

Living By The Spirit
The Spirit of Things to Come
Romans 8

God has not taken our 'No' to him as the final word. He has continued to visit us, in the prophets, by saving deeds and in Christ—by his Spirit. We must still reckon with him and know him. The history of his world will still move forward to the goal he has planned.

When the Spirit comes on Pentecost day, freighted now with all that Christ has done, all of those who repent and believe see things as prophets do—with their eyes opened to the eternities. Moses' prayer is answered: 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets' (Num. 11:29). Our eyes are directed to see and to long for God's future by the Spirit.

- ▣ Jesus has taught his apostles about the kingdom (Acts 1:2-3).
- ▣ He says they will not know times and seasons—such as what God will do with Israel—but they will announce how God is dealing with the nations in the last days (Acts 1:6-8).
- ▣ Joel's prophecy is fulfilled: God has again given the world prophets; he will send days of judgement on the world; those who repent will be saved (Acts 2:16-21).
- ▣ The Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement (Acts 2:37; John 16:8-11)—all the things it is impossible for us to do—things that require a belief in future judgement.
- ▣ The Humanist Manifesto (version two), a summary of humanist beliefs drawn up in 1972, denies any such judgement. 'Promises of immortal salvation or fear of eternal damnation are both illusory and harmful. They distract humans from present concerns, from self-actualization, and from rectifying social injustices.' (There is now a Humanist Manifesto, version three.)
- ▣ While both we and the Holy Spirit bear witness (John 15:27), only the Spirit can validate what is to come and convict people of its truth.

The teaching of the apostles—our New Testament—often makes a direct relationship between the gift of the Spirit and anticipation of God's future for the world. These references may be summarised under three headings as suggested by their use in the letter to the Romans.

The Spirit renews us inwardly.

- ▣ God pours out his love, not just for us or on us but into us by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5).
- ▣ The context shows us that God has done this by calling us righteous, welcoming us as friends, giving us access to his kindness and arousing a hope of sharing his glory.
- ▣ These benefits are substantial enough to sustain us through tribulations. There can be no true confidence that is not undergirded by certainty about the future.
- ▣ Guilt is an irascible irritant that keeps us focused on gaining ground in this world.
- ▣ All this is changed by renewal of the Holy Spirit, a renewal linked with being justified (Tit. 3:4-7; also 1 Cor. 6:11). We can begin living as heirs anticipating an inheritance.

- ▣ The Spirit strengthens us inwardly, enabling us to host Christ himself and giving us understanding of God's immense purpose in saving us (Eph. 3:14-21). We have been launched into the eternities and this world can be seen for what it is—our launching pad, but not our home or our destination.

The Spirit provides a foretaste of things to come.

- ▣ The gift of the Spirit provides a genuine sample of what God has planned for us (Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30).
- ▣ The whole of Romans 8 spells out what this may be: The 'Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' has freed of the inevitable workings of sin and death (v. 2—the personal pronoun is singular, 'you', to suggest the personal implications of this); the Spirit is life because he brings peace with God (v. 6), and righteousness (v. 10; also Gal. 5:5). These will be perfected in the age to come, but they are already decisive for us who trust in the gospel.
- ▣ It is painful to live in a world where unrighteousness seems to have the upper hand—our own and that of others. But we live because God calls us righteous in his Son, he leads us in practical righteousness (v. 4) and gives us hope of a day when all will be transformed. Righteousness is the future!
- ▣ Already we cry 'Father' and so have a taste of what it will be to be glorified as Christ is already glorified (vv. 15-16).
- ▣ The present is frequently painful and confusing. The earth groans; we groan; and the Holy Spirit groans with us, praying for us according to God's plan (v. 27).

Spirit created hope enables the creation and endurance of a multi-ethnic people of God.

- ▣ Paul asks God to fill his people with '...all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 15:12). Why does he mention the Spirit's ability to create hope in the context of differences between church members at Rome?
- ▣ The differences are between strong and weak Christians (14:1-2) and the problem consists in the strong despising the weak and the weak judging the strong (14:3). The issue is what Christians may eat and drink. At the end of the section, he identifies the two groups as Jews and Gentiles (15:8).
- ▣ Among the other arguments Paul brings to bear on the situation, he draws attention to what Jews hoped for—the conversion of the Gentiles (15:8-9). The Scriptures are given so we may live, not with how things are or with what we prefer but with what God has promised (15:4). Christ fulfills these promises and welcomes Jews and Gentiles (15:7).
- ▣ The kingdom in which we share and for which we hope is not about eating and drinking but 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom 14:17). God is offering this to us, but equally, to those whose faith dictates different behavioural options.
- ▣ The Holy Spirit does not so much guide us through this confusion as lift us above it. There is more at stake than merely who is 'right' and who is 'wrong'.
- ▣ The world loves the Beatles song: 'Imagine there's no heaven...' and 'Imagine all the people living life in peace'. Such imaginings ignore the vast empirical evidence that without heaven we do not have the capacity for peace among us or within us.
- ▣ So the appeal comes to us that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (15:12)—a hope created by God's promises of a multi-ethnic people of God.