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THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW AND OLD COVENANTS

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, God poured out the Holy Spirit as He had promised. The Holy Spirit has a significant and distinctive role in every aspect of our lives in the New Covenant.

In the previous message, I have considered 11 points concerning the outpouring and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant. In this message, we will reflect further on this subject. We will also consider the difference in the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Covenant.

As we dwell on this subject, we must remind ourselves not to approach it merely from an academic standpoint. What is of utmost importance is that we enter into life in the Spirit and experience the fullness of the Spirit so that what we are considering becomes real and operative in our lives.

The Holy Spirit in the New Covenant (continued)

12. The Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer life

Romans 8:26

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

We are weak and we do not know how to pray as we should. The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and "intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words".

Prayer is a very important aspect of the life of the believer and we need to recognise our need of the Holy Spirit to help us nurture and maintain an effective prayer life. Effective prayer life does not come about merely by our trying hard to exert ourselves and exercise our faculties; we must understand the role of the Holy Spirit and learn what the Scriptures teaches about praying in the Holy Spirit.

Let us look at Ephesians 6:18. In the context of spiritual warfare and putting on the whole armour of God, Paul says,

Ephesians 6:18

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit,...

True prayer must be in the Spirit, and should not be a mere display of emotion, or a mere exercise of our minds or even of our spirit, although there is a place for the emotion and for the exercise of the mind and the spirit.

Prayer is extremely important in our walk with God, in our service and also in advancing God's kingdom in the spiritual realm. It is not a matter of uttering some words and going through various prayer items. We need to understand how to be guided and enabled by the Holy Spirit and learn to pray in fellowship and oneness with the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit can renew our minds and show us the things that we should concentrate on in prayer. He can help us with the meaning in our hearts, with the choice of words to express what is within, and most of all, empower us to exercise our spirit in prayer and to learn to pray in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is powerful and effective because God is at work. Prayer can change and move things, not merely because we are exercising our faculties, but rather, because the Spirit of God moves mightily in the spiritual realm. The Spirit of God works in the context of prayer. As we exercise ourselves in prayer, we must be conscious of this reality. In all aspects of our time in prayer, including worship, praise, thanksgiving, communion and fellowship with God, we must learn to be guided by the Holy Spirit and learn to "pray at all times in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18).

13. The Holy Spirit reveals to us the deep things of God

1 Corinthians 2:9-12

9 but just as it is written,

"Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,
And which have not entered the heart of man,
All that God has prepared for those who love Him."

10 For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God.

Paul tells us about the deep things of God, "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man". The natural man cannot understand these things, which God has prepared for those who love Him (v. 9). This would include all that we have been reflecting on concerning what God has done and provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ and in the New Covenant.

How do we experience these realities? We first need to have insight into them, followed by experience. But how do we understand and know these realities? Not with the natural man, for no matter how brilliant, intelligent or capable the natural man is, he cannot understand these things. Verse 10 tells us "God revealed them

through the Spirit". Only the Spirit of God can reveal these things to us because "the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God" (v. 11).

And we have received this Spirit. The Spirit of God now dwells in us in order that we might know the things freely given to us by God (v. 12). Recognising what the Scriptures says on this matter, let us earnestly seek to understand and gain insight into the things of God, not depending on our own intellect, cleverness, capabilities or even our own perseverance and study.

Though we may acknowledge the need to depend on the Spirit of God, it is easy in reality for us to depend on our own intellect and perseverance in searching and studying the Scriptures. We must therefore be very conscious of the need to prayerfully, earnestly and humbly look to the Spirit of God to help us and to reveal to us the truth.

We need to bear in mind that there is God's part and man's part. On the one hand, we look to the Spirit of God to teach and reveal to us the truth. On the other, we must diligently seek the truth, study it and ponder over it, all the time relying on the Spirit of God, who is our Teacher and Guide, so that we may be helped to gain true insight and not merely some mental concepts that do not give light and life to our inner man.

