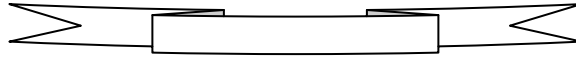


So Great Salvation Study Guide

Teaching Series Part 3 – Faith, New Birth, & Witness of the Spirit

By Paris Reidhead*

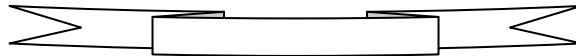
Pastor Reidhead set up this Bible Study Guide to accompany the “So Great Salvation - Study Guide I”. Below are his instructions on how to administer this study guide and questions.



Series I of “So Great Salvation” is composed of six sermons with eight correlating lessons. At the end of each chapter there are study questions. You will find the answers to these questions by carefully listening to the sermon and thoughtfully and prayerfully reading the text.

It is suggested that you first answer the questions of each chapter on a piece of notebook paper; then reread the chapter and listen again to the sermon to satisfy yourself that your answers are correct in relation to the material covered.

Then transfer your answers onto the study question sheet at the end of each chapter. Your carefully written answers will now become a valuable part of the study course of “So Great Salvation.”



FAITH

The Scripture forming the foundation of this chapter is Hebrews 11:1-6.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

The only definition of faith in the Scripture is this: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith might be expressed as the sight of the soul, as the eyes of the human spirit. Faith is the ability to see what isn't there yet to see, but what is going to be, because it ought to be. Even that is an over simplification, for there is much more to faith.

I. GOD'S ILLUSTRATION OF FAITH IS THE DEALING OF ABRAHAM WITH GOD AS RELATED IN GENESIS 22.

God told Abraham to take his son, his only son, Isaac, to the place that God would show him, the place of sacrifice, and offer him to the Lord. (The site was Mt. Moriah, where the temple was built centuries later.)

Now Abraham was a man of faith. Faith and obedience are always together. Because Abraham believed, he obeyed. It was possible to go from where Abraham and Isaac were to where they had to go, perform the sacrifice, and return the same day.

But God didn't give him a road map, so he went a roundabout route and made it a journey of three days, to give him more time with his son, whom he loved dearly. And God didn't scold Abraham because He knew his heart.

When they got to the foot of the mountain, ready to ascend, Abraham said to his servants, "Now you wait here. I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you" (Gen. 22:5).

Now here's faith. Abraham knew exactly what he had to do. He had to ascend the mountain. He had to put some stones together and build an altar; he had to gather wood and lay a fire. He had to have his son lie down on that wood, and to raise the knife and kill his son, and set the wood afire. Abraham knew what a sacrifice was.

But listen to faith. "You remain here, for WE will come again unto you." He had resurrection faith. God had given Isaac to Abraham in the first place, which was just as much a miracle as raising him from the dead would be. God had promised seed from Isaac, and He would give him back again. This Abraham knew.

That is God's illustration of faith, that God is able to do what He has promised. And God had promised that He would give Abraham a seed through Isaac.

II. GOD'S ILLUSTRATION OF WHAT THIS FAITH OF ABRAHAM IS TO MEAN TO US.

Romans, Chapter 4, will give insight as to what God wants this faith of Abraham to mean to us.

"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3) ... "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:8-12).

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:13). "Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all. (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:16-17).

The kind of faith illustrated in this portion of Scripture is that which is exercised when a person comes into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This is of the utmost importance, because the promise made by God was not only to Abraham and his seed according to the flesh, but to everyone who would savingly embrace God's dear Son. "In thee and thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). God has promised that we would be of worldwide blessing. This helps us to understand why we read in Acts 1:8: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me BOTH in Jerusalem, AND in all Judea, AND in Samaria, AND unto the uttermost parts of the earth."

Why? Because we are the heirs of the promise made by God to Abraham and to his spiritual seed, "In thee and in THY SEED shall all nations of the earth be blessed." This faith not only savingly unites us to Christ but also brings us into a relationship in which the promises made to Abraham can be fulfilled.

III. THE THREE KINDS OF FALSE FAITH

A. Head Faith

During the years that God has privileged me to travel rather widely in serving Him I have discovered that there are several kinds of faith. The first one I call a "head faith".

