



THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN MISSIONS

Religion

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ABSTRACT

Much discussion, argument and dissent, have been expressed over the centuries regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in Missions, and differing opinions regarding this has caused many a rift and breach within the Christian world. The researcher attempts to present a study of the relevant verses in the Holy Bible and relevant texts from authorities in the field to support his position that the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in Missions – right from the election – predestination process of the yet unborn soul who is to be saved and continues in his sanctification and ministry till his dying day.

Definitions: Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, co-equal with the other two Persons and the continuing presence of God in man, also referred to as the Spirit of God, Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Jesus.

Missions is defined as “the sending forth of authorized persons beyond the borders of the New Testament church and her immediate gospel influence to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in gospel-deserted areas, to win converts from other faiths or non-faiths to Jesus Christ, and to establish functioning, multiplying local congregations who will bear the fruit of Christianity in that community and to that country.”

KEYWORDS

Holy Spirit, Missions, Salvation, Predestination

INTRODUCTION:

The Holy Spirit was introduced in the beginning of Genesis, (1:2) where He hovers over the waters, presumably restless due to the chaos that existed then. He is the third mentioned Person of the Trinity who is God to the same extent as the other two Persons of the Trinity; Biblical references to the three Persons are interchangeable. He indwells the believer, (Jn 14:17, 1Cor 6:19) and is primarily responsible for the regeneration, sanctification and empowering of the believer. But the role of the Holy Spirit begins long before, as we shall see.

Predestination

It is clearly evident that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, all three Persons of the Triune God, were in coexistence in love and glory (Jn 17:24) before the act of creation; before time began, and we can safely conjecture that all three Persons of the Trinity were co-authors in the scripting of the design and timeline of creation. It is also clearly evident that God the Father in His wisdom and foreknowledge predestined some to be His chosen, (Rom 8:29-30) and we cannot imagine Him working this out without the involvement of His Spirit, along with His Son. *(The researcher does not intend to defend his obvious position or to debate the various theories of election and predestination here, as that falls out the scope of this research paper)* It is stated in Revelation (17:8) that this predestination was complete and the names registered in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world i.e., before creation.

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK IN THE INDIVIDUAL

Preservation of the unsaved

Once born into this world, the soul predestined for salvation and adoption into sonship by the grace of God (Eph 1:4-5, 2 Tim 1:9) is preserved from destruction and death by the restraining grace of God expressed through the working of the Holy Spirit in this world, striving, as it were, to

- 1) contain man and prevent him from harming himself as was the case (Num 22:22) where the Spirit of God repeatedly warned Balaam through the voice of a donkey,
- 2) by controlling the forces of nature as with Jonah who was prevented from escaping the will of God (Jonah 1:4) by an unavailing storm,
- 3) by further controlling circumstances whereby the fish was provided (Jonah 1:17) as a miraculous means of escape and transport to the desired destination, and
- 4) by influencing the thoughts and actions of human beings positively as in the case of King Cyrus, a pagan king whose actions toward rebuilding the Temple were prophesied 700 years earlier (Is 45:13) ^{or}
- 5) by influencing the thoughts and actions of human beings ^{negatively} as in the case of Pharaoh king of Egypt hardening his heart towards the Israelites (Ex 7:3, Rom 9:17) so that miraculous signs and wonders could be performed to the glory of God.

Preparing the heart to accept Christ

The person is made deeply aware of his sinful state and the penalty thereof, his absolute inability to do anything about it and his need for a Saviour. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah mentions the direct writing of the law of God on men's hearts, (31:33) casting aside the untruths that Satan has blinded man (2 Cor 4:4) with, testifying of Jesus (Jn 15:26) leading him to realise the state he is in, the requirements of a righteous God and the impending judgement of those who reject (Jn 16:8-11) Him. John (6:44) quotes Jesus as saying “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day*”, implying that the drawing is done through the offices of the Holy Spirit as His Representative on the earth after Pentecost.

Conversion

The heart prepared still requires the Holy Spirit's nudging to repent of sin, make the call of faith (both of which are gifts of the Holy Spirit), confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12:3) and ask Jesus into one's life. For “*while it is possible to become a believer without the Bible it is not possible to become one without the work of the Holy Spirit.*”

Intercession

Believers are exhorted time and again to pray for; - intercede on behalf of unsaved souls, and the most effective way to pray is with the help (Rom 8:26) of the Holy Spirit. (Zech 12:10) In fact, it is the Holy Spirit who reminds believers of specific friends or acquaintances in need of salvation. Often believers are led by the Spirit to intercede for or minister to people in need, as when Ananias was sent (Acts 9:17) to Saul at Damascus.

Presenting the Gospel

Similarly, believers often sense “in the Spirit” that a specific person needs guidance into salvation so they can begin the process. The Holy Spirit also makes the believer aware that the soul is receptive to the Gospel, as when Phillip was sent to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:29) eunuch on the road to Gaza. Mostly, people accept Jesus through someone presenting the Gospel to them, (Rom 10:14) making them realise that the only way to salvation is to accept the Saviour into his heart.