14. The Holy Spirit helps us gain insight into God's revelation in the Scriptures

One important aspect of the Holy Spirit guiding us into all the truth is that He grants us insight into God's revelation in the Scriptures. The Scriptures is a major source of God's revelation to us and we need to pay careful attention to what God desires to teach us from the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The Scriptures is inspired by God and intended for our learning and for us to be trained in righteousness. It is wholesome and can bring us to the point of being fully adequate, equipped for every good work. The Scriptures can help us attain to the greatest height of spiritual insight and maturity that God intends for us.

Although this is God's intention, it does not come about easily. We need to pay due attention to the study of the Scriptures. As we set apart time to read and ponder over the truths in the Scriptures, let us be mindful that it is the Spirit of God who inspired the writing of the Scriptures and we therefore need to look to Him to grant us insight into the proper interpretation, understanding and application of the Scriptures.

While all true believers acknowledge the authority of the Scriptures, yet the failure to properly interpret, understand and apply the Scriptures has been one of the major reasons for the problems and confusions that exist amongst believers all through the centuries and even to this day.

Many tend to interpret the Scriptures in a rather subjective manner, but that is not the way God has intended it. God has given us the Scriptures as the objective truth and revelation. It is not to be interpreted subjectively, with different persons coming up with different interpretations and conclusions that contradict one another. To arrive at the objective truth, we must seek to understand what God truly intends to communicate to us through the Scriptures, and not merely what we think or prefer, or what others tell us.

How do we arrive at the objective truth? The Spirit of God who inspires the Scriptures is the One who is able to help us. We need to carefully study the Scriptures, relying upon the Spirit of God to grant us true insight. We also need to be humble and open to others who love God so that together we may arrive at the correct understanding.

While many truths in the Scriptures are clear, there are some that are not easy to understand. Before we act on what we think the Scriptures teaches, we must be reasonably clear that we have arrived at the truth; otherwise, we may be thinking that we are applying the truth when in fact we are deviating from the path of truth. This is a common occurrence amongst believers. Many have gone astray in varying degrees because of wrong interpretation, understanding and application of the Scriptures. We must exercise great care and be slow to conclude, especially on issues that have significant implications and where there is much controversy, with various ones offering differing and contradictory interpretations.

15. Impartation of truth by the Spirit's enabling

Not only what we learn must be taught by the Spirit, when we impart truth to others, we must also be conscious of the need for the Holy Spirit's enabling. Otherwise, there would not be the impartation of light and life. It will be mere concepts and ideas that can, at times, hinder rather than help in the recognition of truth, or that may even lead to a false sense of knowledge.

Let us learn from the approach of the apostle Paul. In spite of his great learning, spiritual stature and deep knowledge of the things of God, he was very conscious that he needed to depend on the Spirit of God to teach him and help him communicate the truth.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.

2 For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

3 I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,

4 and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

We can see from this passage that Paul was very conscious not to rely on his own learning and wisdom to communicate the truth, but instead to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit so that, as Paul puts it: "your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God".

If we fail to rely on the Spirit of God to enable us, what we impart and what others receive from us would be of the natural man. Without the Spirit of God working in that context, it will be devoid of the life, power and reality of God and will not help others grow in true faith.

We must be conscious of this, not just in the preaching of the gospel or when we are seeking to help someone turn to the Lord, but also in our communication in everyday situations, including times of fellowship and when we talk to others. If we desire to communicate life and truth, we need to look to the Spirit of God to guide and enable us so that there will be the impartation of light and life, and of truth and reality.

16. The Holy Spirit leads and guides us in our daily lives

Romans 8:14

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

This verse looks at the issue of the Spirit's guidance in a more comprehensive manner. God does not want us to live our lives as we please, or even try to understand the truth in the Scriptures and then seeking to live it out on our own. He wants us to be conscious of our need of Him in all aspects.

It includes being led by the Spirit to know the path that God wants us to take, how we should live our lives, the decisions we ought to make and His empowering to live out what we have come to understand of His will.

