

Witness of the Spirit

By Paris Reidhead*

First John chapter three, this will be number seven in our series, seventh *evidence of eternal life*. I shan't give you who may not have them, one through six. I'm sure there are many people here in the congregation that will be pleased to do that. If you'll ask them. Please put a seven, next to the 24th verse of the third chapter of I John and next to the 13th verse of the fourth chapter, and next to the 10th verse of the fifth chapter. There are three verses that ... and really are essentially the same and we want you to note them, because they do complement each other and fulfill the statement in chapter three, verse 24, the second half of the verse was read for us. "And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the Spirit which he has given us." And in chapter four, verse 13, "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." And verse 10 of the fifth chapter, "He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness with in himself."

I trust you will understand how we're to use these *evidences of eternal life*. The person who comes to us and says, I am not sure of my relationship with Christ, instead of giving them some glib or light answer; we take them to the Word of God and ask the Spirit of God to show them what is in their hearts. At the very best, we stand at the outside, we see what their lives, maybe the little we can observe them, and we hear what they say. But God looks on the heart. And therefore, we want you to take them to the Word.

I mentioned early in the week in this series that on the fourth of July Sunday in 1937, at Leslie Presbyterian Church at the head of Lake Osakis, between Osakis, Minnesota and Long Prairie, Minnesota. I was candidating as pastor of this little country Presbyterian Church. My text, of course, being the first time I'd ever been in that situation had to be John 3:16. And I will never forget when I was sitting down here in the front view, and Mrs. Peterson was chairman and she got up and she said, "Well, you heard him. Do you want him?" And Mrs. Hughes said, "Well, it wasn't much of a sermon, but I like the way he prayed. I guess he's all right. I say we get him."

So Mrs. Peterson said, "Well, I guess, raise your hands if you want him." And I'm sitting right there, you know. "Well," she said, "I guess that's most of the hands, and nobody said no so you'll be with us this summer. Well, we caught him, now what are we going to pay him? And, where's he going to stay? Mrs. Hughes, you've got an extra room there? Can he stay at your place?" "Well, Albert would it be all right with you?" "Yeah, it'd be all right with me." So, Albert agreed. Laura and Albert took me on for the summer. They said, "Well, now what are we going to pay him? How much you're going to charge him, Laura?" "Well, I don't know. What do you say, Albert?" "Well, let them tell us."

And so, "Well, how's \$5 a week for board and room?" That wasn't too bad, was it. And well we're gonna...and then they said, "I guess we'll give him \$15 a week, that'll take care of his car and so on." "And, Laura, you'll get it when we give it to him. He won't owe it to you, if he doesn't get it from us. All right." Well, that was all this young fellow 18-years-old became pastor of the Leslie Presbyterian Church.

And I had about the same kind of a library. I had a Scofield Reference Bible, Cruden's Concordance and two volumes of John Wesley sermons. There were total of 146 sermons in the two volumes.

You might think that was a pretty meager library, but I'll tell you; anybody who starts out preaching and has John Wesley's two volumes of sermons has a rich heritage to begin with. And I want you to know that that summer I got acquainted with that man of God. And he blessed my heart. I've never been without those volumes. They've been a tremendous blessing to me. And even though I was rigidly schooled in trying to explain away the Word of God...Wesley, 250 years earlier, no it was 200 years then that was 50 years ago so 200 years at that time, had an enormous impact on my heart, and on my life. And I thank God for the rare privilege that I had throughout the weeks of that summer, visiting with that man, through this record of his ministry. And one of the truths that was driven home to my heart, as over and over again, John Wesley, emphasized in the sermons that he preached throughout England was the witness of the spirit to the new birth.

Now, the foundation truth for this that's engaging us today is found in Job the third —you don't need a turn— Job the 32nd chapter in eighth verse where we are told that "there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the almighty giveth them understanding." There is a spirit in man. And elsewhere we are told, the part of a man that knows the things of a man is the spirit of man that is in him. If you know you're here and not home or somewhere else, the part of you that knows that is your spirit. Or you can say your soul or your body, but they all enter into it, but still, it's the human spirit that knows the things of a man.

And it is important for us to understand that one day we're going to leave our bodies. We've just heard the sister who is with the Lord. The part of her, that thinks and feels and will is in His presence. And one day they're going to lean over me or over you, and I trust with tears and with regrets, they will say, "He's gone. She's gone." What do you mean, 'he's gone, she's gone'? There's the familiar body with the scars and the evidences of weakness. There it is. And yet the person is gone, the person who thinks and feels and wills and knows, that's the spirit of man that is in him.

