

The Holy Spirit at Work in the Believer

Week 1

Warm-up question: How did you come to believe in God or to be interested in spiritual things? Was it through teaching you received in your childhood, a book you read, an experience or an individual?

Alternative warm-up question: Can you remember the first time you became interested in spiritual things, or convinced that there is a God?

Charles Grandison Finney was a man greatly used of God during the Great Awakening, a period of a spiritual revival in the 1830s, mostly situated on the east coast of the United States. Under his preaching, he was said to have led more than a million people to Christ. Before his work as a revivalist and preacher he was pursuing a career in law until the question of the salvation of his soul came to his mind. He had been attending a very traditional church. The speaker was not inspirational or dynamic. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit started nudging his soul as to where he would spend eternity. He decided that he would make his peace with God and resolved to avoid all business until he was assured of his salvation. The following experience of his spiritual rebirth and of being filled with the Spirit was written in his autobiography. It is very interesting to note how the Holy Spirit worked in his life in this instance:

“Tuesday night I had become very nervous; and in the night a strange feeling came over me as if I was about to die. I knew that if I did I should sink down to hell; but I quieted myself as best I could until morning. At an early hour I started for the office. But just before I arrived at the office, something seemed to confront me with questions like these: indeed, it seemed as if the inquiry was within me, as if an inward voice said to me, “What are you waiting for? Did you not promise to give your heart to God? And what are you trying to do? Are you endeavoring to work out a righteousness of your own?” Just at this point the whole question of Gospel salvation opened to my mind in a manner most marvelous to me at the time. I think I then saw, as clearly as I ever have in my life, the reality and fullness of the atonement of Christ. I saw that his work was a finished work; and that instead of having, or needing, any righteousness of my own to recommend me to God, I had to submit myself to

the righteousness of God through Christ. Gospel salvation seemed to me to be an offer of something to be accepted; and that it was full and complete; and that all that was necessary on my part, was to get my own consent to give up my sins, and accept Christ. Salvation, it seemed to me, instead of being a thing to be wrought out, by my own works, was a thing to be found entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ, who presented himself before me as my God and my Savior. Without being distinctly aware of it, I had stopped in the street right where the inward voice seemed to arrest me. How long I remained in that position I cannot say. But after this distinct revelation had stood for some little time before my mind, the question seemed to be put, “Will you accept it now, today?” I replied, “Yes; I will accept it today, or I will die in the attempt.” North of the village, and over a hill, lay a piece of woods, in which I was in the almost daily habit of walking, more or less, when it was pleasant weather. It was now October, and the time was past for my frequent walks there. Nevertheless, instead of going to the office, I turned and bent my course toward the woods, feeling that I must be alone, and away from all human eyes and ears, so that I could pour out my prayer to God.

The thought was pressing me of the rashness of my promise, that I would give my heart to God that day or die in the attempt. It seemed to me as if that was binding upon my soul. A great sinking and discouragement came over me, and I felt almost too weak to stand upon my knees. Just at this moment I again thought I heard someone approach me, and I opened my eyes to see whether it were so. But right there the revelation of my pride of heart, as the great difficulty that stood in the way, was distinctly shown to me. An overwhelming sense of my wickedness in being ashamed to have a human being see me on my knees before God, took such powerful possession of me, that I cried at the top of my voice, and exclaimed that I would not leave that place if all the men on earth and all the devils in hell surrounded me. “What!” I said, “such a degraded sinner I am, on my knees confessing my sins to the great and holy God; and ashamed to have any human being, and a sinner like myself, find me on my knees endeavoring to make my peace with my offended God!” The sin appeared awful, infinite. It broke me down before the Lord.

