

Receiving the Holy Spirit

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Preacher: Rev J.J.Murray

[0 : 00] Turn this evening to 2 Corinthians chapter 3. 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and reading at verse 17.

Now the Lord is that spirit, and for the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all with open face beholding us in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory.

Even us by the spirit of the Lord. Now we are following the outline of the Apostles' Creed.

And we have come today to the phrase which says, I believe in the Holy Ghost or the Holy Spirit. And we are asking ourselves a question, do we really believe in the Holy Spirit?

Do we really know the Holy Spirit? Do we really honor the Holy Spirit as we ought to do? And this morning we looked at the gift of the Spirit or the giving of the Spirit as we have it in Acts chapter 2.

[1 : 09] And we have seen that the world was made a theater for God's glory. And Adam, the first man, or Adam and Eve, the first man and woman in particular, were made the image of God in order to reflect the glory of God.

But that reflector became defiled by the fall. The image was defaced. And the whole creation that God had made was affected by sin.

The question is, how is that glory to be restored? Well, it's going to be restored through the second Adam, or the last Adam, as Scripture calls him.

The first Adam failed. He marred the image of God by sin. But the second Adam, or the last Adam, is going to be the one who is going to restore the image of God in his creation.

He was the radiance of God's glory and the express image of his person. The man from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. And in order to bring about that glory, he had first of all to stoop in humiliation.

[2 : 26] He had to become a man. He had to live upon earth. He had to die the death of the cross. He had to be buried. And he had to go through a process of humiliation in which his glory was veiled.

But then also he went through a process of exaltation in his resurrection, in his ascension, and in his sitting at the right hand of God.

And now he is in our nature, in our flesh, at the right hand of the Father. He is resurrected and he is glorified. And in him, the image of God in man is restored.

As the God-man in Christ, the image of God in man is restored. He is the first man of the new creation.

He is the one who is the firstborn among many brethren. Then the question is, how is the earth to be filled with the glory of God?

[3 : 28] How is this glory that Christ has to be given to the sinful sons of men? How is it to be given to them?

Well, it is given to them by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost in abundance. Christ in his ascension came into possession of the Spirit.

And he became what Scripture calls the life-giving Spirit. The last Adam is a life-giving Spirit. He gives life suited to the Spirit.

And the goal of creation, or the new creation, is consummated in the Lord Jesus Christ. And now he sends his Spirit to recover that glory in us and in the world.

And in the day of Pentecost, 120 disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and became the first fruits of that new humanity, that new community that is reflecting the glory of God.

[4 : 42] And that Holy Spirit came in such abundance that he is, through his coming in a plenitude of grace, able to bring that gospel and to be a witness to that gospel throughout all the world.

And the Great Commission is being fulfilled in the power of the Holy Spirit. He has inaugurated the last day glory already.

It has come in Christ. And the powers of the age to come has come down with the Holy Spirit. And these powers are operating in the saved sinner.

And they're operating in the world. And through that work of the Holy Spirit, the nations are going to hear the gospel. They are going to come in to the blessing of salvation.

But tonight we ask the question, how do we as individuals receive the benefits that Christ has purchased for us?

[5 : 47] You see, as long as Christ remains outside of us, we are separated from him. And all that he suffered and did for us in his salvation remains useless and of no value to us.

All the work he did in his coming into this world, in his humiliation to the death of the cross, in his exaltation to the right hand of the Father, all that remains outside us as sinners.

The question is, how do we come into participation of these benefits that Christ has wrought for us?

Well, the New Testament answer, the Pauline answer is, in terms of it is only in him that the blessing of redemption becomes ours.

It is only by the Spirit that we are in Christ. It is in Christ and in the Spirit that these benefits come to us.

[6 : 53] The benefits become ours by direct participation in Christ. There is a divine giving. He has given his Son.

He has given his Spirit. But then there is the human receiving. How do we receive it? Well, we receive it in one way, by believing the gospel.

By believing what we hear, the good news of salvation. But you cannot separate the giving of the Spirit from our initiation into Christ.

And we have a Spirit, and we believe in Christ, and we are united to Christ, and in that way, we receive all the benefits that Christ has brought for us.

