

## **The Believer and the Spirit**

### **VII. - The Holy Spirit and the Daily Life of the Believer**

***“Let your habit of thought be without focus on material things, being satisfied with your possessions. For He has said, I will never leave you nor in any way abandon you . . .”*** (Hebrews 13:5).

***“Behold I am with you every day until the consummation of the earthly age”*** (Matthew 28:20).

Believers are inclined to think of their life on the earth as one long focus on religious experience and activities. It is what might be called a “religion intensive” life. It is assumed that the only things that matter on the earth are the things we do that have religious or spiritual significance. It is therefore also assumed that the relationship of Christ to the believer is something of a religious leader or guru. It is therefore further assumed that He is with us only insofar as we focus on Him and give ourselves to religious thought and action. In the pursuit of piety, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that we are God’s children and that He is not only with us, but in us, throughout each day of our lives. He is with us in the good times and the bad. Like a good parent, He is inextricably involved in our lives.

The text uses the Greek word *εγκαταλειπω* (*egkatalleipo*) and means literally, “I will never abandon you (in your circumstances).” This is a quotation from Genesis regarding Jacob—*“Behold I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into the land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of”* (28:15). Jacob went through many negative experiences in his life, which incurred God’s displeasure, but God never abandoned him, and finally brought him through to victory. God’s attitude toward Jacob is beautifully expressed in Deuteronomy—*“He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him and there was no strange God with him”* (Deuteronomy 32:10-12). The use of this quotation in Hebrews gives us the liberty to make it applicable to us in the New Testament era.

Many believers have the faulty impression that the Lord is only near to them when they are functioning at a high level of spiritual fervor. Some of this attitude is based upon an unfortunate translation of a text in James—*“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (5:16). Actually it should be translated, “the petition of a just one avails much, being energized.” The Greek word *δικαιος* (*dikaios*) does not distinguish between states of “spirituality.” It does not refer to pious behavior, so much as to being saved through justification by faith. The energy of God responds to the petitions of His children, not by degrees of fervency, but by their right as His children. Fervency is, after all, a response of the emotions which are an unreliable part of the human psyche or soul. The idea that behavior has a direct relationship to prayer is an Old Testament concept. In the New Testament we are in a different relationship. We have the Spirit of God within us and are therefore in constant touch with Him, even though the actions of the “flesh” are not always

acceptable. Paul makes it quite clear that the flesh or the “natural man” still possesses the unfortunate effects of “the fall.” When Jesus addressed the woman of Samaria, He spoke to her of “*worshipping God in spirit*” (John 4:23). He did not suggest to her that her lifestyle would prevent her from doing this.

*But John himself says, “We know that God does not hear sinners,” does He not?*

John does not say this. In 9:31 he quotes the blind man, who makes the statement in the context of his Old Testament teachings. However, an important distinction must be made here between the fact that God hears us, and how He responds to us in terms of our behavior patterns. He will always hear us, as His children, possessed by His Spirit. But sometimes we limit Him as to the kind of response He can make to us. We may be in certain circumstances as a result of unsound decisions or behavior that prevent Him from doing for us what He might otherwise like to do. Children often get themselves into difficulties that affect the parent’s responses, but the parents do not turn a deaf ear to them or leave them. Good parents will work with children in regard to their behavior patterns, but certainly they will not cut them off or turn a deaf ear to them.

There is in some quarters, a faulty notion that when we are out of order or having behavior problems, it is because Satan has taken over the throne of our hearts. But that certainly does not comport with the passage we have quoted above. The reality of the matter is that Christ will never relinquish to Satan the throne of our spirits. What happens, is that our human nature or “flesh” is sometimes affected by Satan to get off the track, but that does not mean that Christ has abandoned our spirits. Nor does it mean that He is not open to our cries for help (see Psalm 107). If we think that Christ has abandoned us, where will we go for help? The problem with the concept of “backsliding” is that one feels that one is therefore out of touch with Christ, which can only lead one further into the wilderness.

It is therefore vital to see our identity with Christ in a familial relationship. Christ will no more cut us off because of behavior problems than a good parent would cut off a child because it is struggling with problems. In fact, because of the action of the Holy Spirit, we have had a change of nature from mortal to immortal; from temporal to eternal. Once we have been reborn, Christ can no more rescind our eternal natures, than a parent could declare a child to be no more a person. Science generally classifies organisms into three kingdoms—mineral, vegetable, animal. As Christians we would add two more—human and Divine. A lower cannot become a higher kingdom unless the higher kingdom absorbs the lower kingdom. Thus, for example, a tree can become a rock (as in petrified wood), but a rock cannot become a tree, unless the tree absorbs the minerals through its roots. A carrot cannot become a horse, unless the horse eats the carrot and it becomes part of its tissue. Just so, an animal cannot become a human, unless the human ingests the animal and it becomes part of its tissue. By the same token, a human cannot become God, unless, of course, God, through the process of new birth, puts His Spirit within the human. It is not reasonable to assume that God is going to change the nature of the human, reborn with His Spirit, back into a spirit-less human, any more than a parent will attempt to change a child into a dog (even if it were able to do so). In the case of the incestuous behavior of a son with his father’s wife (I Corinthians 5), Paul says that he will “*deliver him to Satan for the destruction of his body that*

*his spirit may be saved*" (I Corinthians 5:5). Although a change of behavior is advisable and often complementary, salvation constitutes a change of nature, wherein the human is lifted to the realm of the Divine. That is not to minimize the importance of behavior, but rather to examine more precisely the meaning of our salvation. Through the process of the new birth, Christ has elected to so identify Himself with the redeemed that He cannot abandon them.

**Behold I am with you every day . . .** The Greek text says *πασα τας ημερας* (*pasa tas hemeras*). The literal translation is "every day." The people of God in the Old Testament did have God with them also, but He was not in them, as in the New Testament believers. He could and did retreat from them on occasion. The intertestamental period is such a time. For four hundred years there was no prophet in Israel. In the New Testament era, Christ is not only with us, but in us, and therefore guarantees His daily presence. In the case of human emotions, we may feel, at times, as though He has abandoned us, but that is due to the unreliability of the human mind. The truth of the matter is that those who have invited His presence into their spirits will have Him with them, "until" the consummation of the earthly era. Christ has cast His lot with us until the fulfillment of His purposes for us on the earth, and then we'll be glorified with Him throughout eternity.

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