This is an intellectual assent to what is written in the Word. There are multitudes of people in the church who think themselves to be born of God because they have mentally assented to what they read on the page of the Scriptures. The fact that one may have agreed to the truth of God's Word does not necessarily mean that it is true in him. It is important to know that it is true

on the page, but it is imperative that it be true in one's heart. We must distinguish between what our minds have perceived and our hearts have received. There is a great difference. Many people who think themselves right with God have nothing more than the plan of salvation. The blueprint of the house does not protect one from the elements. The house does. The plan of salvation is not salvation. Salvation is a Person, our Lord Jesus Christ, and "He that hath the Son hath life," not he that hath the plan.

Our Lord spoke of two houses. Both of them had the same floor plan; both had the same front facade and the same number of rooms. Everything about the houses was Similar, except one was built on rock and the other was built on sand. Those who have only an intellectual assent to the plan of salvation, who have never built on the rock of awakening and conviction and repentance will be those who in the day of reckoning will find that their little house is torn down by the flood of God's wrath.

An intellectual assent is not the faith we are talking about.

B. Dead faith

The second kind of faith is equally devastating. I call it a "dead faith." We found this among our Moslem friends when we were in Africa. But such a faith is not found solely on the mission field. There are many people who think of themselves as Christians, who are associated with Christian groups, who have merely accepted rituals, dogmas and taboos which they associate with Christianity. They abstain from this and observe that. They have been baptized and catechized, but they have never realized that salvation is not a system of doctrine, taboos or rituals, but salvation is a Person. "He that hath the Son hath life" (I Joh. 5:12). They have a dead faith, that is, everything but Christ.

C. Devil's Faith

The third kind of faith is called a "devil's faith." This is an emotional response to the horrors of hell and the beauties of heaven. It is the kind that the demon evidenced in Matthew 8:29, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" The demon knew that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and that He was going to judge the demons, but he remained a devil. James declares, "the devils also believe and tremble", but they remain impenitent devils nonetheless (Jam. 2:19). A devil's faith is an emotional response, a recognition that the pleasures of heaven are preferable to the horrors of hell; any belief which will gain the one and escape the other will be supported.

D. Saving Faith

In Romans 10:9 we find a very distinct statement as to the kind of faith that savingly unites one to Jesus Christ.

"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

The impenitent sinner can have a "head" faith, a "dead" faith and a "devil's" faith by his own efforts. He can appropriate doctrine, submit to ritual, have an emotional response, all by himself. "Believe in thine heart" is a different matter.

The song writer has said it, "I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart, or how believing in His Word wrought peace within my heart." Saving faith to me impart...

What do you mean? Do you think for one moment that an impenitent wretch who is trying to bargain with God can stretch the arms of his mind and spirit two thousand years into the past, and see a Jew dying on a Roman gibbet, and believe that the death of that man could change his eternal destiny and his character, without help from God?

Quickened ... quickened ... quickened faith. It's saving faith. It's heart faith, in response to repentance. Now that's why Paul taught the people of Ephesus, "I was with you night and day, from house to house, to the Greeks and to the Jews, teaching repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." It is in that order, for it is thus that heart faith is released. Heart faith is a total, personal commitment to the sovereignty of the One in Whom we believe. Because our Lord is who He is, and did what He did, we are going to obey Him and serve Him and serve Him as long as He gives us breath.

These are the people who are "believers". Are you a believer? You are if you have been born into His family.

FAITH

1. What is God's chosen example and illustration of faith and where is it found in the Bible?
2. Where in the New Testament do we learn what God wants this illustration of faith to mean to us?
3. Why is this kind of faith important?
4. What is the first kind of faith? Briefly explain.
5. What is the second kind of faith? Briefly explain.
 - a) Where would one find examples of this?
6. What is the third kind of faith?
7. How does "saving faith" differ from the other three kinds? Cite reference and verse.
8. What is the definition of "believe"?

