

E. Hope by Virtue of the Indwelling Spirit (8:1-30)

In the seventh chapter Paul explained that the only two resources available to men by which they can order their relationship with God and His righteousness are *self* and *law*. Not only do all people – whether secular or religious – recognize and utilize these resources, they innately believe that self and law are both sufficient and effective in the quest for personal righteousness.

- In other words, every human being recognizes and acknowledges objective righteousness, though human nature insures that people will rationalize and excuse their own lack of conformity to it. It has been rightly observed that the proof that people recognize and uphold the importance of righteousness is not how they *act*, but how they *react*. People will rationalize their own behavior, but they insist upon righteousness in the conduct of others, particularly as it implicates them (Matthew 7:1-5). Thus Jesus could bring full definition to every person's responsibility to others by simply calling upon men to treat their fellow man the way they want to be treated (Luke 6:27-38).
- Men recognize the need for righteousness, and they look to themselves and law to gain it and secure themselves in it. Regardless of whether they understand their own righteousness in religious or secular terms, the fact remains that all men inherently regard righteousness as a *personal* commodity rather than a reckoned one. Moreover, both their present confidence of righteousness as well as their hope of advancing in it are bound entirely to themselves and their performance under a moral/ethical code, whatever may be the source or form of that code.

These truths make Paul's instruction in Romans 7 particularly profound and compelling. For his core argument is that, when men are left with the resources of self and law, the result is absolute and inescapable subjugation to the power and prerogative of sin. Though both self and law understand, agree with, and insist upon righteousness, indwelling sin renders the person its slave and uses law to deceive and destroy its helpless captive. People not only delude themselves that they possess personal righteousness; they are falsely convinced that that righteousness stands upon their own personal capacities applied to the instruction and exhortation of law. But Paul thoroughly debunks this delusion, showing that, because self and law are impotent against sin's enslaving power, people's only hope for righteousness is outside intervention by a deliverer more powerful than sin.

That deliverer was previously alluded to (5:1-5, 7:6), and is also implicated in Paul's response to man's plight at the end of chapter seven (7:25a). The hope of righteousness and deliverance from sin's tyranny is not self and law, but *God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit*. Paul's language is crucial, for it ascribes the work of deliverance to all three of the members of the Godhead. All too often Christ is regarded as intervening between God and men – saving them from God rather than saving them for God as an act of obedience to the Father's will. The truth is that men's deliverance from their enslavement to sin stands upon the good pleasure and kind intention of the Father, which intention was fulfilled by the gracious, atoning work of the Son, and is subsequently brought to bear and perfected in the lives of men through the renewing and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. The resource for men sold into bondage to sin is entirely *divine*; it is solely the combined, unified purpose and work of the triune God.

That redemption is a divine work accomplished solely by and depending entirely upon the Godhead is foundational to Paul's argumentation in chapter eight. For, in all the Scripture, there is no grander treatise on the Christian's assurance and confidence before God. In chapter seven Paul employed language of absoluteness in reference to men's enslavement to sin; in chapter eight such language is used in reference to the Christian's deliverance from sin and the resulting status and standing he enjoys. And as men's slavery to sin has focused upon the impotence of self and law, so men's full and everlasting deliverance focuses upon the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's thesis in transitioning from chapter seven to chapter eight is simply this: *what self and law are utterly incapable of accomplishing, God has accomplished in Christ through the power and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.*

Because the Holy Spirit is the centerpiece of chapter eight and its glorious treatment of the believer's deliverance, assurance, and confident hope, it is profitable to consider His place and significance in redemptive history. What role did He play in the various stages of salvation history leading up to the Incarnation, and how did His work provide insight into God's promise regarding His place in the "new age" of the kingdom inaugurated by Christ? Only by addressing those questions will the full significance of Paul's instruction be comprehended.

- 1) The first thing to recognize is that the Holy Spirit is central to God's developing promise of the kingdom in the Old Testament. For the defining reality of the kingdom of God is the elimination of the curse upon the cosmos and, with it, the cleansing and renewal of all things (cf. Isaiah 11:1-10, 35:1-10, 65:17-66:24; Zechariah 12:1-14:11). At the heart of this work of renewal is the purification and sanctification of a covenant people made fit by God to inhabit the kingdom, and that work is ascribed to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit (ref. Ezekiel 11:16-20, 36:16-32, 37:1-14; Joel 2:28-29).
- 2) As the Spirit is the agent of the re-creation in Christ, so He was the agent of the first creation. Thus He is introduced as "brooding" over the newly formed earth (Genesis 1:2). At the point of its creation the world is represented in the Scripture as being dark, disordered (*formless*), and uninhabited (*void*), and each of these aspects of imperfection and incompleteness was to be rectified by divine directives regarding light, separation, and life. But the fact of the Spirit's brooding presence at the time God began to speak indicates that He was the agent of God's creative and ordering activity. God declared His purpose and He accomplished it by the power of His immanent Spirit.
- 3) From that point forward the Scripture presents the Holy Spirit as the agency of God's power exerted in His created order. He not only is the agent of God's creative work, He is the One who nurtures and preserves those works. This nurturing and preserving aspect of the Spirit's role is most clearly evident in His relationship with the covenant nation of Israel. Thus, the Scripture reveals Him to be the predominant point of God's interaction with the created order prior to the Incarnation. Sinclair Ferguson observes:

"It is clear from the various biblical references...that ruach [spirit] denotes more than simply the energy of God; it describes God extending himself in active engagement with his creation in a personal way." (The Holy Spirit, Contours of Christian Theology)