Now, this statement is the foundation of our relationship with God. We are born of His Spirit, by His Spirit and it's our spirits that are regenerated. The day after you were born again your body was as it had been the day before. One day in the future, we're going to receive a body like onto His own body of glory. But until that time, the part of us that is made in His image and likeness, the part of us that's the partaker of the divine nature is the human spirit. Now, in the Word we are told in Romans chapter eight, verse 16, "The spirit itself," but that's because of the reference of pronouns, "the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

And in that great, I consider it the greatest Christmas passage in the epistles, Galatians chapter four, verses four to six, we are told that in "The fulness of time, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And since we are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts whereby we cry, Abba, Father." "He sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts whereby we cry, Abba Father." He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us, redeem them that were under the law, and that we might be born into His family and be adopted as His children. And so "God sends forth," so we are told "the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

Look at it this way. We talked to you last time when I was with you about the work of the Spirit of God and bringing one out of death into life. When God wants to bring someone dead in their trespasses and sins, to Himself, the first thing He does is put a sample of His grace up next to that sinner. Did you know, I hope you do, that to someone you're the very best Christian that they know? And perhaps, if they ever come to Christ, it will because they knew you. You're a sample of God's grace, living Christ before them. That's the first thing you can do for the unconverted.

The second thing you can do is intercede for them. To intercede is to legally represent the sinner before God. To be as a court appointed lawyer, going into the presence of the judge on behalf of his client who's in prison or in jail, so you are a heaven appointed representative of the sinner, to go into the presence of God the Father, to represent the sinner before God, to acknowledge his guilt, to accept the justice of God's condemnation, and then to cry out to God for mercy. God gives that sinner the right to go to hell. And He doesn't interfere into either the sinner or the sinner's representative asks Him to. But because you are kinsmen of the sinner, your intercession, in a sense, releases God to begin to work in the heart of that one dead in their sins. So we can intercede for sinners.

And then the third thing we can do is to witness to sinners. Give them the Word of God; apply it to their hearts, into their consciousness. Now when we do that, then there are some things that God does. The first thing He does is to awaken the sinner. Awakening is that work of God, the Holy Ghost, the spirit of bondage, again to fear, who shows the sinner the basis of his bondage in the grounds of his fear, and causes him to become sensitive to his problem into his need. It is a very gracious work of God, awakening the sinner. You can't do it, I can't do it. I can fuss with them and argue with them and jostle them and bump them, and make life miserable for them, but I can't awaken them. That, God does. And He does it, I believe in answered intercessory prayer.

And then the next thing that the Spirit of God does as the Word is applied is to convict the sinner. To convict is to cause the sinner to discover that he is indeed guilty. He has turned to his own way, that he is a traitor and an anarchist and a transgressor and an enemy and deserves God's wrath. Conviction, a state of mind wherein the sinner begins to agree with God, about what God has said concerning him. And when He, the spirit of truth does come, He will convict. You can't. You can apply the Word, you can't convict the sinner.

And on the basis of the sinner having been awakened and having been convicted, then we can enforce the truths having to do with repentance. That "now God commands all man everywhere to repent" (Act. 17:30b). And our Lord saying, "Except you repent, you'll perish" (Luk. 13:3). We're going to explain repentance that it's a change of intention and purpose from pleasing oneself to pleasing God. On the basis then of repentance and only then the Spirit of God releases saving faith into that repentant sinner's heart. Wherein he can reach 2000 years into the past and embrace the Son of God on Calvary dying for him, that He might bring him to God. And it's more than an exercise of the intellect. It's heart faith that savingly reaches out to the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now, look at it this way. The Spirit of God brooding over the sinner. As we read in Genesis one, "The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the deep, which was without form and void," dead. And the first thing that God said in Genesis one was, "light be." And the first thing God does when he would awaken the sinner, when he would deal with the sinner, bring him to grace is, "light be." It's awakening work. And then as he continues to move, bringing that one to conviction, and to repentance, and then to exercise saving faith, and when the Spirit of God was brooding a while over that sinner's heart, response to saving faith, it is to join Himself to the human spirit. And the person is said to be born of God. Pardoned, yes. Forgiven, yes. But also made a partaker of divine life. He's born again.