THE NEW BIRTH

When we come to the subject of regeneration or, as we call it here, the new birth, we must understand what is NOT because there are some false ideas that must not be allowed to obscure the Bible's teaching on this most important theme. To emphasize this importance our Lord Jesus repeated the commandment "ye must be born again", twice in John 3, verse 3 and then again in verse 7. But just as Nicodemus had his own ideas and questions about this subject, so today there are certain mistaken views which must be recognized and avoided.

We can do no better in this regard than to refer to the statements made by Charles Finney from his sermon "Regeneration" preached on November 21. 1849:

"First, the new birth does not consist in the creation of any new faculty, either of mind or of body. Sinners do not need any new faculties; they only need to use those faculties that they already possess, in the manner that God requires them to be used."

"Second, the new birth does not change the capacity or structure of any of the powers of the body or of the mind."

"Third, the new birth does not imply any change in the feelings of the mind that produce a change in a man's actions. The new birth is not a change that is introduced into the sensibilities or feelings. To be sure, new feelings do arise in the born again one but these new feelings do not constitute regeneration."

The new birth is the crisis of a changed relationship with God affected by God in the heart of one who has exercised heart faith, saving faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a crisis toward which the previous process has pointed and in which it has culminated. The process consisted as we have seen: Awakening, which issues into Conviction, which moves one to Repentance, which is indispensable to make possible Faith (saving faith), which results in God the Holy Spirit producing the New Birth in the believer's inmost being.

In response to heart faith two things happen. In heaven we are justified, the record against us is changed. As the word suggests, before God it is "just as if I'd never sinned." Christ publicly satisfied the law on our behalf, so that we can be forgiven and pardoned, so that God "might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). In our hearts, God the Holy Spirit quickens us; our spirits are joined by Him in that life-giving touch. We become new creations because He has restored contact with us. We have been born into God's family and are enabled to call Almighty God, "Our Father."

What does it mean to be dead in sin? Let me illustrate. Suppose you get up one morning and go to turn on the TV set to watch the morning news. Nothing happens ... there is no sound and no picture. "The TV is dead," you remark. Does that mean that during the night the workings of the television disintegrated into rust so that you could sweep out the insides into a dustpan? What has happened is that a connection has been broken, or a transistor is out, or some wire is loose. In one way it is appropriate to say that the TV set is dead, because in the Scripture death always means separation.

Now God made us with receiving sets to know Him, but we were "dead" to Him because of our sin. Even though God is geographically as near to us as the air we breathe, ("In Him we live and move and have our being") because we were rebellious unbelievers He would not reveal Himself to us (Act. 17:28a).

Let us examine further the fact of the nearness of God to all men.

We live in three elements, in three atmospheres, at the bottom of three oceans. The first ocean we live in is the ocean of air. We have a receiving set, our lungs. Normally, air goes into our lungs through our nose or through our mouth. If someone covers your mouth and pinches your nostrils, in a few minutes you are going to be a statistic, because you must have air. In it you live and move, and from it you have your physical being.

The second ocean in which we live is electronic sound. We are told that there is so much electronic sound in the room where you are reading this; that if all that sound were tuned in and turned up to 100 decibels, the building you are in would probably

shatter and collapse. But you must have a receiving set to process electronic sound. We have ears, but we need the electronic equipment made to receive that sound, for it is not audible to our ears without that help.

There is a third atmosphere in which we live, God. Paul said on Mars Hill in Acts 17:28, "In Him we live and move and have our being." We do have a receiving set to know God, the human spirit. However, as long as one is living in rebellion against God, that receiving set is dead. It doesn't work. But when God in His sweet grace and wonderful power responds to true repentance and heart faith, He repairs that receiving set, namely, the human spirit. The first message one receives is "You can call Almighty God 'Abba, Father'."

Now the tragedy of "easy believism" is that the products of it get their assurance, not from God, but from somebody else. The consequence is that when they begin to doubt or question, they are in trouble. Many people say, "I tried Christianity and it doesn't work." We saw earlier in the introduction of this study that in present-day evangelism it takes about 200 first time decisions to get one person who will go on living for Christ two years later. So many of those who made decisions did so because of the efforts of people. When the personal workers are gone and the excitement is past, the person who was told by some earnest but mistaken person that he was saved finds that nothing happened, nothing is changed and he is right back where he was before. However, if that one has been truly born of God, and God has repaired that receiving set, and he has found out from God directly that he is His child, then there is a difference.