Direct conviction

There have been instances where due to social or religious restrictions it was not feasible for somebody to present the Gospel to the unbeliever, (for example to adherents of Islam, as in the case of Bilquis Sheik who had a series of dreams) where the Holy Spirit directly communicated with them; similar to the Apostle Paul's experience (Acts 9:3-5) on the Damascus Road. There have been instances of Hindu priests and Brahmin scholars reading the Bible just to find fault with and discredit it only to have the Word coming alive and convicting them; this is also the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Prophesying, (1 Cor 14:24-25a) tongues with interpretation, and word of knowledge can all convict by revealing the innermost thought of people, and that can lead to conviction and acceptance of Jesus. The Apostle Paul mentions that the working of signs and wonders (Rom 15:18-19a) leads the unbeliever to Christ.

Regeneration

Regeneration (Ti 3:5-6) is brought about by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, starting at the moment of accepting Christ into his life, when the person is born again of water and the Spirit, and is miraculous and instantaneous.

Indwelling and daily guidance

The continuous presence or indwelling of the Holy Spirit is promised to the believer post Pentecost (Jn 14:17), for the purpose of leading (as of Phillip when he was sent to the eunuch) to preach the Gospel, through illumination of the Word and reminding the believer. (Jn 14:26) Believers also have the assistance of the Holy Spirit in helping them to pray when they do not know (Rom 8:26) how to.

Sanctification

The believer is sanctified (Rom 15:16b) by the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit; this involves the changing of the nature (due to the change of heart mentioned in Ezekiel 36:26) from the old sinful flesh controlled nature to a new Spirit controlled nature that produces the fruit of the Spirit and happens to the extent of his submission and surrender to His instruction. In his letter to the Galatians (5:19-24) the Apostle Paul lists out the fruit of living in the flesh and contrasts it with the fruit of living in the Spirit.

Boldness to preach the Gospel

The timid disciples were transformed instantly (Acts 4:31b) into bold proclaimers of the Gospel, unafraid of pain or persecution, even willing to lose their lives in the process. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is at work today, emboldening missionaries to work in faraway places and even risk their lives in doing so. Jim Elliot, the missionary to Ecuador (who was killed by the natives while on a visit to the islands) was fully aware of the risks involved therein, remarked *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose"*.

Empowering

The Holy Spirit also empowers (Acts 1:8a) the individual, enabling him to do many things not otherwise or humanly possible, also promised by Jesus in as recorded by John (14:12).

Equipping of the saints

The offices of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher have been listed out in the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians (4:11) and the Holy Spirit equips them with the different gifts listed out in various places in Scripture for the purpose of carrying out their mission according to the need. These range from service, teaching, exhortation, generosity, leading, acts of mercy (Rom 12:6-8) and wisdom, knowledge, and faith, to the miraculous gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, tongues and their interpretations (1Cor 12:4-11); even speaking is mentioned as a gift. (1 Pet 4:11)

Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit in the believer goes against all fleshly behaviours and instincts. "For Love displayed has its greatest impact when its object the hater, joy in painful situations, peace in troubling times, patience under affliction, kindness to the unkind, gentleness to the harsh, faithfulness when all seems lost, godliness toward the ungodly and self-control towards the irritating." This display of Christlikeness (all attributes were demonstrated in full measure by Jesus during His life on this earth) serve to draw the unbeliever to Christ. Christopher Wright states, "It is the way of the Spirit of God given to us through Christ: 'Walk by the Spirit . . . led by the Spirit . . . live by the Spirit . . . keep in step with the Spirit.' That is the heart and soul of Christian living."

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK IN THE CHURCH

Appointing and empowering of leaders

Churches with Spirit filled members are led by the Holy Spirit to appoint leadership that in turn is Spirit filled and can thus prioritise the primary agenda of the Trinity - the preaching of the gospel to the whole world.

Selecting and sending of missionaries

Further, churches and leaders, in obedience to the Spirit are led to set apart (Acts 13:2) and anoint specific people (Acts 13:3) as missionaries.

Selection of the mission field

The Holy Spirit is instrumental in leading the missionary to the intended mission field, either towards (Acts 13:4) or away from (Acts 16:7) certain regions or nations. It was the Holy Spirit who sent William Carey all the way to India.

Strategizing and direction of missions

There are many instances of the Holy Spirit clearly planning and providing step by step instructions to missionaries, (Acts 8:29) never revealing the whole plan or its intended outcome at the outset but expecting the missionary to trust and obey. Leslie Newbiggin is quoted as saying *"The [C]hurch is witness insofar as it follows obediently where the Spirit leads."*

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit is active in all aspects of Missions, rightfully so as He is co-equal with and shares the same agenda as the other Members in the Trinity. This starts from the very beginning, before the foundations of the world were laid, when God the Father along with the Son and the Holy Spirit designed creation and charted out its timeline; when God ordered that man be granted freewill with the foreknowledge of its disastrous consequences of man's inevitable fall and alienation from Him, necessitating the provision of the only way of redemption that could prove the extent of God's deep love for man – the sacrifice of God in the Person of the Son Jesus Christ, and continues till the drawing of the soul to God and all the subsequent steps of repentance, regeneration and preparing the next generation for missions.

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