Now, when that happens, what part of him is affected? The human spirit. And if it's God, the Holy Ghost that is bringing life to the human spirit, is it to be wondered, therefore, that the first thing that the Spirit of God would do would be to pause this quicken, awakened, forgiven, regenerated human spirit to be able to say, "Abba, Father." Doesn't seem strange or difficult, does it? Doesn't to me. It seems terribly logical, perfectly clear, that if it's God, the Holy Ghost, awakening, convicting, bringing to repentance, quickening, saving faith that saving kind and regenerating, the first thing He's going to do is what we read, "send forth to Spirit of his Son into our hearts whereby we cry, Abba, Father." The witnesses of the spirit.

Now it's so terribly important for us to understand therefore, that the only One really in the universe that has the right to tell a person that they've been brought out of death into life is God, the Holy Spirit. We can tell sinners how holy God is. We can tell them how sinful they are. We can tell them what this holy God did in love, sending His Son and His Son did in love dying the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. We can tell them what they must do. We can tell them what will happen when they do what they must do. But because we stand on the outside, because we aren't in their hearts, they can tell us they've done it before they've done it. Therefore, we have to say to that person, "Now, look, this is what God did. And this is what you must do. And when you do what you must do, this is what God will do. And when God does what you must have done, you will know and when you know, you tell me."

Don't you see what happens with that? Or maybe it's a bit slower. Maybe we don't have quite as many decisions. But when a person knows from God, they've been born of God, we're going to do something with that statistic that says we have to have 200 conversions to get one person going on a year later living effectively and faithfully for Christ. Sometimes we want to read John Bunyan's¹ *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. You'll discover that he writes that three times during a seven year period, he had people come to him, to talk with him about being born of God. And three times he made professions of faith. And three times he discovered that nothing had happened.

And when he discovered nothing had happened, there was disillusionment and depression that sat in and he went back into the world. Until finally, the Spirit of God worked in his heart, and no man was there. They'd been there before, led him to premature profession. And then God revealed to him that he'd been brought out of death into life. And it was because of that experience that he felt that he had to do something that was going to enable him to save others from the experience through

¹ John Bunyan (1628 - 1688) was an English writer and Puritan preacher.

which he had passed. And for that reason, he wrote, Pilgrim's Progress that he might endeavor to establish certain of these principles.

Someone very dear and very near to me made an indication of a need when I was pastor in New York City. I knew I've been praying for this particular person, I had been very burdened, while knowing that he demanded reality. And I was rather surprised when this person raised the hand at the end of the service, and then I did as I frequently did, said, "If you'd like to talk or pray with us, please go into the Wilson Chapel," a little room to the side of the auditorium there, the Tabernacle. I was delayed, some people came to talk to me and I couldn't leave them. I wanted to get in there. And when I got into that room, my associate, a good man who basically understood and would agree with what I've just said to you had gone to this person and had done as he'd been taught to do years and years before. Had taken this one through the Scripture, elicited a positive response, put words into the person's mouth, had them pray. And then said, "Now tell Pastor Reidhead what's happened." And the person looked and said, "What do you mean?" "Well, what?" And so he had to say, "Well, that you're saved." "Oh." And so the person repeated what he'd been instructed to repeat. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to handle it. Because you see, the person was my son. And three months later, no, actually a year and three months later, that son told me, "Dad, you know that night? Nothing happened. I can't go on fooling you any longer. I don't know that there's a God. I don't know that God is. I don't know anything. I only know I tried it twice and it doesn't work. Nothing happened and I just have to tell you that I'm not what ... I can't go on deceiving you."

My wife and I have been praying ever since that God would reveal Himself, make clear to him. Bring him to a real assurance and knowledge. Well, you say, "You're prejudiced because it was your son." No, I'm prejudiced because I'm concerned about the Word of God, because I believe that God, the Holy Ghost, never advocated as the spirit of adoption. And the only one in the universe that has the right to tell a person they're brought out of death into life is God, the Holy Ghost, no one else. I can tell on how holy He is. I repeat, I can tell on how sinful they are. I can tell them what God did. I can tell them what they must do. I can tell them what God will do when they do what they must do. But I have to stand outside. They have to tell me when it's done.