It has been God's intention from the beginning of creation that we learn to walk with Him, have fellowship with Him, instead of living our lives on our own. The Scriptures paints for us in just four words one of the most beautiful pictures of how one can live a life pleasing to God: Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:22). This brief description strongly suggests that Enoch had deep fellowship with God, and that this was a consistent feature in his life. Hebrews 11:5 reveals to us that God was pleased with Enoch and granted him the privilege of being taken up without seeing death. We need therefore to be conscious of the Spirit of God and look to Him for guidance and enabling at all times, not just in times of crises, difficulties or when we have to make major decisions.

17. Strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man

When Paul prays for the believers, as recorded in his epistles, he concentrates on the major issues. In Ephesians 3:16, Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers that they might be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inner man. This is a major aspect of Paul's concern for believers and we should therefore pay heed to it.

Ephesians 3:16

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.

The most important part of man is the inner man, and Paul is concerned that we are strengthened with power in the inner man. This comes about through the ministry of the Spirit of God. And because it is "according to the riches of His glory", we know that the Spirit of God can strengthen us tremendously. Every aspect of our inner man can be strengthened with power.

The goal of Paul's prayer for believers is in the direction of the Holy Spirit at work in our inner man so that we may attain to the fullness of life that God intends for us. In verse 19, he speaks of believers being "filled up to all the fullness of God"—not just a little taste of it but its fullness.

Both Ephesians 4:13, which we dwelled upon in the previous message, and Ephesians 3:19, our present consideration, speak about the fullness of the Lord that believers are to move towards. The goal is moral and spiritual beauty, stature and maturity in the Lord. Clearly, there is much more that we need to learn and enter into of all that God desires of us. To make good progress in that direction, we need to be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inner man.

Let us ask the Lord to grant us insight into this area of truth and enter more and more into what God intends for us. Let us neither be complacent nor be satisfied with the superficial or with whatever we may have already attained to. There is much more that awaits us.

18. Overcoming the evil one and the powers of darkness

The Holy Spirit helps us overcome the evil one and the powers of darkness "because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Let us realise that on our own, we are no match for the powers of darkness and for the evil one. They will surely overcome us if we depend on ourselves.

But we can take heart that the Spirit of God who dwells in us is infinitely more powerful than the evil one. And we need to understand how He can enable us to overcome the evil one, not sporadically, but consistently.

Let us look at the role of the Holy Spirit in the context of spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:17-18.

Ephesians 6:17-18

17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Paul urges believers to put on the full armour of God so that they can effectively wage spiritual warfare because our struggle is not primarily against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of darkness and wickedness. As Paul lists the various parts of the armour of God, he refers to the role of the Holy Spirit as "the sword of the Spirit" (v. 17) and urges us to "pray at all times in the Spirit" (v. 18). This is a vital aspect of spiritual warfare. Just as in the expressions "the breastplate of righteousness" (v. 14), "righteousness" is the breastplate, "the shield of faith" (v. 16), "faith" is the shield, and "the helmet of salvation" (v. 17), "salvation" is the helmet, so in the expression "the sword of the Spirit", "the Spirit" is the sword. This understanding of the meaning of "the sword of the Spirit" has been explained in greater detail in the message 2TS19 in the series of messages: *Two Important Temptation Scenes*.

The Spirit of God is the sword that cuts down and overcomes the enemy, and destroys the stronghold of the enemy. He is the One who enables us to overcome the evil one and his forces.

And Paul links the Holy Spirit at work in spiritual warfare with prayer—"with all prayer". It is through prayer that we learn to move the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. And He is the One who overcomes the powers of darkness. Thus, Paul exhorts us to pray at all times in the Spirit.

19. Overcoming the problem of the weakness of the flesh and the problem of sin

God wants us to live a life of holiness and righteousness, to walk in the truth. But Paul makes it clear in Romans 7 that, on our own, we are not able to. Even when we desire to live aright, we will continue to fail.

Romans 7:18-19

18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

Romans 7:22-24

22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?

The weakness of the flesh is the reason for the constant sense of frustration and wretchedness that we experience. "Who will set me free?" is the cry of anguish of a man held in bondage by the weakness of the flesh. (Bear in mind the evil one has been actively at work, exploiting the weakness of the flesh and keeping us in bondage to sin). Paul tells us the answer emphatically in verse 25:

Romans 7:25

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! ...