Let me illustrate. In the early part of the 19th century, 1837-1850, Charles Finney had meetings in northern New York State. God was greatly blessing his ministry. Still he incurred the wrath of the Presbyterians of which he was an accredited clergyman, because he instituted something new. He established what came to be called "the anxious seat". Mr. Finney set aside a section in the church and announced that this section was reserved for the "anxious". The "anxious" were the awakened; those under conviction, and those moving toward repentance. Each "anxious" person was given a ticket with his/her name on it to make sure that a place would be available in this section, even though usually many had to be turned away because the crowds were so vast.

Sometimes, when Finney was preaching, he would move to this section of the church and address himself directly to the "anxious". It has been related that during the time he was in meetings in Albany, New York, the entire State Supreme Court came to hear their fellow lawyer. Midway in the service the Chief Justice was reported to stand up. When Mr. Finney recognized him, the gentleman stated,

"Mr. Finney, you have carried your case. The evidence is convincing. If you are prepared to open the "anxious seat", I am prepared to come." And he walked down the aisle to that section. In the course of that meeting, it was reported that every member of the state Supreme Court of New York professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Presbyterians were so incensed with Finney's new approach that he was tried in a church court and dismissed from the denomination. He later became a member of the Congregational Church and became pastor of the Broadway Congregational Church in New York City.

Charles Finney came to New York City originally at the invitation of Henry Ward Beecher. Lyman Beecher, a brother, was pastor in Boston. Their sister was Harriett Beecher Stowe, who wrote "Uncle Tom's Cabin". Lyman Beecher was perturbed that Finney had become a member of the denomination of which he was a part and began to raise the objection that Finney's converts didn't stand. Henry Ward Beecher, as a challenge to his brother, appointed a blue ribbon committee of outstanding citizens to go to Rochester, where ten years earlier Finney had held a meeting that lasted for fourteen months, during which time many thousands professed faith in Christ. The committee was to make a study of the converts who had made professions of faith during the evangelistic campaign held by Charles Finney ten years previously.

This committee reported that they had found that 85% of those who had made professions of faith under Finney's ministry in Rochester, New York, were living for Christ ten years later. Now compare that to one-half of one percent still standing for Christ one year later as it is in our day. This will give you some idea how far we have departed from the method God used and blessed under Finney. Perhaps if we could wait until people really meet the Lord, as did Finney, our results would improve. It is

an eternal principle that no one has the right to tell a person he is born of God except the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of adoption. God has never ceded that right to anyone; He reserves that as His sovereign prerogative.

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem that that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father” (Gal. 4:4-6).

Do you understand? Because you are sons, born into the Father's family, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, with the witness of the Spirit in your heart, you can cry, Abba Father.

When John Wesley began to preach in 1737 the churches of England closed to him. Even at Epworth where his father had been rector for many years, Wesley was not allowed to speak from the pulpit. So he stood outside with his father's gravestone as his pulpit and preached to all the people of the village. The churches of England were closed to him because he maintained, that it wasn't enough to have your name recorded in the church records, having been baptized as an infant, to have gone through catechism classes and taken into the church as an adult. Wesley affirmed that you must be born again and have the witness of the Spirit that are born of God.

At first Wesley was hurt by this rejection, but he soon realized that this was God's way of getting the people to hear him. His strategy was this: in the middle of the week before he planned to go to a certain community he sent a messenger to the rector of the Anglican Church, requesting permission to use the church. The pastor declined, as Wesley had expected, and then proceeded to send word throughout the village that John Wesley was coming and that he had been denied the use of the church and that the parishioners were forbidden to go hear him.

What would the modern evangelist pay for that kind of advertising? We know that it worked, for on many occasions Wesley was reported to have preached to more people in the open air than there were residents in the town where he was speaking. Part of the reason for the large crowds was the fact that the rector was his advance man and provided the advertising.