Just at that point this passage of Scripture seemed to

drop into my mind with a flood of light: "Then shall ye go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. Then shall ye seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." I instantly seized hold of this with my heart. I had intellectually believed the Bible before; but never had the truth been in my mind that faith was a voluntary trust instead of an intellectual state. I was as conscious as I was of my existence, of trusting at that moment in God's veracity. Somehow I knew that that was a passage of Scripture, though I do not think I had ever read it. I knew that it was God's word, and God's voice, that spoke to me. I cried to Him, "Lord, I take thee at thy word. Now thou knowest that I do search for thee with all my heart, and that I have come here to pray to thee; and thou hast promised to hear me."

That seemed to settle the question that I could then, that day, perform my vow. The Spirit seemed to lay stress upon that idea in the text, "When you search for me with all your heart." The question of when, that is of the present time, seemed to fall heavily into my heart. I told the Lord that I should take him at his word; that he could not lie; and that therefore I was sure that he heard my prayer, and that he would be found of me."

Later on, back in his office, he tried to get back into the state of being concerned for his soul, he was not aware that God had taken him at his word and that he was now a Christian. Again, in his own words, he says:

"I could not be anxious at all about my soul, and about my spiritual state. The repose of my mind was unspeakably great. I never can describe it in words. The thought of God was sweet to my mind, and the most profound spiritual tranquility had taken full possession of me. This was a great mystery; but it did not distress or perplex me. I went to my dinner, and found I had no appetite to eat. I then went to the office, and found that Squire W— had gone to dinner. I took down my bass-viol, and, as I was accustomed to do, began to play and sing some pieces of sacred music. But as soon as I began to sing those sacred words, I began to weep. It seemed as if my heart was all liquid; and my feelings were in such a state that I could not hear my own voice in singing without causing my sensibility to overflow. I wondered at this, and tried to suppress my tears, but could not. After trying in vain to suppress my tears, I put up my instrument and stopped singing.

Just before evening the thought took possession of my mind, that as soon as I was left alone in the new office, I would try to pray again — that I was not going to abandon the subject of religion and give it up, at

any rate; and therefore, although I no longer had any concern about my soul, still I would continue to pray. Just at dark Squire W—, seeing that everything was adjusted, bade me goodnight and went to his home. I had accompanied him to the door; and as I closed the door and turned around, my heart seemed to be liquid within me. All my feelings seemed to rise and flow out; and the utterance of my heart was, "I want to pour my whole soul out to God." The rising of my soul was so great that I rushed into the room back of the front office, to pray. There was no fire, and no light, in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state.

On the contrary it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet. I have always since regarded this as a most remarkable state of mind; for it seemed to me a reality, that he stood before me, and I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears; and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him, that I recollect.

I must have continued in this state for a good while; but my mind was too much absorbed with the interview to recollect anything that I said. But I know, as soon as my mind became calm enough to break off from the interview, I returned to the front office, and found that the fire that I had made of large wood was nearly burned out. But as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recol-

lect I cried out, "I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me." I said, "Lord, I cannot bear any more;" yet I had no fear of death.

How long I continued in this state, with this baptism continuing to roll over me and go through me, I do not know. But I know it was late in the evening when a member of my choir — for I was the leader of the choir — came into the office to see me. He was a member of the church. He found me in this state of loud weeping, and said to me, "Mr. Finney, what ails you?" I could make him no answer for some time. He then said, "Are you in pain?" I gathered myself up as best I could, and replied, "No, but so happy that I cannot live."¹

Finney's experience was a very powerful one. He went on to serve the Lord in a very powerful and self-sacrificial way. Everyone has their own story and no two experiences are the same. However, we will always see that things are different in a person's life when the Spirit of God takes the throne of his or her life. Often a person's inner being or heart is moved with compassion over things that before conversion or being filled with the Spirit did not bother him or her. When this inner change came to me, I remember walking along the street of my home town, having feelings of compassion for the people of my home town. I now see this as the Holy Spirit's influence in my heart. My one goal in those early days of my Christian experience was to be able to speak on the streets to people about Christ. I wanted to speak to anyone that would listen. I wanted to speak not only to my friends, but others who were interested in spiritual things. I went to London and spoke in Hyde Park at Speaker's Corner. I also went through France, Spain and Portugal with teams of other young people. We spoke publicly and also performed drama skits and told the message of Christ through songs and other creative ways of expression, doing anything to draw a crowd and share the gospel. Within four years I was church planting by multiplying Small Groups in my home town. My marijuana and drug habit that had got me into such trouble in my teen years, now no longer had any hold over me. There was a new power at work in my life that enabled me to conquer my old habits and have control and discipline in my life which I had not been able to do before. What about you? Is there an area of your life that has become a mountain before you that cannot be removed? God has promised you power after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you (Acts 1:8). It has been my experience as a pastor and church planter