The answer lies in Christ. God helps us to overcome by what Christ has accomplished at the Cross and what we can now enter into in the risen Lord. The death of Christ together with His resurrection and ascension is critical. Paul elaborates on this truth in Romans 8.

Romans 8:2-3

2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

Verse 2 tells us the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and of death. On our own, we are not able to live aright. Even the Law could not help us, because of the weakness of the flesh. But God overcame this problem by sending His own Son (v. 3). And now it becomes feasible for us to do so through the death of Christ, His resurrection and ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We see the two key issues of life coming together—the death of Christ and life in the Spirit—to enable us to fulfil the will of God and live an overcoming life.

The term "law" in "the *law* of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" communicates to us that it is a principle, a way of life, not something that we merely experience in fits and starts. The Spirit grants life, and this is worked out in Christ Jesus. Romans 8:2 is a very rich verse. It is at the heart of all that we have been talking about.

The following verses in Romans 8 give us directions as to how we can overcome the weakness of the flesh and live an overcoming life:

Romans 8:4, 6, 13

4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

In essence, when we learn to walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh (v. 4), on the basis of what Christ has accomplished at the Cross and our being in Him, we will be able to fulfil God's requirement and overcome the weakness of the flesh.

Verse 6 tells us that it is still possible for believers to live in the flesh and to have our mind set on the flesh. Paul says that to overcome the weakness of the flesh, we must set our mind on the Spirit, resulting in life and peace.

Verse 13 tells us that a life lived according to the flesh will lead to spiritual death. If we desire to live a life of meaning and purpose and to live well, we must ask the Spirit of God to help us put to death the deeds of the flesh and set us free from the stranglehold of the flesh.

20. Unity in the Spirit

The Holy Spirit helps God's children attain and maintain true unity in the Spirit and in the truth. Unity is a very important issue in relation to church life and the fulfilment of God's purposes. There is much going around under the banner of unity that is not true unity. It is important for us to be clear about the meaning of true unity and what it consists of. Let us look at an important passage on the subject of true unity:

Ephesians 4:1-6

- 1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,
- 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,
- 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

In verse 3, Paul exhorts us to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". If we learn to submit to the Spirit of God, there will not be discord, division and conflicts but true oneness because the Spirit of God brings about true oneness.

What Paul says in the preceding verses and the verses that follow is relevant. If believers desire to pay heed to Paul's exhortation to walk in a manner worthy of God's calling (v. 1), they must be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (v. 3). And this is brought about by the Spirit of God working in our heart, mind and spirit and helping us to exercise patience, love, humility, gentleness or meekness and forbearance (v. 2). These are the critical qualities that bring about

true unity, and they are essentially the virtues of the fruit of the Spirit that Paul wrote about in Galatians 5:22-23.

Thus, as we are submitted to the Spirit, the Spirit of God works within us, and as we grow in the Lord, the fruit of the Spirit becomes more and more manifest, resulting in true unity in the body. And this true unity is grounded in the fact that there is only one body (v. 4). The Spirit of God has baptised us into the body of Christ; there is only one body. The principle of oneness in the body of Christ is applicable to the local congregation as well as the universal church. There being only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all (vs. 4-6), if we are all following the guidance of the Spirit, we will of course be submitted to the Lord and there will be true unity. This is the basis of true unity.

True unity does not emerge simply because a group of believers come together under one umbrella, even when they are in agreement. If what they agree upon is not of the Lord and not grounded in the truth as revealed in the Scriptures, it is not submission to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And if it is not grounded in true submission to the Triune God, then it is not true oneness.

