

Sermon Ephesians 1:1-14 (Part 3)

Scott Newton ©

Introduction

I was going to go on to verses 15-23 with this sermon but after having looked a little more at the last part of these verse I felt there was still much we can learn from this section of scripture. And we have covered the work of the Father in brief and the work of the Son in brief, I felt it would be good for us to cover the work of the Holy Spirit in brief.

From verse 11 onwards we have an important argument. Paul is initially talking about himself and the other initial disciples points out that they were chosen in Christ in order that they might be to the praise of God's glory. And he points out to the Ephesians, and to us, that they also were included in Christ when they heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation. Note how Paul styles it – the word of truth. Not the stories of people's experiences of truth but the word of truth. And those truths were the gospel of our salvation – the fact that Christ died for us to redeem us from our sin.

And having believed we were marked with a seal. Seals is something we don't use very often in everyday life these days either but the concept is still well understood because we still seal up legal rulings etc. Especially governments who will seal up information for a number of years because they fear that public knowledge of it will cause public unrest or if they feel it will jeopardise the security of the state. Well, we who have believed are also marked with a seal. A living seal – the promised Holy Spirit. That is quite incredible really, that the third person of the Trinity should be our seal guaranteeing our inheritance in Christ. So how do we know we are Christians? Because we have been given the Holy Spirit. But how do we know that we have the Holy Spirit? How do we know that it is not our own minds playing tricks on us? This is a difficult question to answer but let us see if we can pull various threads together and at least get a better idea. After all, it is important to know whether we have the Holy Spirit or not as he is our guarantee of our inheritance and as it is such a wonderful inheritance it is not wrong for us to want it. After all, Christ is the centre of that inheritance so it is good that we should desire it. We see the same sentiment in 2 Corinthians 1:22 and 1 John 4:13.

Believe and You Will Be Saved?

Some people will say this is easy. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved and if you are saved then you must have the Holy Spirit – QED. However, I don't think we can be quite so categorical about it. Let's look at Matthew 7:21-23 – this is Jesus speaking mind you - *“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”* I'm sure that if we had asked those people to whom Jesus is referring to here they would have said they were Christians but from Jesus's perspective they weren't. So it seems we would have to say that it is possible for us to be wrong but our perception of whether we are in Christ or not.

Christian Experience and the Word of God

So how do we tell we have the Holy Spirit. We cannot answer this question with a particular objective test which will always return yes or no – rather we have to look to our own hearts and answer some questions. Experience is very important to the Christian but that experience has to be compared to the Scriptures otherwise we have know way of knowing whether our experiences are



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genuine Christian experiences or delusions from our own mind. They give us an external point of reference to know whether what we are seeing is the work of the Spirit or not. As 1 John 4:1 tells us – we are to test the spirits. This becomes critical for Peter at Pentecost. He refers back to Joel to explain what is happening.

Also in Acts we see various acts of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples. Sometimes they had definite visions or visitations from angels. On the other hand sometimes it was much more subtle, for example in Acts 13:4 we are told that Paul and Barnabas “*sent on their way by the Holy Spirit*”. Given the context in the previous couple of verses it is quite probable that the Holy Spirit's prompting came through discussion with the leaders of the church at Antioch.

Evidences:

So let us have a look at some of the things that will help us to know whether we truly have the Spirit or not – and in the processes give us some practical tests to find out whether we are Christians or not.

Evidence 1: The Spirit of God makes us alive to God. If he is dwelling within us then we should have some longings after Christ and his body.

And which happens to be the church. We should want to meet together as a people. To give you an example from my own life. When I became a Christian I felt the need to go to church. My parents were fairly anti-church so I couldn't ask them to give me a lift so I choose a local church and use to ride my bicycle to get there. The church I ended up going to was not a very friendly church - I stayed at that church for several months and can't really say that I got to know anyone – but come Sunday evening I would get that gut feeling that it was time to go. I believe that was the prompting of the Holy Spirit within me.

Evidence 2: If the Spirit of God is living within us then we should have some interest in the things of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:26-27 - “*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*” What causes the Spirit to rejoice should make us rejoice, what grieves the Holy Spirit should make us grieve. So news of the kingdom of God growing, of people coming to Christ, should fill us with joy as it does Christ. While news of Christians suffer should make us sad, to make us want to pray. And within our own congregation there should be some wanting to care for the other members of Christ – their joys should be our joys, their sorrows our sorrows.

