

Sunday School Lesson.....The Works of the Holy Spirit (#22nd Lesson) Lesson 2 on the Comforting of the Suffering

In our previous lesson we were using the suffering of Hebrew nation, God's vessel of the Old Testament and how their continuous suffering draws a straight line to the process of God through the Holy Spirit in His process of dealing with the suffering of His children.

God's children left Palestine, the land of Promise to Abraham, and followed Joseph down to Egypt due to a famine in the land of Palestine. The first 200 years was wonderful, the next 185 years became worse and worse.

- **In Exodus 2:23, the Hebrews remembered God and began to cry out to Him for deliverance.**
- **In Exodus 6, the Lord hears and pronounces they will be delivered from bondage**
- **It will be forty years later they will leave Egypt.**

And why was the deliverance of the Hebrews delayed after Moses had been made manifest before them? Why were they caused to experience yet more sorely the enmity of Pharaoh? But, blessed be His name, the Holy Spirit does not desert the convicted soul, even in its darkest hour: He secretly upholds the soul and grants at least temporary respites, as the Lord did the Hebrews in Egypt. The poor Satan harassed soul is enabled "against hope to believe in hope" (*Romans 4:18*) and to cry, "*Let the sighing of the prisoner come before Thee: according to the greatness of Thy power, preserve Thou those that are appointed to destruction*" (*Psalms 79:11*).

Yet before deliverance is actually experienced, before that peace which passeth all understanding is communicated to his heart, before the redemption "which is in Christ Jesus" becomes his conscious portion, the soul is made to feel its complete impotence to advance one step toward the same, that it is entirely dependent upon the Spirit for that faith which will enable him to "lay hold of Christ." (The Pillar Above, The Fire Behind, The Manna on the Ground must have preeminence after the blood on the door, the consuming on the lamb, and the shoes and rod on the feet and in the hand.)

NO PLACE FOR A "DECISION" TO BE SAVED One would naturally suppose that the good news of a free Savior and a full salvation would readily be embraced by a convicted sinner. One would think that, as soon as he heard the glad tidings, he could not forbear exclaiming, in a transport of joy, "This is the Savior I want! His salvation is every way suited to my wretchedness. What can I desire more? Here will I rest." But as a matter of fact this is rarely the case, yea, it is rarely so.

Instead, the stricken sinner, like the Hebrews in Egypt after Moses had been made manifest before them, is left to groan under the lash of his merciless taskmasters. Yet this arises from no defect in God's gracious provision, nor because of any inadequacy in the salvation which the Gospel presents, nor because of any distress in the sinner which the Gospel is incapable of relieving; but because the workings of self-righteousness hinder the sinner from seeing the fullness and glory of Divine grace.

The Lord would make them to feel their impotence as well as their wretchedness and would exhibit more fully His power over the enemy, lest the Children of Israel come to believe in their own self-righteousness, because chosen of God through Abraham, because they rose up and prayed for deliverance the prayer help deliver them. So it is very often (if not always) in the experience of the quickened soul. Satan is now permitted to rage against him with increased violence and fury (*Zechariah 3:1*). The Devil accuses him of his innumerable iniquities, intensifies his remorse, seeks to persuade him that he has committed the unpardonable sin, assures him he has transgressed beyond all possibility of Divine mercy, and tells him his case is hopeless. And, my reader, were the poor sinner left to himself, the Devil would surely succeed in making him do as Judas did!

Strange as it may sound to those who have but a superficial and nonexperimental acquaintance with God's Truth, awakened souls are exceedingly backward from receiving comfort in the glorious Gospel of Christ. They think they are utterly unworthy and unfit to come to Christ just as they are, in all their vileness and filthiness. They imagine some meetness must be wrought in them before they are qualified to believe the Gospel, that there must be certain holy dispositions in their hearts before they are entitled to conclude that Christ will receive them. They fear that they are not sufficiently humbled under a sense of sin, that they have not a suitable abhorrence of it, that their repentance is not deep enough; that they must have fervent breathings after Christ and paintings after holiness before they can be warranted to seek salvation with a well-grounded hope of success. All of which is the same thing as hugging the miseries of unbelief in order to obtain permission to believe. (Religious which offers such rituals, teaching of rules, and nonsense of a living Eucharist are currently winning millions.)

Burdened with guilt and filled with terrifying apprehensions of eternal destruction, the convicted sinner yet experimentally ignorant of the perfect righteousness which the Gospel reveals for the justification of the ungodly, strives to obtain acceptance with God by his own labors, tears, tributes and prayers. But as he becomes better acquainted with the high demands of the Law, the holiness of God, and the corruptions of his own heart, he reaches the point where he utterly despairs of being justified by his own strivings. "What must I do to be saved?" is now his agonized cry. Diligently searching God's Word for light and help, he discovers that "faith" is the all-important thing needed, but exactly what faith is, and how it is to be obtained, he is completely at a loss to ascertain. Well-meaning people, with more zeal than knowledge, urge him to "believe," which is the one thing above all others he desires to do, but finds himself utterly unable to perform.