to see many living the Christian life on their own spiritual resources, instead of seeking for God to come and give them His power and abilities to live the life that they cannot live on their own without His help. There should be a remarkable difference in our lives when the Spirit takes up residence in our hearts. The secret, and I am still learning this myself, is to live in dependence on God. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God (Luke 4:4). I take that to mean that we shall not be sustained by just that which feeds our physical bodies but that which our spirit needs, the living word that comes to our heart prompted by the Spirit. That kind of life is only brought about by recognizing and being sensitive to the Spirit's inner promptings and obeying those thoughts that the Holy Spirit brings to our minds, a kind of spiritual sensitivity.

What can happen when a group of people are filled with the Spirit of God and start to listen and obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Well, let's find out how Finney impacted the community he lived in. He resolved, after his salvation and filling with the Spirit, to give up his law practice and give himself to the most important thing in the world, the salvation of those that do not yet know God. The Spirit of God seemed to stay with him in great power as he went from village to village preaching the Word of God. When he spoke about Christ, people would fall on the floor under a great conviction of spirit, crying for God to have mercy on their souls. There seemed to be a special presence over the area where he would be preaching. He says of one time:

"The state of things in the village and in the surrounding area was such that no one could come into the village without feeling awestricken with the impression that God was there in a peculiar way. As an example of this I will relate a particular incident. The sheriff of the county resided in Utica. There were two courthouses in the county, one in Rome and the other in Utica (New York State). Consequently, the sheriff, Bryant by name, came to Rome quite frequently. He later told me that he had heard of the state of things at Rome, and he, together with many others in Utica, had laughed a great deal about it. One day it was necessary for him to come to Rome. He said that he was glad to have business there, for he wanted to see for himself what things were really like. He was driving in his one-horse sleigh, without any particular impression in his mind at all, until he crossed what was called the old canal, a place about

¹ <http://www.godrules.net/library/finney/finney.htm>

a mile from the town. He said as soon as he crossed the canal, a strange impression came over him, an awe so deep that he could not shake it. He felt as if God permeated the whole atmosphere. He said that this feeling increased the whole way, until he came into the village. He stopped at Mr. Franklin's hotel, and the stable-man came and took his horse. He observed, he said, that the stable-man looked just like he himself felt—as if he were afraid to speak. He went into the hotel and found the gentleman there with whom he had business. He said that they were both so obviously shaken that they could hardly attend to business. He reported that several times in the course of the short time he was there, he had to rise from the table abruptly and go to the window and look away, trying to divert his attention to keep from weeping. He saw that everyone else appeared to feel just as he did. Such an awe, such a solemnness, such a state of things he had never had any conception of before. He quickly concluded his business and returned to Utica—but (as he said later) never to speak lightly of the Spirit's work in Rome again. A few weeks later in Utica, when Finney traveled to that town, he himself was converted.”²

In this long introduction we have an honest account of the way the Spirit came to a man, convicting him of sin and purifying him before using him greatly to the benefit and salvation of many lives. God hasn't changed; He wants to do the same today. The Spirit filled Finney in a different way than what many people experience. That is His prerogative. He will come in different ways to different people. He will not ask or require the same thing of everyone. I trust that in these six weeks of talks we will experience more of the Spirit of God than we have experienced up until now. We need this same power of the Holy Spirit more than ever in the days we live. When our hearts overflow so that others around us can observe and notice the power of the Holy Spirit, they will become spiritually hungry themselves. They will notice something different about us and want the same thing for themselves. This is something that God wants for all of us. It is a prayer that He longs to answer.