And therefore, as we said this morning, to have Christ is to have the Spirit, and to have the Spirit is to have Christ. That's how we receive the blessing of salvation.

[7 : 54] all that Christ has brought for us, we participate of it in him. And the Spirit unites us to Christ. And through that union with Christ, we receive all the benefits that he has purchased for us.

And that means that we cannot think or enjoy the blessings of the gospel, isolated from each other, or separated from Christ. There's a great mistake being made in modern evangelicalism.

And that is, to separate Christ and his benefits. It's perhaps not so prevalent as it was some years ago. You were told that you could come to Christ and receive him as Savior, and then some years later, you could receive him as Lord.

You would come to an evangelistic meeting, and you would receive Christ as Savior, and then you would go to a convention, and you would be challenged, is Christ Lord of your life?

And perhaps you felt he wasn't, and you would be exhorted to receive Christ as Lord. Now that's impossible in New Testament terms. You cannot separate Christ and his benefits.

[9 : 14] You can't offer the benefits of Christ without Christ himself. And that gives a healthy Christ-centeredness to the gospel and to our preaching.

Melanchthon said long ago, to know Christ is to know his benefits. You don't come to know his benefits first. You come to know Christ first, and then you come to know his benefits.

You can't separate Christ from his benefits. You can't partake of salvation without submitting to the Lordship of Christ.

And then another great mistake that has been common in evangelicalism in the last 50 years, and that is separating the work of the Holy Spirit.

You have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, they would tell you, but have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit? Have you received the fullness of the Spirit? And a separation was made between these two things.

[10 : 17] But you see, when we receive the Spirit, it is the baptism of the Spirit. We're baptized into Christ by the Spirit, and we receive all the benefits of Christ through that baptism of the Holy Spirit.

So therefore, all that we have, we have in him. And all that we have, we have by the agency and power of the Holy Spirit.

But then the second thing is, we are united to him, not only in what he has accomplished in our place, but also in the status in which he as mediator was inaugurated by God.

And you see, that's what Paul means when he says, not only that we are in Christ, but we are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

You see, the believer is not only in Christ, and through Christ receives all the benefits of salvation, but he's also in the heavenly places in Christ.

[11 : 23] In our union with him, our status is radically changed. And there's a parallel, you see, between what Christ, what happened to Christ, and what happens to us.

He died, and he was buried, and he was resurrected, and he was glorified. He was vindicated in his resurrection. He was justified, and then he was glorified.

And a believer who is in Christ follows the same pattern. He dies with Christ, he rises with Christ, he is glorified with Christ.

And our whole status as sinners is what we are in Christ, in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. But you see, in addition to our status, in our personal condition, there is progressively a transformation taking place until a final degree of glory.

When he will regenerate not only our souls, but our bodies. Our physical existence will ultimately conform to the blueprint of his glorious body.

[12 : 36] You see, the union that we have with Christ brings us into the orbit of the life of Christ and that which changed Christ.

That which changed him at his resurrection and his glorification. And when Paul is speaking about our new life in Christ, he says, if any man be in Christ, he is not simply a new creature, he's a new creation.

He's part of the new creation that Christ has made. We're part of this great change that has taken place and is taking place.

We're a new creation in Christ Jesus. So then, what is the work of the Spirit? Well, the work of the Spirit, as far as we are concerned, is essentially a ministry of uniting us to Christ and then unfolding to us and in us the riches of God's grace which we inherit in Christ.

And surely that's what Paul is telling us here in the last verse of 2 Corinthians chapter 3. He's telling us that that is the work of the Spirit as far as we are concerned.

[13 : 55] It's a ministry of uniting us to Christ and then unfolding to us and in us the riches of God's grace which are ours in Christ.

In this chapter, Paul is contrasting the old dispensation and in you as we are doing this morning. And he says the ministry of Moses, the ministry of the old dispensation was marked by concealment.

The ministry of Paul is characterized by great openness. You see, there is now no veil obscuring the abiding glory of God, the glory of the gospel.

Only Moses could gaze on the glory of God. The ordinary people were not allowed to gaze on the glory of God. But now in the New Testament, in the New Testament dispensation, the eye of faith, says Paul, may gaze upon the glory of Christ without interruption.