If this message was important in the early 18th century, it is equally important in the latter part of the 20th century. Let us declare emphatically that only when God quickens your heart, as a new creation, and tells you that you are His child, can you know because you know that you know Him.

The churches closed to Wesley because he affirmed that it was necessary for a person to be born again ... and know ... by the witness of the Holy Spirit that he was born again. The Church of England believed in the “new birth” but they believed that this happened when the infant was baptized and placed into the church. Wesley was disturbing the “status quo”; he was upsetting the comfortable clergy who liked things the way they were. So today many pastors and evangelists are quite contented, or at least seem to be, with a situation where a sizeable portion of their congregation gives little evidence of having been born of God.

Today, as in Wesley's day, it comes down to a matter of the “new birth”. Is being “born again” an assumption one makes from something one does or is involved in doing? Or, is the “new birth” something God does within one in response to the proper exercise of “saving faith” in the finished work and exalted Person of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Look at what you just read in Gal. 4:4-6, “Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father.”

Do you see it? Do you understand it? Faith, new birth, and the witness of the Spirit. Those you minister to must come that route, and if you have been brought by any other route, today is the day to make amends.

THE NEW BIRTH

1. From John 3 what was the mistaken idea about being born again which was expressed by Nicodemus?
2. What was the first thing Mr. Finney said the new birth is NOT?
3. What was the second thing Mr. Finney said the new birth is NOT?
4. Why do you think Mr. Finney made his third point so clear and strong?
5. What are the four “steps” or prerequisites to the new birth?
6. How Does “justification” differ from regeneration or the new birth?
7. How is “dead in sin” explained in this study?

8. What is the tragedy of “easy believism?”
9. What was the percentage of converts under Charles Finney who were said to be following the lord ten years after their conversion?
10. How does that figure compare with our day?
11. Who is the only One who has the right to tell a person that he is born into God’s family and can call God “Abba Father”?
12. Why were the churches of England closed to John Wesley?

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

“But when the fullness of the time was come, 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 because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:4-6).

“The Spirit itself (lit. that same Spirit ... the Spirit of adoption in v. 15) beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom. 8:16).

In his introduction to his first discourse on Romans 8:16, John Wesley writes:

“How many vain men, not understanding what they spoke, neither whereof they affirmed, have wrested this Scripture to the great loss, if not the destruction, of their souls. How many have mistaken the voice of their own imagination for this ‘witness of the Spirit of God’ and thence idly presumed they were the children of God, while they were doing the works of the devil?”

I. WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT IS THE ANCIENT TRUTH HELD BY BELIEVERS SINCE APOSTOLIC TIMES

The truth concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Adoption, is not some new and novel teaching that I have invented and am trying to promote. This ancient truth has been held by believers since the time of the Apostles, throughout the centuries. This does not mean that there have not been those who objected to the clear teaching of the Word, historically, and do object in modern times.

Nearly forty years ago the pastor of a prominent Bible-belt church stated in my hearing, “There are among us some who would try to persuade us to think that the way a person is assured of being saved is by some ‘tickling under the fifth rib on the left side.’ This is wrong. The only way anyone will know he is saved is by taking a verse of Scripture and standing on it.”

During the past forty years in American Christianity “easy believism”, which was deemed a heresy, has become the order of evangelism and the norm of orthodoxy, even though it is patently contrary to God's Word. However, this should not be thought strange. John Wesley had the doors of opportunity to preach in the churches of England closed to him because he taught the necessity of the “witness of the Holy Spirit for assurance of salvation” ... and that was in the eighteenth century.

The “prince and the power of the air, that same spirit that now works in the children of disobedience” was defeated at Calvary. He was held in captivity by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even so, the victorious, triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has permitted him to continue to do his evil worst during this time between our Lord's ascension and His return. What better strategy could the god of this world devise to nullify the work of Christ than to fill the organized church with people who have made a superficial profession of faith (and thereby claim to be Christians) but remain dead in their sins, living under the control of Satan. By their presence in the church, they destroy the effectiveness of the church's witness for Christ.