Evidence 3: If the Spirit of God is dwelling with in us and he is holy then we should know something of the fight against sin in our lives.

Paul could write of the struggle he had with sin in his own life in Romans 7. We too should be able to tell of something of the struggle we have with sin in our lives to. As Galatians 5:22-23 tells us “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*” which is certainly not natural to me. Some days being a Christian is a struggle between doing what I know I ought to do and what I want to do. I can identify with Paul. And this should be true of all of us to some degree if we are Christians.

Evidence 4: If the Spirit of God is dwelling with in us then we should feel some necessity to pray.

In Colossians 4:2 Paul writes “*Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*” And in Philippians 4:6 he writes “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*” And he can write this because of Romans 8:26 - “*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.*” Pray is in some



respects not easy for us in the 21st Century, or at least we make it not easy because we think it's a set of formulas or a particular way of speaking. But prayer isn't that – pray is speaking and listening to God – in the same way basically that we do to anyone else except that God can hear our thoughts as well so we don't necessarily have to pray out aloud.

Evidence 5: If the Spirit of God is dwelling within us then it should be reflected in our lives.

This will be manifest in the things that we say and do and enjoy. What does Romans 8:5 tells us - *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.”* And what does the Spirit desire – that we reflect Christ through being like him – or in more traditional words – through holy living. Are things like truth, honesty, obeying the law, family, etc. important to us? In South Africa Christian businessmen had the reputation for the being the worst businessmen to deal with because of their dishonesty level. That should not be the case. If our lives are not being transformed then it is high probable that we do not have the Holy Spirit. Now it is true that just about all of us have times when we backslide but the general progression should be towards lives which reflect more of Christ. And that is the reason why Paul spends the last few chapters of Ephesians dealing with practical everyday life issues.

Evidence 6: If the Spirit of God is dwelling within us then we should be led by the Spirit. Our lives should at some level being given up to be led by the Spirit. We should be open to his voice and follow his nudging within our lives. And there is also that “just knowing” - *“The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children”* (Romans 8:16). I wasn't sure whether to include this under an evidence or not.

Now all of these are experiences but they are all experiences which we can compare to the Scriptures and say yes – they are consistent with what the Scriptures teach us about God and so we can say they are, with a high degree of certainty, from God. Without the Scriptures to be there is a reference point we would have no way of knowing whether they were from God, our own desires, or from someone or something completely different.

What about Charismatic Gifts?

What about things like speaking in tongues and other more charismatic gifts? Do they show evidence that we have the Holy Spirit? They can and quite often do but if they are not accompanied with some of the evidences above then we probably have to conclude no. Jonathan Edwards lived through some of the major revivals of the 1800's in America and being a good Presbyterian the more charismatic side worried him. Many of his contemporaries preached and prayed against those revivals. His thoughts were that we should not fight against God if it really was God working so did some serious work into whether the revivals were genuine works of God or not. His conclusion was that if

- 1) Regard for Jesus was increased.
- 2) Sin was regarded seriously and holiness of life became important.
- 3) Regard for the Scriptures is increased as the Word of God.
- 4) The people were led into truth
- 5) Love to God and love to man is increased.

then it was high probable that it was of God and it should not be fought against. These should be true of all of us over time as well.

Observations

Observation 1: Sometimes it's just a matter of time and the observations of other people. For some of us we never reach assurance of faith and doubt all the evidences that we are Christians. But over time people see how we change, how we love God just a little more, how we become just a little



more patient, how our priorities change and they give God the glory for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and they can help us to see that we do actually have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Observation 2: Some of us have had crisis experiences - some sort of epiphany- times when we knew without a doubt that God was with us and if asked if we have the Spirit we immediately thing back to that particular time.

But remember that there can be dangers with crisis experiences. Sometimes a crisis experience may be triggered by something other than the Spirit of God moving – it may be caused, for example, by the emotionalism of the service we are in. We need to be aware of this and not just accept them blindly. Another point to note that if we do not keep growing but stagnate, or worse, just go back to our old way of life, then it probably was not of God either. God did miracle after miracle in getting Israel out of Egypt and one would have thought that that would be enough to convince anyone that God is real but no, it wasn't. We can always find alternative explanations for the works of God in a miraculous way.