And this is common to all believers. It's not just the apostle that enjoys this great privilege, but all believers enjoy this privilege.

[15 : 13] This view in the first place that we have of the glory of Christ. The veil which shut off the glory from our apprehension has been removed for good.

It has been removed forever. And the image of the glory of Christ is drawn in the gospel. That's the only image we have.

And the only image we are to behold. It's the glory of Christ in the gospel. That's what we are called upon to gaze at. And to gaze by faith into the gospel is to behold Christ.

Because that's where he is held up to the gaze of those who are called to believe in him. He's held up in the gospel.

He is the image of God. He's the image of the invisible God. To behold this glory is to behold the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.

[16 : 21] That's what we see in the gospel. That's what the spirit does and what he delights to do. He delights to take of the things of Christ and to show them to us.

And therefore held out to us in the gospel as in a mirror is the glory of Christ. The glory of the God man. The one and only.

And we are to gaze upon him. We have the liberty to do it. It wasn't that in the Old Testament. It was something that was confined to Moses.

It was something that was concealed. But now it's open. It's manifest. We all can behold it. We are to look upon the glory of Christ drawn for us in the gospel.

That's where our eyes are to look to Christ in the gospel. And the second thing Paul says is this. The effect of continuously beholding is that we are continuously being transformed into the same image.

[17 : 25] as we continuously behold the glory of Christ in the gospel we are continuously being transformed into the same image.

That is into the likeness of Christ. And in contrast to the glory seen on Moses' face there is no prospect of this glory fading.

Moses had a glory when he came down from the mount. but that glory faded it passed away it diminished. But there is no prospect of this glory diminishing.

It only increases more and more until a day when Christ comes back in all his glory. When a Lord of glory himself comes then at last the glory will be revealed in all its fullness.

During the gospel age it's revealed in the gospel. It's held out to us in the gospel. But at the end of the gospel age the one who is preached in that gospel is coming again and we shall see him in all his glory.

[18 : 40] We shall behold him every eye shall see him but a saint shall behold him as the one who is their saviour. But until that time says Paul we behold it by faith.

We behold the glory of Christ in the gospel by faith. The gospel, the word of God is a mirror and we look into that mirror and we exercise faith and we see Christ there and we believe in that Christ and we are transformed by looking at that Christ.

We are changed. but then when he appears we shall behold him face to face and our transformation into his image will be complete.

It's going on all through our lives but when we see him as he is the transformation will be complete. When he is manifested we shall be like him for we shall see him even as he is.

that's the end of it all when the glory of Christ shall be manifested before our eyes. And then the third thing that we see from this verse is that the process of transformation into the image of Christ is none other than the restoration of the image of God which was marred through the fall of man.

[20 : 14] What is taking place by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives is the restoration of the image of God in us. That image that was marred by the fall and it has been restored by our beholding the glory of Christ and by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

And you see in Christ we are allowed not only to see the radiance of God's glory but also the true image of man because in his human flesh Christ became the perfect man.

He became the image of God in man and it's into that image that we are being transformed. We're not being made gods. We're being made more human.

The image of God is being restored to us. We are beginning to realize the meaning of God's original status for us. For man that he made us in his own image.

And that is what is coming about in our lives. And the design of the gospel is that that image of God which has been defaced by sin may be restored within us.

[21 : 34] That's what the gospel is about. That's what the work of the Holy Spirit is about. Writing to the Colossians Paul says put on a new man that is being renewed unto the knowledge after the image of him that created him.

It's being renewed after the image of him who created us. We are being renewed in the image of God. As human beings we are being renewed in that image.

And you see there's a great battle going on because the flesh is still present. But the glorious thing is this as Paul says to the Romans the flesh is no longer the dominating influence on our present existence.

Yes we know what it is to cry out O wretched man I am and to be influenced at times by that flesh. But it's no longer the dominating influence in the believer.

Our past is a past in Adam. Our present existence is in Christ and in the spirit. That's the great difference that we've got to lay hold upon says Paul and that we are to glory in and we are to work at.