Of this, the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation speaks twice of “the synagogue of Satan”.

“And I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9).

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie” (Rev. 3:9).

Of these two passages Adam Clarke in his commentary has this to say: “There were (in John's day) those who professed Judaism, and had a synagogue in the place, and professed to worship the true God; but they had no genuine religion, and they served the devil rather than God. They applied a sacred name to an unholy thing, and this is one meaning of the word ‘blasphemy’ in the Bible.”

Return in your thinking to the introduction to this series of studies where it was suggested that as few as ten percent of the members of churches in our day give Biblical evidence of being born of God. Many claim the name of Christ, but according to

Ephesians 2:1-4 are “dead in trespasses and sins and walk according to the god of this world, the prince and the power of the air, the same spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.”

This is no light matter. It is the insidious strategy of the defeated for to rob our Lord Jesus Christ of His victory and the spoils of His suffering. Every practitioner of so-called “easy believism” is a participant in that evil purpose by deluding the unconverted to think themselves to be children of God by submitting to an “evangelical ritual”. This “ritual” can be viewed as dangerous and damning as is baptismal regeneration, which was the ordinary procedure by which the people of England of Wesley's day had been made members of the Anglican Church.

It is imperative that God's Word be proclaimed whether men hear or refuse to hear. It cannot be repeated too often, or emphasized too much, that the only One in the universe who has the right to tell a person that he is born of God is God the Holy Spirit. He is the Spirit of Adoption and He has never abdicated that sovereign prerogative. He has never turned that responsibility over to anyone else.

There are two possible heresies. The one is the heresy of message, which we are well equipped to detect. The second is the heresy of method, which is more subtle and dangerous. many times the message preached is orthodox, but the method is heterodox. It is important to strive for orthodoxy in both our message and our method.

I was once asked the question, “What do you do differently now from what you used to do with people who are seeking the Lord?”

The difference is this. Now I tell people how holy God is, and from the Word get them to see how sinful they are, and then show them what God has done in His love and grace and justice to make it possible for them to be forgiven and pardoned. Then I tell them what they must do. Then I say to them, “Look, when you do what God has commanded, you will be born again. When you are, you will have the witness of the Spirit, and when you know that you've passed from death unto life, come and tell me.”

I can't tell them. The Spirit of God is truth and He knows when one has passed from death unto life. The only one that has the right to tell a person he is born of God is God the Holy Spirit.

II. WHAT THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT IS

Let us consider the questions, “What is the witness of the Spirit?” and “How does He ‘bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God’?”

Job 32:8 tell us “There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.” The Book of Job is the oldest book of the Bible. From the very first, therefore, it has been known that the part of man with which God deals is the human spirit.

In I Cor. 2:11 the Apostle Paul confirms and amplified this, especially in several of the preferred readings from ancient texts, which present the passage thus: “For what is there that knoweth the things of a man, except the spirit of a man that is in him.”

Adam Clarke, in his comments on this verse, writes: “The spirit of man knows the things of a man: that is, a man is conscious of all the schemes, plans and purposes, that pass in his own mind, and no man can know these things but himself.”

Put more simply, it is that part of me that knows “I am me”, that I am here, not there; that I am man, not woman; that I am old, not young; that I am sitting down; not standing up; that I am married; not single ... that part of me that knows all these things is my spirit. That is the part that leaves the body when we die ... that is the part which leaves when loved ones look at the still form no longer breathing and say, “He is gone.”

Heretofore we have seen that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to prepare sinners for saving grace by awakening them; convicting them; leading them to repentance, quickening, saying faith, whereby they can reach back 2000 years in time to lay hold on the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having done all this, it is not difficult to understand that in response to

savingly embracing God's dear Son, the person is born into the family of God. Now Galatians 4:6 becomes understandable in a fuller way, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." The pardoned, cleansed, forgiven sinner, by virtue of being placed in the Father's family as a child, is now enabled and encouraged by God the Holy Spirit, communicating directly to the person's spirit, "You can call Almighty God ... Father."

