

St Barnabas - Swanland
Sunday 6th June 2010 9:00am Service – 1st Sunday After Trinity
Spiritual gifts: the Person and Work of the Spirit

Romans 8 : 9-17 and John 14 : 15-26

LET US PRAY

Lord, thank you so much for your love and grace and for your Word. We give you thanks for this day. We thank you that your spirit is indeed among us. We know that unless your spirit opens our minds and hearts, we will not hear or see; and so we ask that your Spirit would indeed speak a word to each one so that we may become more conformed in the image of your son. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

In our reading today from Romans Paul tells us about the character and work of the Holy Spirit, and he explains how the Holy Spirit is revealed to those who have responded by faith to the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Paul writes a precise account of how the Holy Spirit fits into the Gospel, which he describes here as a choice between being 'in the flesh' and 'in Christ Jesus'. In our passage from Romans, the Holy Spirit is part of every sentence in which Christ is mentioned. Paul talks about the spiritual connection between people and God with a sense of awe and wonder; from the amazing use of 'Abba', a personal form of address to God (v 8:15), to the awesome privilege of being heirs of God (v 8:17) and able to share this in glory. I can't think of any higher privilege for anyone before Almighty God, than to be accepted as His son ... (or daughter)....and heir!

In the early days of the church, many wondered why the Holy Spirit was necessary, for surely the Gospel was about the work of Jesus, the Messiah, and God alone, and some people still believe this today. Chapter 8 of Romans addresses this issue head on, and it is where we will find our questions about this best answered. If we are to understand what Paul says here, it is best to think about the situation faced by the disciples and the early Christians. Jesus was with them in bodily form for many years, and when He died, He ceased to be with them and ascended to be with the Father. When the Holy Spirit was sent on them at Pentecost (Acts 2), they experienced the power to do themselves what previously Jesus Himself had done, so the Holy Spirit was like the permanent presence of Jesus in the life of the believer. This is why Paul says in verse 10 'But if Christ is in you ... your spirit is alive...'

Consequently, in the time between Jesus' ascension and His coming again in glory God has given the Holy Spirit freely to all who believe. This means that

although believers continue to live in a world of sin, they may experience the promises of God and have the assurance of His presence, even though Jesus has not yet come in glory and the final victory over sin is not yet complete.

The Spirit is not an option, [PAUSE] and Paul makes it abundantly clear that without the presence of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for us to call ourselves Christians; **'if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ'** (v 8:9). Indeed, he describes what it means to be 'children of God', saying that such are **'led by the Spirit of God'** (v 8:14), and he confirms that we can only know we are God's people by means of the Spirit, **'The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children'** (v 8:16). So there is no alternative religion within Christianity precluding the Spirit, even if some people give the impression that the option is available.

Everything Paul has carefully explained about the Gospel contains detailed arguments about Jesus Christ. **So how does the Holy Spirit fit into this?** Jesus was the one in whom God had placed His trust to be His Son and do the work of salvation; and He did this for all people through His death and resurrection.

In Chapter 1:16,17 Paul writes

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

and in Chapter 3:20-

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

The Gospel Paul explained in these two passages of Romans requires our response by faith, and this faith in Jesus opens the door to our **'peace with God'** (5:1) and the consequences of our **'being right with God'**. However, the experience of real Christians after the first New Testament day of Pentecost was that they were empowered to live as Christians both individually and collectively, by the Holy Spirit. The life of faith was therefore a combination of the Christian's response of faith to Jesus and God's response

which was firstly to grant salvation and also to give the gift of the Holy Spirit to enable the believer to put faith in action, as commanded by Christ.

The Holy Spirit was not new to the disciples. The Spirit was observed to come on Jesus 'like a dove' at his baptism (Matt 3:16), and John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptise not with water but with the 'Holy Spirit and with fire' (Matt 3:11). Consequently, after the great day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to the disciples in a similar way (Acts 2:3), it was entirely natural that they should equate baptism not just with becoming a Christian through repentance and by faith in Christ, but with God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

This was nothing abstract, but something to be experienced by the gracious giving by God of specific spiritual gifts. A form of the gift of tongues was given on the first day of Pentecost, but the New Testament has several well-known lists of other gifts that were observed in the lives of early Christians.

Romans 12:6

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

1 Corinthians 12:4

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

and Ephesians 4:11

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

The early Christian community, including Paul, were deeply conscious of living 'in the Spirit'; it was their real experience, and Paul links with this experience by what he says in verses 9 to 11 of our passage.

Verse 9 : states what was the obvious to them; for to be a Christian was to make the decision to turn away from living 'in the flesh' like everyone else in the world, and to know with full assurance that they belonged to Christ because of the 'Spirit of Christ'. The Holy Spirit was no 'new' thing, but the Spirit of God who was previously present with Christ, was now present with them. Paul's words about the Holy Spirit were not driven by the kind of deep thinking that surrounded his description of the saving work of Jesus, they were a description of what a real Christian could expect to know.