[22 : 53] That we're no longer in Adam but we're in Christ. Our past was in Adam but we've been taken out of Adam and now we're in Christ and we're in the spirit.

and that image of God in man is being restored in us. That's the great transformation that is going on. And then the fourth and final thing is in origin process and consummation this whole work is being carried on even as from the Lord who is the spirit.

It's the spirit who is the agent in all that is happening in the great transformation that is taking place. You see he is not only unfolding to us the riches of God's grace but he's unfolding in us the riches of God's grace.

That's what the Holy Spirit is doing. He's not only showing us what we have in Christ but he's actually transforming us into that image. And you see the very union we have with Christ is a union that is grounded in Christ's humanity.

The goal of the spirit and transformation into the image of God is that is expressed in Christ's humanity. It's the humanity of Christ that bears the image of God.

[24 : 24] Louis Berkhoff says by this union believers are changed into the image of Christ according to his human nature. What Christ affects in his people is in a sense a replica or reproduction of what took place with him.

Not only objectively but in subjective sense also they bear the cross, are crucified, die, and are raised to newness of life with Christ.

They share in a measure in the experiences of their Lord. That's our experience being united to Christ. We die with Christ, we are crucified with Christ, we are raised with Christ into newness of life.

And at the end of the day, our natures are going to bear the image of Christ according to his human nature. And you see the glory will then be restored.

That glory we spoke about at the beginning is the glory that will be restored in us. And as people are being converted throughout the world, the glory is being restored in all the world.

[25 : 37] And the more converts there are to Christ, the greater is the glory. And the earth is being filled with the glory of God. That's a great encouragement to us in this day.

Some of you again referred to that when John Marcell preached at the Scottish Reformed Conference last year. The whole earth is full of his glory, the glory of his grace, the riches of his grace.

That's the God who is revealing himself in Christ. He's filling the earth with the glory of his grace. And the more people are converted, the greater glory there is to God.

There's a restoration of glory, not only in the individual, but in the world itself through the individuals who are influenced by the gospel and who are converted and who are manifesting the glory of God.

And so God will not go without his glory. He created the world. God will not be frustrated. He will have greater glory in the end than it was lost through the fall of man.

[26 : 46] There'll be a greater glory to God at the end of the day. And that's our confidence and that's our hope. What a great hope there lies before the individual, before the Christian.

But remember, and especially those of you who are not believers in Christ, remember that all that I'm talking about tonight is only available for us in Christ.

Calvin says, we see that our salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else.

If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is of him. In short, since rich stores of every kind of goods abound in him, let us drink or fill from this fountain and from no other.

Don't go to any other fountain for salvation or for blessedness. There's one fountain. The fountain opened. In that last, that great day of the feast, Jesus said, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.

[28 : 00] There's no other fountain but the fountain of Christ to drink for poor, needy sinners. You've got to go to that fountain and no other.

You'll never get any blessing or any salvation outside Christ. all the wells are dry. All the wells of the world are dry. They're all dried up.

There's only one well that is full and overflowing, that well that has been created by the Lord Jesus Christ, that well that is kept by his Holy Spirit, that stream that is passing through this perishing world, from which men may drink and be saved, from which they may have their fill, out of their innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.

This he said of the Spirit who was not yet given, because Christ was not glorified, but Christ is now glorified, and the Spirit is given, and the water is flowing, and the invitation is to come to drink of that fountain, and to drink of that stream, because there's no other stream that will give salvation or blessing to the children of men.

come this night and drink for salvation. May God bless his word. Let us pray. Our gracious God, we pray that thou make us realize anew how thou hast treasured up all things in Christ, and we pray that we may see the barrenness and emptiness of our lives, and of this world without Christ, and may we be constrained tonight to come to the fountain that thou hast opened, and we might indeed drink or fill, of his salvation, of the blessedness that is to be found in him.

[29 : 46] O Lord, we have tried the broken cisterns, and they have failed us. We pray tonight we may be drinking at the great stream that thou hast given to needy sinners, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

O how we thank thee for it, and how many have drunk from it, and been saved, and now rejoice in heaven above. may we tonight not neglect that great salvation, but we may be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but his.

We ask it with the pardon of sin in his name, and for his sake. Amen.