If we desire to grow in true oneness, we need to look to the Spirit of God to bring it about. It begins by the Spirit of God working within us, renewing our minds, transforming our character, and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Together with the brethren, we move together as one body in the direction of God's call, guided, led and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Wherever God's children are walking in truth, according to the guidance and enabling of the Holy Spirit in the direction of God's call, there will be the spirit of fellowship and oneness in serving the one true God. This would result in the proper working of the various parts of the body of Christ, each one fulfilling the part God desires of him in His overall plan and purposes and contributing to the building of His kingdom. True unity is hindered and disrupted whenever the flesh intrudes, whenever we seek to serve according to our own strength, our own thinking, preference and inclinations, contrary to the will of God.

True unity is extremely important in the outworking of healthy church life and the fulfilment of God's purposes in both the local context and the wider context of God's children all over the world.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old Covenant

I will now consider with you the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit prior to the inauguration of the New Covenant, that is, under the Old Covenant.

We have noted earlier that in John 7:39: "the Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified", the word *given* is in italics, that is, it is not in the original text. The literal translation of this verse is: "the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified". Does this mean that the Holy Spirit was not at work in the lives of

people prior to the death of Christ and prior to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost recorded in Acts 2? What about the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit during Old Testament times? The Scriptures does give examples of the Holy Spirit at work in and through the lives of people prior to the death of Christ. We read of the Holy Spirit coming upon them and filling, empowering and enabling them.

We will look at a few examples from the Old Testament, starting with God's call of Bezalel in Exodus 31.

Bezalel—building of the Tabernacle

Exodus 31:1-5

- 1 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
- 2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.
- 3 "I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship,
- 4 to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze,
- 5 and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship.

We see in verse 2, God calling Bezalel by name, that is, it was a specific call for a specific person to undertake a particular task, which in this case was "to make artistic designs" (v. 4). And for that, God "filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship" (v. 3). Verse 7 tells us that it was in the context of building the tabernacle, or the "tent of meeting", that Bezalel was called.

Saul—to fulfil the role of kingship

Let us look at another example, King Saul. God called him and anointed him to fulfil the role of kingship.

1 Samuel 9:15-17

- 15 Now a day before Saul's coming, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel saying,
- 16 "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over My people Israel; and he will deliver My people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have regarded My people, because their cry has come to Me."
- 17 When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, "Behold, the man of whom I spoke to you! This one shall rule over My people."

In this passage, we see the Lord speaking to Samuel about Saul, the one He had chosen to be prince over His people Israel, to rule over them. Saul was also to deliver His people from the hand of the Philistines.

In 1 Samuel 10:6, the prophet Samuel told Saul that the Holy Spirit will come upon him mightily. This was in accordance with the will of God, to empower Saul to fulfil the task God had entrusted to him. And verse 10 tells us that the Holy Spirit did come upon Saul accordingly.

1 Samuel 10:6, 10

6 "Then the Spirit of the Lord will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man.

10 When they came to the hill there, behold, a group of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him mightily, so that he prophesied among them.

However, in spite of being empowered by the Spirit of God, the Scriptures tells us that King Saul failed the Lord and the Lord raised up another king, David, in his place.

David—anoointed king over Israel

1 Samuel 16:1

Now the Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons."

In this verse, read together with verse 12, we see God sending Samuel to anoint David to be king over Israel.

1 Samuel 16:12-14

12 ... And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he."

13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. ...

14 Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him.

In verse 12, we see that when David appeared, God confirmed to Samuel that this was the one He had appointed. We then read in verse 13 that the Spirit of God came mightily upon David. But again, it was for David to fulfil a specific role, to be king over the nation of Israel. In contrast, we see the Spirit of the Lord departing from Saul (v. 14) because of his disobedience to the Lord and failure to fulfil what the Lord had entrusted to him.

Jahaziel—giving assurance during a national crisis

In the above examples, the Spirit of God came upon someone because of the need of the occasion. This happened again during the reign of King Jehoshaphat, when there was a national crisis.

2 Chronicles 20:1-6

1 Now it came about after this that the sons of Moab and the sons of Ammon, together with some of the Meunites, came to make war against Jehoshaphat.

2 Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea, out of Aram and behold, they are in Hazazon-tamar (that is Engedi)."