In verses 10 and 11, Paul effectively summarises everything he previously said about sin and its consequences and the alternative of believing in Jesus. He repeats this, but this time, he introduces the Spirit, so whereas 'your body is dead because of sin' because of 'Christ ... in you', the righteousness of being 'made right with God' is described as 'alive' in the 'Spirit' (v 8:10). Paul then closely relates the Spirit to the resurrection of

Jesus and the new life this gives the believer; ‘**..he who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life ... through His Spirit, who lives in you**’ (v 8:11). You can see that everywhere, there is a strong connection between the life of the believer and the Spirit, because for Paul, the two are inseparable. The ‘added value’ of the Holy Spirit - The big question is this. **What kind of life does God want His people to have?** It is all very well to say that the Christian life must be devoid of everything associated with a worldly life of sin, but where does this leave us? How can a Christian live within a fallen world and do so in a way that is personally fulfilling? **Paul’s answer is to live ‘by the Spirit of God’.** This fits what happened to the disciples and was also true of Paul’s personal experience. **It was only when the Spirit came in power that they had a life to live that was distinctly Christian (see Acts 2:43-47) and in which they had something to do for God.**

As Paul begins to speak about the life of a Christian, he moves away from his previous theological points which were all about comparing the life of **‘the flesh’** and the new life of the **‘Spirit’**. **In verse 16, he speaks about being ‘children of God’.** To be a child of God is a real human experience because it involves a two-way relationship with God, in which we have privileges as well as duties, and God is a Father to be loved as well as obeyed.

God has graciously accepted us through our faith in His Son Jesus, and therefore accepts us as by **‘adoption’ or Sonship as Paul describes it** (v 8:15). However, when Paul describes this as being **‘a slave to righteousness’** instead of being **‘a slave again to fear’** (v 6:16-19), he tells us that the new life is not intended by God to be one form of fearsome slavery in exchange for another. **A real relationship with God is one of love, and Paul indicates this not by writing it down in so many words, but by announcing the right of a Christian to call God ‘Abba’, the word used by a young child for a father.** This is the word famously used by Jesus when He called on His Father on the night before He died whilst in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36); **‘Abba, Father!’** Paul then, in a sentence which neatly describes the deep empathy that exists between a real parent and child, says **‘the Spirit Himself testifies with our own spirit that we are God’s children’** (v 8:16). In any real relationship between a parent and a child, or a father and a son, a deep spiritual connection is clear to both parties, and nothing in this world can destroy it. **Now if this is true of natural parents, how much more true is it of our relationship with God ‘in the Spirit’?**

The climax of this passage comes in the description of our right under God to claim the heritage of God’s glory, shared through the sufferings of Christ. **This is a reminder that the new life in the Spirit is none other than the call of Jesus to be a disciple;** for it was Jesus’ first call to his disciples that they should follow the path He trod, which included suffering and persecution.

This life of faith which has an inner knowledge of the 'fatherhood' of God is characterised by truth and trust. It would have been inconceivable to Paul that people would call themselves Christians and yet doubt that they had the kind of assurance of faith and confidence in their relationship with God which lies at the heart of our passage today. It would be inconceivable to him that people might regard the Holy Spirit as some kind of 'optional extra'. The new life lived by all disciples of Jesus and all Christians was the life of the Spirit! All who professed faith in Christ, and were baptised and taught the faith, were expected to receive the Holy Spirit; not simply in some general sense, but firstly in the specific sense of knowing with certainty that they had a father and child relationship with Almighty God! This is the true heritage and right of all, by faith, and anything less is not what God intends for anyone.

Unless the Holy Spirit is openly at the heart of the life of God's people, both personally and collectively, then what we are dealing with is but a mere shadow of the true church of God.

God calls us to have great expectations: we can expect unlimited grace from God, and we'd better expect a lot of ourselves as well. Because the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all of us: young and old, men and women, you, and me.

Jesus told the disciples the night of his betrayal that if they loved him, they will keep his commandments.

And he promised them his Spirit unconditionally ... a Spirit that will advocate for them,
and comfort them,
and lead them
and watch over them.

He promises them that the Spirit of God will live in them.

Jesus also tells his disciples that not everyone will receive the spirit.

He tells them that those in the world, those who love only themselves, those who sneer at holy things and scorn the law of God cannot receive the Spirit

because they do not know the Spirit,
because they do not desire it.

Jesus assures his disciples on the night of his betrayal that they will see him again - that because he lives and will continue to live so will they ... and that they will know that he is in the Father and that they are in him and he is in them.

Jesus gives us the gift of his eternal love and reminds us of how love works: of how, while there is unconditional affection and care, there is as well the hope that the love will be returned - so that we will know the fullness of the love we are receiving.

Jesus reminds us that love needs to be returned ... not just directly but also indirectly, in actions whereby we pass on the love to others.

Take the time each day to know Jesus, to treat him as a friend, to talk to him and to make him special to yourselves. Treat his wishes as your deepest desire, his every suggestion and hint as your life giving law and your greatest yearning.

All these things the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit have told us so that we might have the fullness of God's blessings - that we may know the true glory of love and the eternal joy and strength that life in Him brings.

God is with us - Christ is in us - the Spirit is all around us.

LET US PRAY

Heavenly Father, without Jesus as our Saviour, we would be cast away from your loving presence forever. Without His sacrifice, we would have no opportunity to be forgiven, nor would we be restored to Your everlasting kingdom. Thank You for sending Jesus to us, and for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who guides and counsels us. In Jesus Name we pray. AMEN