Of this work of the Holy Spirit in the redeemed heart, John Wesley had this comment: "The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me, and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

How may one who has the genuine witness of the Holy Spirit in himself distinguish it from presumption? Since it is the spirit of man that knows the things of a man part of the answer comes from the person himself asking questions of himself, which only he can answer.

"Were you truly awakened to your need? Were you convicted of the crime of 'turning to your own way and ruling your own life'? Have you truly purposed to please God in everything, to love, serve and obey Him whom you have received, the Lord Jesus Christ? Is the burden of your guilt lifted and do you pray to Him as your Father?"

No one can answer these questions for another. The person who knows these things to be true of himself cannot explain how he knows ... he just knows that he knows.

Again we hear John Wesley wisely share with us, "Were there any natural medium to prove, or natural method to explain the things of God to inexperienced men, then the natural man might discern and know the things of the Spirit of God. But this is utterly contrary to the assertion of the Apostle Paul, that 'he cannot know them, because they are spiritually discerned' by the spiritual senses which the natural man does not have."

Now let me make this practical and ask you if you have that inner certainty that you have been born of God. If I say, "Are you married?" and you have to see if you have a wedding ring on your finger or search for a wedding certificate, I think you have a problem. When you are asked, "Have you been born of God?" And you're not sure; certainly you have a problem, a very important problem. If I were in your place, I wouldn't rest until I had settled this problem and had found out exactly what my state is.

In his second discourse on Romans 8:16, John Wesley wrote, on April 4, 1767: "It concerns the Methodists, so called, to clearly understand, explain and defend this doctrine; because it is one grand part of the testimony which God has given them to bear to all mankind. It is by His peculiar blessing upon them in searching the Scriptures, confirmed by the experience of His children, that this great evangelical truth has been recovered, which had been for many years well nigh lost and forgotten."

Twenty years after Wesley had in his first discourse on Rom. 8:16, referred to earlier, affirmed the following statement, he reiterated it declaring that he saw no cause to retract or change any part of it.

"By the witness (testimony) of the Spirit I mean an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ loved me and gave Himself for me, that all my sins are blotted out and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

"We also are to understand that this does not mean that the Spirit of God testifies by an outward voice, nor always by an inward voice, although He may do this sometimes."

"Many objections have been raised, but none of them change this patently clear Scriptural truth that the 'witness of the Spirit' is an inward impression on the souls of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit that they are the children of God."

Two important inferences are to be drawn. First, let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit does really testify that we are the children of God, the immediate

consequence will be the fruit of the Spirit, namely, love, joy peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and temperance.

The second inference is, let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness of the Spirit. We must continually cry to God until His Spirit cries in our hearts “Abba, Father”. Once we have received this witness of the Spirit of adoption, this “Peace which passes all understanding” and which expels all painful doubt and fear, will “keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” So we need never more be deprived of either the testimony of God's Spirit, or the testimony of our own ... namely, the consciousness of our walking in righteousness and true holiness.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

1. What two Scriptures are quoted which are basic to the understanding of the witness of the Spirit?
 - a) Reference:
 - b) Reference:
2. What mistake did John Wesley cite that he felt many people make in respect to this?
3. How long has this truth been held and preached by believers?
4. In this study to whom is the invention and promotion of "easy believism" attributed?
5. What is the effect of filling church membership rolls with people who have not been truly born of God?
6. What two references seem to describe this condition?
 - a) .
 - b) .

7. What are the two heresies and in what do they differ?
8. Who alone is authorized to tell a person they have been born into God's family?
9. What is John Wesley's statement about the witness of the Spirit in the believer's heart?
10. Looking back over the sermons you have heard would you say with Wesley, "that this great evangelical truth (ought to be) recovered, which had been for many years well-nigh lost and forgotten"?
11. Are the "witness of the Spirit" and the fruit of the Spirit in the life always to be together? Explain.

* Reference such as: Original Message Delivered at Bethany Fellowship, Minneapolis, MN on Thursday Morning, June 11, 1987 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.