3 Jehoshaphat was afraid and turned his attention to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

4 So Judah gathered together to seek help from the Lord; they even came from all the cities of Judah to seek the Lord.

5 Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord before the new court,

6 and he said, "O Lord, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You.

We read in 2 Chronicles 20 that Moab, Ammon and the Meunites came to make war against Jehoshaphat (v. 1). The latter was up against a great multitude and was afraid. Therefore, he proclaimed a fast throughout Judah (v. 3). Together with Judah, Jehoshaphat sought help from the Lord (v. 4). He acknowledged in his prayer that God is ruler over the kingdoms of the nations and that power and might are in His hand (v. 6). Knowing that he was facing a formidable foe, he prayed in verse 12:

2 Chronicles 20:12

"O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You."

It was a crisis and King Jehoshaphat cried out to God for he saw that the enemy was too powerful for him and his army. In the following verses, we see the Spirit of God coming upon Jahaziel and he spoke on behalf of the Lord:

2 Chronicles 20:14-17

14 Then in the midst of the assembly the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, the Levite of the sons of Asaph;

15 and he said, "Listen, all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and King Jehoshaphat: thus says the Lord to you, 'Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God's.

16 'Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the valley in front of the wilderness of Jeruel.

17 'You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do

not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the Lord is with you.”

It was a very important moment and God spoke through this man, Jahaziel, to assure King Jehoshaphat and Israel that God would fight on their behalf. The Spirit of God came mightily upon this man and he prophesied.

Zechariah—prophesying against Judah

We also see the Spirit of God at work in 2 Chronicles 24 through the prophet Zechariah. This occurred in the reign of King Joash. Joash had been helped by Jehoiada the priest. But when Jehoiada died, the king listened to his officials and they abandoned the house of God, serving the Asherim and other idols instead (vs. 17-19). So God’s wrath came upon Judah. He sent prophets to bring them back to the Lord but they would not listen. Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah and he prophesied.

2 Chronicles 24:20

Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, “Thus God has said, ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you.’ ”

Zechariah spoke on behalf of God, prophesying God’s judgement on the nation of Judah because they were obstinate and would not turn from their wicked ways.

Elizabeth—the mother of John the Baptist

In the New Testament, prior to the death of Christ, the Spirit of God also filled certain people on specific occasions and in specific contexts. We read an account of this in Luke 1:41-45.

Luke 1:41-45

41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 And she cried out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

43 “And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?

44 “For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped in my womb for joy.

45 “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”

This was prior to the birth of the Lord Jesus and the birth of John the Baptist. It was a specific context, a specific occasion, where the Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth and filled her and enabled her to say the words that we read in the above passage.

Zacharias—Elizabeth's husband

In verse 67 of the same chapter, we see the Spirit of God also filling Zacharias, Elizabeth's husband, and he prophesied.

Luke 1:67

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, ...

This occurred during the birth of John the Baptist. Their neighbours were surprised that Elizabeth planned to call the child John and they asked Zacharias, who confirmed that his name was indeed John. And in that context, Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit and he prophesied (vs. 67-79). Take note that these incidents took place prior to the death of Christ.

We have seen several examples in the Old Testament, and two examples in the New Testament, of the Holy Spirit coming upon various people prior to the death of Christ. Why then did the apostle John mention, "the Holy Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39)? Why do we refer to the outpouring and ministry of the Holy Spirit as a major provision of God under the New Covenant when He was already at work prior to Christ's death? What is the difference between the ministry of the Holy Spirit prior to and after the death of Christ? This is the subject we will now consider.

Difference between the role and ministry of the Spirit in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant

Though the Holy Spirit was at work in Old Testament times and prior to the death of Christ, coming mightily upon various people to empower them, fill them and enable them, let us take note that these were unusual and isolated occurrences. They involved people whom the Lord called for specific roles, responsibilities and tasks and also to speak on His behalf and to prophesy.

