

## **An Unseen Friend:** *The Work of the Holy Spirit*

Jesus touched people. He shocked his local crowd when he touched a leper (Luke 5:12-16), even though leprosy was incurable and highly contagious.

Filled with Jesus' love, Medical missionary to India Paul Brand touched lepers. He recalls how one broke down in tears. The leper's attendant said, "You touched him, and no one has done that for years. Those are tears of joy."<sup>1</sup>

When Jesus returned to heaven, He knew His absence would devastate His disciples. Assuring them, He said, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). He promised *another* Comforter, Himself being the first. In the absence of His presence, the sound of His gentle, deep voice and the touch of His warm, strong hands, He would send the Spirit, who would abide with us forever.

The Spirit touches human beings in unique and perhaps even more powerful ways than Jesus touched us. This third Person of the Godhead operates without a face or a name. We come to know Him, not by His own self-description, but by what He does and how He works. At times when He touches us, we weep tears of joy.

In the Word we see that the primary functions of the Holy Spirit are to *convict*, *confirm*, *conform* and *comfort* God's children. Let's let Him touch us in new ways even as we learn about Him.

### **Convict**

Jesus said of the Spirit: "When He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8-11).

Our sinful natures require constant correction. The idea that humans are intrinsically good is part of the belief system we called *humanism*. The Humanist Manifesto was first published in 1933, and since then there have been more than 100 million war deaths<sup>2</sup> and an even greater number of

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Samra, "Power of Touch," *Our Daily Bread*, November 17, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_wars\\_by\\_death\\_toll](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wars_by_death_toll)

deaths by democide.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the Nazi atrocities, numbering over 10 million, began in 1933 when the manifesto was published!

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). We fail to reflect God’s character. As the hymn says, we are “prone to wander.” We need the Holy Spirit to touch our idols, convicting our straying hearts. The sense of shame and guilt that comes over us when we see our sin is actually a good thing in the right doses, because it pushes us toward seeking a solution for our sin problem. That solution is faith in a sin-pardoning Savior.

When we feel the convicting of the Holy Spirit, we may follow Peter’s counsel to the Jews at Pentecost: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). But we can’t manufacture repentance. Even this is a gift from God (see Acts 5:31). What a comfort to know that the same Spirit that convicts us will also give us the gift of repentance!



### Confirm

When we receive this gift, God reaffirms our adoption into the heavenly family. Paul said, “You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Galatians 3:26). He also said, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Galatians 4:6). Once the Holy Spirit enlightens us, we begin to recognize God as our true Source and great Benefactor. We begin to experience God as a loving Father, and bond with Him as child with Parent.

In Ephesians 1:13-14, Paul says that when we believe, we are “sealed” with the Holy Spirit:

In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

This “seal” means that God marks, or authenticates us. The passage goes on to say that this Holy Spirit “seal” is the “guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of our purchased possession.” We are heirs of God’s heavenly riches, wealthy trust-fund children who’ve been given a place in the heavenly mansions.

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<sup>3</sup> Democide is any murder by officials acting under the authority of the central government. It is a broader term than genocide.

Receiving God's Spirit guarantees that we have an inheritance coming. This "guarantee" resembles a down payment on a house—the money paid up front proves that the buyer has the ability to pay the balance. God's down payment is His way of saying, "I can deliver on My promise—and here's proof." Rejoice, believer! You're going to heaven! God's bank is overflowing, you're the heir, and His Spirit in your life reassures you of this.

### **Conform**

There's more. God loves us as we are, but He doesn't *leave* us as we are. According to our text, even believers have a choice to make; we can live according to either the flesh or the Spirit. Even after being born again it's possible to choose the path of "carnal Christians" who fail to incorporate God's power into everyday life. The root cause of this failure is that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Romans 8:7). If our minds are in a carnal space, everything else—passions, desires, appetites, emotions, words and behaviors—will soon follow. At times we will need a "check up from the neck up" to see where our focus lies.

But this reshaping process, far from being burdensome, is a great blessing. Notice that while "the carnal mind is enmity against God" because "it is not subject to the law of God," "to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:7-6). To live in obedience to God's law is not a dry, rigid experience; it's a spiritual adventure! Personal transformation makes life exciting.

God has promised, "I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them" (Hebrews 10:16). This dynamic experience of change from the inside-out is biblically termed *sanctification*. Sanctification is the process of accepting again and again the mind of Christ, then bringing the body into harmony with the new mind.

To keep us accountable, God has provided a litmus test of our faith in Galatians 5:16-24:

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If our mind is truly set on the Spirit, we will have the outward fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Claiming devotion to Jesus even while freely indulging in “the works of the flesh” splits our personality. The works of the flesh listed in this passage may be divided into four S's-- Sexual sin, spiritualism, strife, and substance abuse:

**Sexual Sin**- adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness

**Spiritualism**- idolatry, sorcery

**Strife**- hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders

**Substance Abuse**- drunkenness, revelries

These things give outward evidence that our minds are *not* on the Spirit. (Notice that the “strife” category has the most sins!)

But Christianity isn't primarily about what we *avoid*, it's about what we *embrace*. Believers live *proactively* rather than *reactively*. Think of yourself as running toward something *better* rather than away from something *bad*. That Something Better is Jesus and the vast storehouse of blessings that come packaged with His Spirit. Funneled into our lives, that Spirit produces positive, powerful fruit such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

These gifts can be boiled down to one simple word: love. “He who loves another has fulfilled the law,” Romans 13:10. The law of God isn't just His attempt at cosmic crowd control, it's an expression of His character, the core of which is pure, holy, unselfish love. When we receive His Spirit by faith, He floods our hearts with that same love, which proliferates in the fruits of the Spirit.