Now, I find here that this is not new. The message that God gave John Wesley when he went back to England, where everyone in the country were Christians or names were all on the church rolls, they'd all been baptized. "Oh," said John Wesley, "how imperative it is for us not to deceive ourselves in this most important of all questions. How many vain men have rested the Scripture to the great loss of their souls? How many have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for witness of the Spirit of God and then idly presumed they were the children of God, while they were doing the works of the devil? All endeavors to bring them into the knowledge of themselves they will then account fighting against God. And with vehement and impetuous spirit, they call contending for the faith. They set themselves so far above all the usual methods of conviction that we may well say that it is impossible. It's hard to find words" said Wesley, "to explain what the children of God experience. But perhaps one might say, the testimony of the Holy Spirit is an inward impression on the human spirit whereby God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ hath loved me and hath given Himself for me, that my sins are blotted out, and I am reconciled to God."²

Now, what was he saying? He was saying that it's good to have all of these various things that have made any contribution and the religious life of the individual, but that the only One in the universe that has the right to tell us that our sins are forgiven, that we're pardoned, that we're born into God's family is God, the Holy Ghost. The believer, the Spirit of God gives a believer such a testimony of his adoption, that he can no more doubt the reality of his son-ship that he can doubt the shining of the sun while he stands in the full blaze of its warmth and of its beams. Because you're sons, God has "sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father."

Do you understand it? Do you see it? Do you realize what the Spirit of God is trying to say to us? We're living in a day and a time when evangelism has become so shallow and so shoddy, when walking and speaking and writing and muttering words that we're coached to give is interpreted as being grounds for assuming that we're pardoned, that we're forgiven. We've got to

² "The Witness of the Spirit", Discourse One By John Wesley

come back to reality. “My soul demands reality”³, saying one of the songwriters. We’ve got to come back to the place where people meet God. I ask you, if a person in a church or in church life has never had fellowship with God, how can they realize that fellowship with God has been interrupted or broken? They can’t.

Most people who I have been told and read from the pen of Dr. Tozer⁴, most people in Christian activity today, do not have fellowship with God. They are satisfied and content just to have fellowship with other people about God. I ask you, do you have fellowship with God? Or are you among that number contend to have fellowship and only to have fellowship with other people about God? There was a day, there was a time, in our land when there was great prayer and great concern and great burden over this issue.

I had the good fortune years ago to acquire for my use, not for my library, one of the original copies of the diary of David Brainerd⁵ that had been written by President Edward, the father in law of David Brainerd. Brother Edwards had taken the journal of that young man, his son-in-law, who had died of tuberculosis at a very early age and had put it into this very large extensive journal or biography.

The later editions of the book have not included what I’m about to share with you. In this particular entry, David Brainerd was working with the Indians in the western part of the state of New Jersey. And he told how on Sunday morning he had preached in one village to a group of Indians. And to his delight this was in the Sunday night entry into the journal. It was in this form. “This morning, as I spoke at such and such a place, I rejoice that there were and as I recall, seven people who testified to faith in Christ.” Then it said, and “I went in the afternoon to such and such a village, and there I had so many in attendance and spoke and there were three that testified to faith in Christ.

“And that evening in the home and yet another village I opened the Word and there were two who testified to faith in Christ.” He said, “That I do rejoice at this fruit after these months of labor.” But the next night his entry was as follows, “I did not sleep after I awakened in the middle of the night, for it was as though God was speaking to me saying, are you sure that those who testified to peace were not mistaking the comforts given to my children as applying to them while they are still dead in their sins? Are you a faithful servant?” And so Brainerd said, “Throughout the hours of the day as I continue to cough and to spit blood, I went to that first village and gathered these seven and spoke again to them,” and said, “Ye alas, my worst fears were realized, for four of the seven had wrongfully assumed that the comforts of the children of God applied to them when they had not yet passed from death to life.

“And of the other three, there were two and of the other two, one.” And then he made this note, “Oh, to think how close I came, I know not the day when my brief candle of my life may be snuffed out. Had it been last night, I can imagine that those that had made false claim upon the grace of God without having repented might rise up in the lake of fire, and point me out at the sight of my Lord, and curse me as an unskillful and deceitful servant who had lied to them about the most important subject in all the world. They’re never dying souls.” He said, “I have pled with God that I may go back over all the areas where I have preached in the recent months to examine all of made profession of faith to see that they have good hope in the Lamb that was slain.”

Such care, such concern, such consideration, such burden, such understanding. Why is it then deleted from our day and time? Why has the Word lost its grip upon the minds and hearts of those who love it? I implore as much as did Brainerd or as much as did Wesley? Why are we content with less than everything that the Spirit of God has taught us about this most important of all subjects? What we read here in this Word, “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (I Joh. 3:24). “Hereby we know that we dwell in him and he in us, because he has given us of his spirit” (I Joh. 4:13). “He that believeth on the son of God has the witness in himself” (I Joh. 5:10). The very part of you that knows who you are, and where you are, and what you are, knows the reality of your commitment to please God in everything. The very part of you that knows you’re here and not elsewhere knows whether or not your purpose is to please God that you love Him with your whole heart

3 “He’s real to me, my Father God” By Essek W. Kenyon, 1921.

