

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Holy Spirit and Spirituality
Lesson 4. The Personality of the Holy Spirit

On a recent American television quiz show, the contestants were required to identify the term *pneuma hagios*. Two had no idea what it meant, but the third got it right. *Pneuma hagios* is the Greek term for Holy Ghost (see Matt 1:18 and many others). It was a difficult question, and probably many Christians might not have known the answer. It points up how little the population of a country which calls itself Christian knows about the Bible. Unless we understand Who the Holy Spirit is and His role in the plan of salvation, we will never understand the gospel.

One of the joys of the 1888 message is the understanding that it is easy to be saved and hard to be lost ... but there is an “if.” Both A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner understood the “if” in a unique way. They reasoned that since all of God’s biddings are enablings, the above statement is true *if* one understands and believes the full truth of the gospel.

Righteousness is by faith, totally, and not by works. Then is “faith” the new “works” that we must perform? “The truth of the gospel” is a phrase found twice in the book of Galatians. It is related to “the faith of Jesus” which was motivated by His love. Therefore, it’s easy to be saved and hard to be lost if we understand what it cost the Son of God to die for you on the cruel cross. He died your second death. Any understanding of “faith” less than this becomes “works.”

The result is we no longer have to look at God’s law as a set of impossible standards, which sooner or later we will break, causing us to be lost. Many young (and older) people worry that they have committed the unpardonable sin, so why try to be good. They believe they are already lost.

Knowing more about the personality of the Holy Spirit may help us understand that God does not give up on us unless that is our persistent, deliberate, and ultimate decision. Most know the text that tells us: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,” but don’t understand the significance of the remainder of the same text which says, “by [literally “in”] whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30).

This gives a tremendous insight into the work of the Holy Spirit, and how He feels when His efforts are rejected. For those who are worried that God has given up on them, we need only look at the history of Israel to be assured that God, through His Spirit, is very patient and gracious with us throughout our lifetimes. With the Holy Spirit personally interested in our salvation, we can always know that God never gives up as long as we allow Him to work with us.

In Deuteronomy, Moses warns Israel that she will wander away from God (see Deut. 32:15 et seq.), but He provides the solution: “For the Lord will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants; when He sees that their strength is gone ... (Deut. 32:36). In other words, once they have realized that all their efforts to better themselves by their own strength fail, He can send His Spirit.

Throughout her troubled history, Israel kept wandering off, following pagan gods because she thought they would fulfill all her needs and wishes. As individuals today, we can do the same thing. We suppose that God leaves us each time we turn our backs on Him. We think that we have been so bad, that even God has given up on us. Sometimes we don't recognize God in the quiet thoughts that come into our minds. We remember a person or situation from long ago that encourages us. This is how the Spirit works. Sometimes God brings adversity to teach us the error of our ways. What is important is that God has not left us, but is gently leading us closer to Him. Our God does not give up on us easily, which makes it “hard to be lost”.

When the tabernacle was dedicated in the desert, God manifested His approval and presence by the light of the Shekinah. That Presence was there continuously until the temple Solomon built was destroyed when Israel was taken captive by the Babylonian army. This happened after God warned Israel repeatedly to repent of their sin. Finally, He had to send them into captivity to get them to stop following pagan gods. Even then, Ezekiel was given a vision of the Shekinah's slow, reluctant departure from the temple, and called it the “glory of God” (see Ezek. 10:4, 18,19, 11:22-23). Following the destruction of the temple, the Shekinah was never again displayed to Israel in the form of light. Even with the captivity and the apostasy cycles after the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem, God was still guiding Israel, trying to get them to listen to Him. Even though Israel chose not to believe it, God was sending His Holy Spirit to make it difficult for her to choose to be lost.

Finally, He sent His Son, hoping, like the landowner in the parable (see Mark 12:1-12), that they would listen to Him. Instead of listening, they murdered His Son. Even after pronouncing the seven woes on Israel's leadership in Matthew 23:13-27, Jesus was grieved over having to give them up. In verses 37-38 He cries, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is left to you desolate!”

Even after Israel rejected Him, Jesus was reluctant to give up on them. Only after Israel stubbornly persisted in asking that God give up on them, did He honor their choice. When they said, “we have no other king but Caesar,” during the trial of Jesus, they corporately made a serious choice. Even then, the destruction of Jerusalem was delayed many years. It was after Stephen was stoned that the decision was final. We can all agree that throughout Israel's history, the Holy Spirit was working on hearts, trying to make it hard for them to choose against God.

What had happened to Israel? After the return from captivity, they became zealous to protect and observe God's law until it turned into an idol worse than any carved image. What started out as a desire to please God out of love and delight in His law, turned into

lifeless legalism. They came to believe the act of bringing a sacrifice earned them God's favor, missing the symbolism pointing to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

Like the church in Ephesus, Israel had persevered in their protection of the law and they didn't tolerate those who failed to reverence it, but they had lost their first love of it. Our love of God's law is derived from seeing how sinful we are compared to His law of love. We want to keep the law because we realize that is a reflection of God's character, and we want to be like Him. But we often confuse the sequence. We cannot change our hearts by what we think is "keeping" the law. True law keeping comes from a heart changed by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Both the Ephesian church and ancient Israel were zealous for keeping and protecting the law of God, but they had elevated law keeping instead of Jesus as their savior. Unless they returned to their first love of the law as the illustration of the God of love, the Ephesians' candlestick would be removed. What a sad thing to happen to people who genuinely loved God's way to righteousness which leads to genuine law keeping, but it had disintegrated into formal ritual. The Jews became so blinded they refused to see that their candlestick had been taken away. We can also be in danger of becoming so enthusiastic about law keeping, that we believe we are entitled to be mean, dogmatic, and legalistic in treating those who, in our estimation, don't measure up.

Jesus includes all of us in His exclamation, "If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive ..." (John 7:37-38). People have no hesitation in telling others they are thirsty, but would never think of admitting that they are longing for the life of God. That is why so few become filled with righteousness. It is easier to believe that we can provide our own water rather than to admit dependence on Jesus, the source of living water.

"Jesus said of the water that he gave, which was the Holy Spirit, that it should be in us a well of water springing up unto eternal life. John 4:14; compare John 7:37-39. That is, the spiritual life which we now live in the flesh by the Spirit is the surety of the spiritual body to be bestowed at the resurrection when we will have the life of Christ made manifested in immortal bodies" (Ellet J. Waggoner, *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 8.131).

Our flesh will always be at war with the Spirit, but when we die daily to the flesh through the strength of the Spirit, we and the Spirit will not be grieved, but will experience the greatest joy possible, being with our Lord Jesus.

—Arlene Hill

Notes:

1. Bible texts are from the *New American Standard Bible*.
2. Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at: <https://youtu.be/BuAnSvR6LbU>
3. You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org