⁹ For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him (2 Chronicles 16:9).

He is looking for a bunch of people who are fully committed, with a heart attuned to His.

Business as usual is not enough for the multitudes that do not have a relationship with God. I am convinced that God is looking for whole congregations to pour out their lives in dedication for the salvation of those that have yet to find Christ. Do you know that it was not until 1830 that the population of the earth managed to reach 1 Billion people? From that point it took 130 years to add the second billion to planet Earth. We are well over a population of 6 Billion here in 2007 and increasing by a billion approximately every 8-9 years. If God would visit in revival in the days of Charles Finney, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley and George Whitfield, why would he not visit us in power in our day? More than half the amount of people who have ever lived are now alive.³ Because of the population increase, if we don't have a move of the Spirit and a visitation of God in our day, more people will go to eternity without God than in all previous generations put together. I can't see God allowing that to happen. Do we really believe what the Bible tells us about eternal life, and about heaven and hell? If whole communities can be brought to Christ in the 1830s, why would God not do the same now with your city? If God so loved the eastern United States that he would visit in power in the 1830s, why not now when there are 5 billion more than in Finney's day? Our faith and expectation of God's power at work through us needs to be strengthened and exercised. Faith is like a muscle, it needs to be fed and exercised. That is what I hope we can do together in the next five weeks.

What does the Bible say concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit?

¹⁷ “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Acts 2:17-21).

What things should we be expecting God to fulfill according to this passage of scripture?

² Autobiography of Charles G. Finney, published by Fleming H. Revel Company.

³ John Dawson, Taking Your Cities For God, Page 65, Word Publishing.

Who is the Holy Spirit and What Does He do?

What is your concept of the Holy Spirit?

Some have the concept in their mind that the Spirit is some ‘force that is with us,’ that He is ethereal and not personal. This is a concept that is completely opposite to how the bible reveals the Spirit to be. God the Holy Spirit is very much a person, having character qualities just like the other persons of the Godhead.

Jewish people have rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, saying that there is only one God. However, even in the Old Testament they would find scriptures that would support the idea of the Trinity and in particular the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned more than 90 times in the Old Testament and 260 times in the New Testament. Jewish people reject the idea that God exists as three persons and will proclaim from the Old Testament the key verse that they first learn in the Holy Scriptures:

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is **one**.

⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 Emphasis mine).

When I was living in Israel, I learned more about this key scripture and how the Hebrew words for “one” can be different. The word that is translated ‘one’ is what is known as a compound-unity noun, the word is *echad*, a word that describes oneness or unity but at the same time contains several entities. For instance, it is used to describe the cluster of grapes that the spies returned to the camp with:

²⁴ That place was called the Valley of Eshcol because of the cluster of grapes the Israelites cut off there (Numbers 13:24).

The word “cluster” is our word *echad*, in this context many existing in one. In the book of Ezra we see something similar: 64 The whole company numbered 42,360, again we find our word *echad* translated as the “*whole company*.” When God wanted to indicate the number one and only one, He used a different word, the word *yachid*. This word is used to describe Abraham’s one and only son, which inherited the promises,

the one that, as a test of his faith, he was told to sacrifice on Mount Moriah:

² Then God said, “Take your son, your **only** son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about” (Genesis 22:2 Emphasis mine).

The word “only” is our word *yachid*. The Triunity of God is clearly taught in the Bible. If God wanted to say that there was one and only one in the Godhead He would have used the word *yachid*, instead He communicated in this key verse that God is not only one but three persons in the one.

We see in the very first chapter of the bible, Genesis, a reference to the Spirit brooding or hovering over the waters (Verse 2), clearly at work with the Godhead in the creation of the earth bringing order out of the chaos at the creation. He hasn’t changed. God the Holy Spirit is still able to bring order out of the chaos of your life if you are going through trials and difficulties. He is looking to bring peace to your heart in the midst of what you are going through. All He needs is for you to ask Him.

