writes, "For the law of the spirit (of life in Christ Jesus) hath made me free from the law of sin and death". The words put into parenthesis indicate how they define the word 'Spirit'. It represents, as we have seen in the earlier chapter, "the life in Christ Jesus".

With these introductory comments, notice how the phrases used in chapter 8, so often mis-applied to the Holy Spirit, are repeated to describe the "Christ life" to which we are called.

"Walk not after the flesh but after the spirit" (verse 4)

"but they that are after the spirit (mind) the things of the spirit" (verse 5)

"to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (verse 6)

"in the spirit if so be that the spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (verse 9)

"if Christ be in you... the spirit is life because of righteousness" (verse 10)

"if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you" (verse 11)

"but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (verse 13)

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (verse 14)

(See 'Spirit in the New Testament'. Whittaker/Carr (Page 114))

God Does Work in our Lives

The words of Jesus that, "no man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him" are often quoted to imply some kind of direct influence upon the heart that

accounts for some men accepting the Truth and others rejecting it. Of course God is at work. The question is, **how** does He draw men to the Lord Jesus. The Scriptures help with two illustrations from the Old Testament.

"I drew them... with bands of love" (Hosea 11:4). The bride to her beloved:

"draw me, we will run after thee" (Song of Solomon 1:4).

These Scriptures provide an illuminating illustration. How was the bride drawn to her beloved? Not by compulsion but by attraction. Thus God appeals to men by revealing Himself through the Word. He demonstrates His love; He tells of His promises; He calls men to His Kingdom. It is all done through the preaching of the gospel for, "the Spirit and the bride say Come... And whosoever will let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

No doubt God works through the circumstances of life to bring men to a position in which they must face the challenge presented by the Lord Jesus Christ, but the choice is theirs. There is no direct influence of the Spirit, it is simply a matter of how men respond to the Gospel call.

Often the traditional belief in the ways of providence, most wonderfully demonstrated by Bro. Roberts in his book which bears that title, is belittled as limiting the hand of God in our lives. Often it has been said, "It is not just the Bible and angels" or words to that effect. Of course everything that God does He performs through His Spirit, and the real issue is what does the Word of God say? We must not presume that God should or should not work in a particular way. The truth that God works in our lives through angels is in fact overwhelming. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." (Hebrews 1:14).

We cannot begin to understand in all its fulness the complexities of the ways in which God works in the lives of His children. Remember He knows every prayer we shall ever utter, every trial and tribulation we shall be called upon to endure and He has, as it were, gone before. He has prepared the way, provided for every eventuality. When, perhaps, we cry out in dire distress with no way out of our dilemma, when perhaps we feel that nothing but His Spirit sent in immediate response can provide the strength we need, remember we are seeing things from our human perspective. We might not have known that the trial was going to overtake us, but God knew and will have provided for our necessity. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them" (Psalm 34:7).

Perhaps we should consider the Lord Jesus Christ in his needs a little more carefully. He had a fellowship with the Father that no other has experienced. If any should have had direct comfort and strength given in his heart by the spirit then surely it was the Lord Jesus. Yet he needed the ministrations of angels to strengthen and encourage him.

"Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." (Matt. 4:11).

"And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." (Luke 22:43).

If the Lord needed the ministrations of angels, how much more do we.

Conclusion

It is our hope that what has been written in this booklet will help brethren and sisters to appreciate the real issues in the debate regarding the work of the Holy Spirit that has troubled our Community for many years. Too often those who have departed from traditional Christadelphian teaching are allowed to propagate their views unhindered and unchallenged. It must be appreciated that those who have a formulated doctrinal position in this matter are preaching "another gospel". Christadelphian Bible teaching, from the inception of our community, regarded it as belonging to the apostacy, and no amount of "good words amid fair speeches" should be allowed to cloud that fact. In abandoning fundamental Christadelphian teaching about the work of God in the life of a believer, the real question that they need to ask themselves is, "Have we forfeited the right to be called Christadelphians?"

We pose the question in love, for, to repeat again the sentiments of our preface, we have written in the hope that those who have espoused this error may yet reconsider the implications of their beliefs and return, to Christadelphian values in the understanding of Scripture.

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