We noted that God specifically called Bezalel and filled him with the Holy Spirit, to enable him to perform the specific task of constructing the tabernacle. He also called Saul to fulfil the role of kingship and in that context, the Spirit of God came mightily upon him. When Saul failed as king, the Spirit of God came upon David mightily so that he could fulfil the role that God required of him. In the case of Jahaziel during the reign of Jehoshaphat, the Spirit of God came upon him at a time of national crisis to assure King Jehoshaphat and Judah of God's sovereign undertaking. We also saw Zechariah prophesying judgement on the nation of Israel for transgressing God's commandments and forsaking the Lord. Then again, we saw in the New Testament that Elizabeth and Zacharias were both filled with the Holy Spirit on specific occasions.

Under the New Covenant, the scenario is different. It is God's intention for all His children to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and be led, taught and empowered by the Spirit in every aspect of their lives.

In Acts 2:17, Peter quoted Joel's prophecy of God's intention to pour forth His Spirit "on all mankind". You need not be a special person with a special calling or responsibility to fulfil in order to be filled and empowered by the Spirit. Under the New Covenant, it is God's intention that the Spirit of God works mightily in the lives of all mankind in every aspect of their lives. It is without distinction or discrimination.

Thus, each one should come to know Him, become His child and be filled with the Spirit. God has already poured forth His Spirit and He desires that each and every one of us experience the fullness of the Spirit.

We have noted in 2 Corinthians 3:6, that the ministry of the Spirit is an important and a distinctive feature of the New Covenant. Paul puts it this way: "Not of the letter but of the Spirit". We are to be led, taught and empowered by the Spirit in every aspect of our lives in our walk with God. And in line with this, Paul exhorts all believers not to get drunk with wine, but to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). This exhortation is to all believers, whether they are male or female, slave or freeman, a young Christian, or one who has been a Christian for many years.

The original text of Ephesians 5:18 translated as "be filled" has the meaning "be filled and continue to be filled". It is imperative, an exhortation, a command, an instruction, not something that is optional or meant only for some. It is God's intention that we move in that direction of being filled and continuing to be filled with the Spirit.

This exhortation of Paul to believers to be filled with the Spirit indicates to us that, on the one hand, it is important and feasible for all believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but on the other, not all believers are filled with the Holy Spirit or continue to maintain the fullness of the Spirit. If all are already in that state, why should Paul still exhort believers to be filled with the Spirit? This is a very important issue pertaining to our lives, our walk with God and also in church life and the fulfilment of God's purposes.

It is sad and regrettable that, contrary to the will of God, many of God's children are not filled with the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we are unable to enter into and experience much of what God intends for us, and it is not feasible for us to grow and fare well. This lack is also at the root of many problems, including weakness and ineffectiveness in witnessing, in service and in making positive contributions to the advancement of God's kingdom. It is at the heart of the spiritual poverty and the lack of vitality that exist in the lives of believers.

The reality of the fullness of the Spirit is so vital that we cannot afford to neglect it or be ignorant about it. We must pay close heed to what the Scriptures teaches and ask God to help us appreciate and enter into what He intends for each one of us.

Sadly, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, including being baptised and filled with the Spirit, is enveloped in much controversy and confusion. This is not surprising because, being a very major issue, one can expect significant spiritual opposition.

The evil one and the powers of darkness would seek to obscure and confuse the truth, cause division and hinder believers from appreciating, understanding and entering into what God intends for us. We should therefore be vigilant, prayerful and humble to seek the Lord's teaching in this area.

The Lord willing, we will consider further, some of the controversies and difficult issues pertaining to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and also the issue of the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

Finally, I want to emphasise that it is vital for us to appreciate the significance of the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit in every aspect of the life of the believer and also to learn how we can respond meaningfully to this area of truth.

The reality of the fullness of the Spirit and life in the Holy Spirit is essential for effective Christian living and witness, for transformation and development of the inner man, and also for effective witness and service.

Given the significance of the issues involved, one may rightly ask, "How can a believer be filled with the Holy Spirit and can we know whether we are filled with the Holy Spirit? What is it that hinders us from entering into this important reality? And if we have experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our lives, is it possible to lose it? How can we ensure that we are filled and continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit?" These are the issues we will deal with in subsequent messages.

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