4 Aiden Wilson Tozer (1897-1963) Pastor and Author. Christian and Missionary Alliance

5 David Brainerd (1718-1747) A missionary to the American Indians in New York, New Jersey, and eastern Pennsylvania.

and mind and soul and strength. And it is that same part of you that knows that “the spirit of God is speaking to your heart now and assuring you that you can call almighty God, Abba, Father.”

How important it is in this connection. Last year I told of the young woman who worked with InterVarsity in New York City when I and my wife had privilege of serving the Lord there. I was at an alumni summer conference from InterVarsity up in Michigan. And when I had spoken much to this theme, this young lady said, “Can I speak?” And she came before the fellow alumni who’d been with her in school and of her age group. And she said, “I want to just share with what Paris has been telling you. I grew up,” said she, “in an atheist home or at least agnostics. The only time I ever went to church was for a funeral or a wedding. My parents had no respect whatsoever for God or for the Bible. And that’s how I’ve been reared. I went to Douglas College, the woman’s branch of the University of New Jersey at Rutgers.”

She said, “There after a few weeks I noticed a young woman whose face was so radiant, who was in all of her personality so attractive. I asked the dean of women’s students who she was asked if when her roommate left I could be assigned as her roommate. And that was done because the dean was a friend of my mother’s.” She said, “I hadn’t been roommate to that young woman until I learned she had been a child of God and born of God. And the radiance of her life and testimony won me, and I made profession of faith in Christ.” She said, “I went to the Bible study. I went to the prayer meeting, but friends on the faculty of my father and my mother learned of this and began to argue with me, seek me out, call me to their home for evenings, telling me that I was making a great mistake wasting my life. I had far too good of mine to squander it as an evangelical, as a Christian. And finally they prevailed. And I told my Bible study group and prayer group that it was all a mistake. It was all hypnosis, it was all religious fanaticism and I was giving it all up. I do want to be their friends, but I did not want them to be ever bothered about their prayer meetings or their Bible study anymore.”

And she said, “I went along, but I couldn’t forget what I had been in. One day in the library I was reading and I came across what is called the agnostic’s prayer, ‘Oh God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul’.” And said, “Well, that’s reasonable. I guess I’ll do that.” So she said, “I wrote it down on a piece of paper. I took it to the room. I knew my roommate was away in a Bible study prayer group. And I went in, I locked the door, and I got ready to pray. I was coaching myself, ‘Oh God, if there be a God, save my soul if I have a soul’.” And so she said, “I went over to the bed, and I decided to kneel. And then I closed my eyes and I knew that a lot of people folded their hands, so I knelt. I closed my eyes. I folded my hand. I was mentally repeating, ‘Oh God, if there be a God, save my soul if I have a soul’.”

And then she said, “I opened my lips and I said, ‘Dear heavenly Father ...’” She said, “It dawned on me. I got up. I opened the door. I ran down the hallway where I knew they were in Bible study. I went in, I was laughing. I was crying. I threw my arms around them and I said, ‘It’s real. It’s real. I am a child of God.’” Why? Because “He sent forth the Spirit of his ... his spirit into our hearts crying, ‘Dear heavenly Father.’” The witness is the spirit.

Shall we pray? Father of Jesus, oh Thou who’s loved us with an everlasting love, and cords of loving, kindness have drawn us through all of the rebellion of our hearts, the wickedness of our life, the deceitfulness of our mind. That place where the purpose of our hearts is to please Thy, where we enthrone Jesus Christ, Thy Son is Sovereign and Savior. To everyone here today to whom Thou hath spoken in that sweet tones of love, you can call almighty God Father, Father. Might there come such joy and such peace. Should there be those among us Father, who’ve named to live and have less than life, might they know that.

And might all of us in turn become faithful witnesses to our day and time and generation. Never usurping the sovereign prerogatives of God, the Holy Ghost, who labors together with God and not replacing those things that are only Thou canst do. Breathe upon us breath of God and let the students of this school and members of this church. And all who live in love and worship here have a witness for the Lord, Jesus Christ here and around the world that will bring eternal glory and honor and praise to the Lamb that was slain. In whose Name we ask it, Amen.

* Reference such as, Delivered at Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, MN on Saturday, June 11, 1988 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.