If saving faith were nothing more than a mere mental assent to the contents of *John 3:16*, then any man could make himself a true believer whenever he pleased—the supernatural enablement of the Holy Spirit would be quite unnecessary. But saving faith is very much more than a mental assenting to the contents of any verse of Scripture; and when a soul has been Divinely quickened and awakened to its awful state by nature, it is made to realize that no creature-act of faith, no resting on the bare letter of a text by a "decision" of his own will, can bring pardon and peace. He is now made to realize that "faith" is a Divine

gift (*Ephesians* 2:8,9), and not a creature work; that it is wrought by “the operation of God” (*Colossians* 2:12), and not by the sinner himself. He is now made conscious of the fact that if ever he is to be saved, the same God who invites him to believe (*Isaiah* 45:22), yea, who commands him to believe (*1 John* 3:23), must also impart faith to him (*Ephesians* 6:23).

Can you not see that if a saving belief in Christ were the easy matter which the vast majority of preachers and evangelists of today say it is, that the work of the Spirit would be quite unnecessary? And many in false doctrine either by ignorance or malice do! Surely it there any wonder that the mighty power of the Spirit of God is now so rarely witnessed in Christendom?—He has been grieved, insulted, quenched, not only by the skepticism and worldliness of “Modernists,” but equally so by the creature-exalting free-will and self-ability of man to “receive Christ as his personal Savior” of the “Fundamentalists”!! Oh, how very few today really believe those clear and emphatic words of Christ, “*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me (by His Spirit) draw him*” (*John* 6:44).

When GOD truly takes a soul in hand, He brings him to the end of himself He not only convicts him of the worthlessness of his own works, but He convinces him of the impotence of his will. He not Only strips him of the filthy rags of his own self-righteousness, but He empties him of all self-sufficiency. He not only enables him to perceive that there is “*no good thing*” in him (*Romans* 7:18), but he also makes him feel he is “without strength” (*Romans* 5:6). Instead of concluding that he is the man whom God will save, he now fears that he is the man who must be lost forever. He is now brought down into the very dust and made to feel that he is no more able to savingly believe in Christ than he can climb up to Heaven.

We are well aware that what has been said above differs radically from the current preaching of this decadent age; but we will appeal to the experience of the Christian reader. Suppose you had just suffered a heavy financial reverse and were at your wits’ end to know how to make ends meet: bills are owing, your bank has closed, you look in vain for employment and are filled with fears over future prospects. A preacher calls and rebukes your unbelief, bidding you lay hold of the promises of God. That is the very thing which you desire to do, but can you by an act of your own will? Or a loved one is suddenly snatched from you: your heart is crushed, grief overwhelms you. A friend kindly bids you to, “sorrow not even as others who have no hope.” Are you able by a “personal decision” to throw off your anguish and rejoice in the Lord? Ah, my reader, if a mature Christian can only “cast all his care” upon the Lord by the Holy Spirit ‘s gracious enablement, do you suppose that a poor sinner who is yet “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity” can lay hold of Christ by a mere act of his own will?

Just as to trust in the Lord with all his heart, to be anxious for nothing, to let the morrow take care of its own concerns, is the desire of every Christian, but “how to perform that which is good” he “*finds not*” (*Romans* 7:18), until the Holy Spirit is pleased to graciously grant the needed enablement. The one supreme yearning of the awakened and convicted sinner is to lay hold of Christ, but until the Spirit draws him to Christ, he finds he has no power to go out of himself, no ability to embrace what is proffered him in the Gospel. The

fact is that the heart of a sinner is as naturally indisposed for loving and appropriating the things of God, as the wood which Elijah laid on the altar was to ignite, when he had poured so much water upon it, as not only to saturate the wood, but also to fill the trench round about it (*1 Kings 18:33*)-a miracle is required for the one as much as it was for the other.

The fact is that if souls were left to themselves—to their own “free will”—after they had been truly convicted of sin, none would ever savingly come to Christ! A further and distinct operation of the Spirit is still needed to actually “draw” the heart to close with Christ Himself. Were the sinner left to himself; he would sink in abject despair; he would fall victim to the malice of Satan. The Devil is far more powerful than we are, and never is his rage more stirred than when he fears he is about to lose one of his captives: see *Mark 9:20*. But blessed be His name, the Spirit does not desert the soul when His work is only half done: He who is “the Spirit of life” (*Romans 8:2*) to quicken the dead, He who is “the Spirit of truth” (*John 16:13*) to instruct the ignorant, is also “the Spirit of faith ” (*Corinthians 4:13*) to enable us to savingly believe.

HOW THE SPIRIT COMFORTS And how does the Spirit work faith in the convicted sinner’s heart? By effectually testifying to him of the sufficiency of Christ for his every need; by assuring him of the Savior’s readiness to receive the vilest who come to Him. He effectually teaches him that no good qualifications need to be sought, no righteous acts performed, no penance endured in order to fit us for Christ. He reveals to the soul that conviction of sin, deep repenting, a sense of our utter helplessness, are not grounds of acceptance with Christ, but simply a consciousness of our spiritual wretchedness, rendering relief in a way of grace truly welcome. Repentance is needful not as inducing Christ to give, but as disposing us to receive. The Spirit moves us to come to Christ in the very character in which alone He receives sinners—as vile, ruined, lost. Thus, from start to finish “Salvation is of the Lord ” (*Jonah 2:9*)—of the Father in ordaining it, of the Son in purchasing it, of the Spirit in applying it.