- 4) As noted, the preserving role of the Holy Spirit becomes most evident and developed with the emergence of the Israelite theocracy. Throughout Israel's existence her identity and well-being were inseparable from the presence and power of God's Spirit. He was preeminently the author and preserver of Israel's "kingdom life."
- As the Spirit had brought order and life to the first creation, so He was the agent of Israel's "creation." He formed the nation by His power and established its theocratic order and direction (ref. Numbers 11:1-17, 24-29, 27:15-23; also Isaiah 63:7-14).
 - Having created, established, and ordered the theocratic nation, the Spirit became the focal point of Israel's covenant identity. They were Yahweh's people and He was their God, and this fundamental covenantal reality was evidenced in the fact that God dwelled in their midst in the sanctuary He commissioned and prescribed (Exodus 25:1-9). But God's dwelling place among men was to be the result of His power and not theirs, so that He followed His commandment to build with the Spirit's empowering of selected men to accomplish the work (Exodus 31:1-11). *From the very beginning God was making known that His dwelling place among men would be built by the power of His Spirit, not by human will and resource.* This reality would come to its pinnacle fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, and then in the Church constructed upon Him as the chief cornerstone (cf. John 1:14 and 2:19-21 with Isaiah 11:1-2, 42:1-4, Luke 1:26-35, 3:21-22, and 4:16-21; also Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:4-10).
 - After the completion of the tabernacle, Yahweh dwelled among His chosen people in the person of His Spirit (Isaiah 63:7-14; Haggai 2:1-5). His presence in the midst of the nation was symbolized in the Shekinah glory-cloud that resided between the wings of the cherubim in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 25:10-22; Leviticus 16:1-2; Psalm 80:1-2; Ezekiel 9:3; etc.). When the Lord forsook His apostate people, He made that fact known by removing the glory of His presence first from the temple, and then from the city of Jerusalem where He had placed His name (Ezekiel 10:18-19, 11:22-23; cf. Deuteronomy 26:1-2; 1 Kings 8:1-29).
 - The Holy Spirit was Yahweh's presence among His covenant sons, and so also He was Israel's teacher and guide, primarily through His prophets (Nehemiah 9:30) whose word to Israel was, "Thus says the Lord." As well, He was the nation's protector, defender and deliverer, accomplishing His work through Israel's leaders and judges (cf. Numbers 24:1-10; Judges 3:1-10, 6:34-37, 13:1ff; Nehemiah 9:7-25; Psalm 106:21-23). In these ways and others, the Holy Spirit showed Himself to be the establisher and administrator of the household of God.
 - Finally, the Spirit was the focal point of Israel's theocratic identity in the sense that He uniquely anointed the nation's kings. Because God was the true king in Israel, the nation's human kings simply ruled on His throne under His authority. God led them by His Spirit, and the removal of His Spirit from them was the evidence that He had rejected them as king (cf. 1 Samuel 9:1-10:10, 15:1-16:14).

5) Most importantly, the Spirit's central role in the Israelite theocracy served a profound prophetic purpose; *His function in the theocratic kingdom served to establish the nature of, and thereby bring clarity to, His promised role in the true kingdom that was to come.*

- This is evident first in the Bible's disclosure that the nation of Israel and her covenant relationship with God served a crucial *typological* function. That is to say, Israel's existence and historical circumstance were intended by God to portray and anticipate an ultimate, antitypical "Israel." Israel had been set apart as Yahweh's elect, first-born son (Exodus 4:22-23) – a son who was to find all his delight in and reserve all his devotion for his covenant Father and God. In this way Israel was to be Yahweh's faithful servant and witness in the world of men; the people whose very existence testified of the true and living God.

The Scripture reveals that Israel was to find its antitypical fulfillment first and foremost in *Jesus Christ*. He is singularly the true *Israel* (Isaiah 49:1-13). And as the Spirit's presence in their midst was the evidence of theocratic Israel's identity as Yahweh's beloved covenant son, so it was similarly true of Christ the singular Son. The prophet Isaiah promised that the Spirit of Yahweh would rest upon Him in all power, and God's proclamation of His delight in His Son was accompanied by the descending of the Spirit upon Him (Matthew 3:13-17). From the time He entered upon His public ministry Jesus made known that the presence and operative power of the Holy Spirit in Him indicated that the kingdom of God had come as prophesied. *Even as He proclaimed the coming of the kingdom, Jesus certified His proclamation by the manifestation of the power of the Spirit* (ref. Matthew 12:22-28; Mark 9:1-9; Luke 4:31-44, 8:1-3, 9:1-11, 10:1-11).

As Jesus Christ is the true covenant Servant-Son *Israel*, so the fulfilled and completed "Israel of God" consists of all the covenant sons who are joined to Him (Galatians 6:15-16). The children of Israel were the seed of Abraham, but Christ is the true Seed to whom the Abrahamic promise pertained (Galatians 3:16). Therefore, the promise applies to those who are sons of Abraham *indeed*; that is to say, those who belong to Abraham's singular Son (Galatians 3:1-29; cf. Isaiah 49-55; Romans 2:28-29, 4:1-17, 9:1-33; Ephesians 2:11-3:7; 1 Peter 2:4-10; etc.).

- Israel's fulfillment in the Servant of Yahweh and His work of recovery and ingathering were central to the prophetic message. At the same time, this work was to be attended by and accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. The first creation had been marked by the Spirit's work of creating, ordering, and administering, and so also had the "creation" of the Israelite kingdom. In the same way the prophets ascribed the establishment of the eschatological kingdom to the Spirit's power. The promised kingdom was to be defined by comprehensive restoration expressed in the removal of the curse, the purification of sin, the ushering in of life from the dead, and the permanent renewal of the created order. The Son of David would bring the kingdom, but He would establish and build it in the power of His Spirit (Isaiah 44:1-5; Ezekiel 36:16-30, 37:1-14; also Joel 2:15-32 with Acts 2:1-21; especially John 14:1-16:15 and Acts 1:1-8).