Still in that first chapter of Genesis, we see the plurality of the Godhead by the use of the words “us” and “our.” Then God said, ²⁶ “Let **us** make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness, and let them rule.....” (Genesis 1:26 Emphasis mine).

In his book *One God or Three*, Stanley Rosenthal, a Jewish believer in the Messiah, writes:

“In our English Bibles the translators capitalized “g” in God when translating the Hebrew words for God – El and Elohim. In the Hebrew language these words mean “the all-powerful, almighty one.” Both of these nouns are actually the same word. One, however, El, is the singular form, while the other, Elohim, is plural. Of particular importance is the fact that of the 2,750 times these words are used in the Old Testament, Elohim, the plural form, is employed in 2,500 cases.”⁴

Let’s look at another passage that speaks of the Spirit of God from the Old Testament:

¹⁶ “Come near me and listen to this: “From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it

⁴ One God or Three, Stanley Rosenthal, Page 23, Printed by The Spearhead Press.

happens, I am there.” And now the **sovereign LORD** has sent me, **with his Spirit**.¹⁷ This is what the **LORD says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel**: “I am the LORD your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go (Isaiah 48: 16-17).

In this Old Testament passage, who are the Persons involved?

The three persons of the Godhead are mentioned in this one Old Testament passage together. The Sovereign Lord (the Father), the Redeemer (The one who is speaking is the Son) and the Spirit.

So What’s the Holy Spirit Like?

Let’s look at one or two more passages of God the Holy Spirit at work in the Old Testament. Let’s turn to the book of Judges, chapter 16.

When you think of Samson, what picture of him comes to mind?

Do you think of this huge hulk like person carrying off the gates of the city up to the top of the hill? (Judges 16:3). How big and heavy would the gates and posts of a city be? I like to believe he was a little guy like me. Why not? He seemed to have amazing strength, but how do we know from the scriptures how big he was? If he was a huge muscleman, why would the Rulers of the Philistines each pay Delilah eleven hundred shekels of silver for her to find out the secret of his strength? (Judges 16:5). The Philistines were so convinced by what they saw of Samson that they were ready to pay money to find out the secret so that they could overcome him. Three times we are told that the secret of his strength was that the Holy Spirit would come on him and give him supernatural strength. (Judges 14:6, 19, 15:14).

In Exodus 31:3-5, we see the Spirit of God filling Bezalel with artistic talent, skills in metalwork

to create and design things for the Tabernacle of the Lord.

He gave leadership gifts to Gideon. In Judges 6:15, Gideon proclaims his spiritual bankruptcy. Yet when the Spirit comes on him in verse 34, he is ready to face the huge army of the Midianites with only 300 men. You are not alone; you and the Holy Spirit make a powerful team when you have God the Holy Spirit on your side, working in you and through you.

What characteristics of personhood do you see in the following scriptures? (Perhaps each person in the group can look up and read the following passages).

Ephesians 4:30. (He can be grieved)

1 Thessalonians 5:19. (The Spirit’s fire can be quenched)

Hebrews 10:29. (He can be insulted).

Acts 1:16. (He can speak. The Holy Spirit **spoke**....”)

Acts 5:3. (He can be lied to).

Acts 7:51. (He can be resisted)

Acts 15:28. “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit.... (He thinks)

Romans 8:14. “Those who are **led** by the Spirit of God are the Sons of God.”

John 14:16, He can counsel you and be with you. “...He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.” The Greek word used here is *paracletos*, and means, “one called alongside’ - a counselor and an encourager.

The Holy Spirit has been sent to be alongside of you forever. You are not alone even though you may be lonely. This One that is called alongside you will comfort and counsel you with His presence and love.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, thank you for your presence and your power. Please open my eyes to see new ways that you want to manifest Jesus to this world through me. Amen.

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