Let's not confuse this with sappy, sentimental love based on an emotional rush. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The commandments show the structure of true love. The “love” that leads to disobedience is really self-love, but true love leads us to follow Him fully.

## Comfort

Life is hard. Would not a loving God come alongside us through life's journey, particularly the painful passages, to give us comfort? Remember, the Holy Spirit is a Comforter. When life on earth looks bleak, He presents the reality of a world to come in which God will wipe away all tears (See Rev. 21:4). God wants us to rest securely in the promise of heaven.

To be clear, we remain free to walk away from salvation. Even after we come to Him, we retain our power of choice, and God will not force us to be saved. But neither does He want us to live our lives worrying about our destiny. To let fear of being lost consume us is to become self-centered, and to ultimately break the law of love. We stand, not in our own merits, but in His, and He desires that we rest securely in His promise to save us.

How do we receive His Spirit? We receive from God what He Himself longs to give us. It was God's good pleasure to adopt the human race in Jesus Christ (See Eph. 1:5). He signed all the necessary "papers" with His blood and through His Spirit. And He did this all when we were "without strength," helpless as babies, and even enemies of God (See Rom. 5:6-10). Will He now withhold His Spirit from us? No! He died to give it. He who adopted us longs to see us receive the Spirit of adoption:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. Romans 8:14-16.

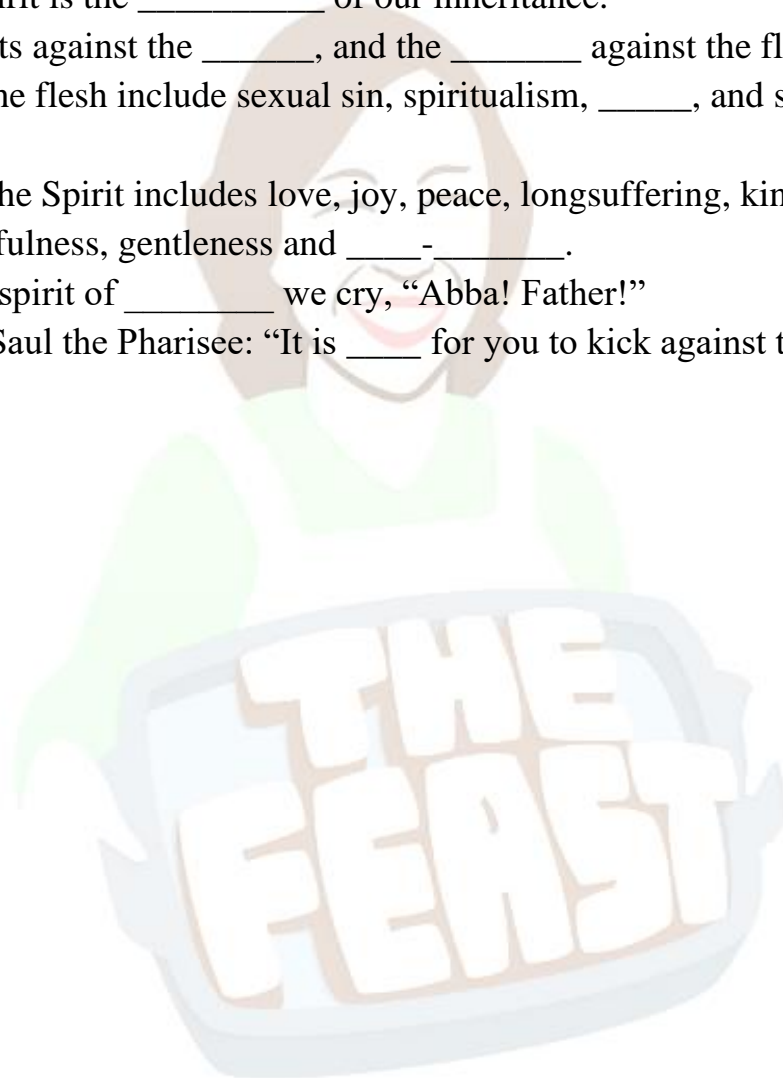
## The Takeaway

God said to Saul the Pharisee: "It is *hard* for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14). "Goads" refer to pointed sticks used to drive oxen. Walking away from God may seem easy because we no longer face the opposition of our flesh, the world, and the devil. But the road *away* from God is difficult, too. To break His law, we must violate our God-given design. We must oppose His law and His Spirit. In fact, because God's law is but a transcript His character of love, which creates the structure of reality, we can't break His law without setting ourselves at odds with reality itself. God—and we might say reality—sends us warnings not to continue in rebellion.

God may give us the freedom to walk away, but He gives us hoards of reasons not to. These Bible studies are full of such reasons. Why not receive the Holy Spirit today and allow Him to guide in your continued study of the Word?

## Quiz

1. When Jesus returned to heaven, He sent another \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The primary functions of the Holy Spirit are to convict, confirm, conform and \_\_\_\_\_ God's children.
3. The Holy Spirit is the \_\_\_\_\_ of our inheritance.
4. The flesh lusts against the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ against the flesh.
5. The sins of the flesh include sexual sin, spiritualism, \_\_\_\_\_, and substance abuse.
6. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Through the spirit of \_\_\_\_\_ we cry, "Abba! Father!"
8. God said to Saul the Pharisee: "It is \_\_\_\_\_ for you to kick against the goads," Acts 26:14.



## Answer Key

1. Comforter
2. Comfort
3. Seal
4. Spirit, flesh
5. Strife
6. Self-control
7. Adoption
8. Hard

