

A Cosmic View of the Holy Spirit

Speaking in tongues has become the hallmark of the charismatic movement as evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work in the individual. Experiences such as miracles and healings are also cited as proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The charismatics are usually zealous to draw others into their ranks. They are excited about their experiences, and want to share them. But at the same time, they show an aversion to doctrine. They also limit the work of the Holy Spirit to private experiences or to the experiences of a body of believers. The work of the Holy Spirit seems to be limited to personal salvation, the desire for eternal security and sanctification.

Reformed theologians have a broader view of the activities of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Of course, the Holy Spirit is active in the individual believer and in the congregation. Apart from this activity, there would be no believers and no congregations at all. The Holy Spirit, however, is the giver of all life, not spiritual life only. He hovered over the waters of creation. He spoke in history by the prophets. And He was poured out on Christ's disciples on Pentecost. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, men and women come to salvation. And after they have become citizens of the Kingdom, He continues to work in them. Says Packer, "The Christian's life in all its aspects-intellectual and ethical, devotional and relational, up-surg-ing in worship and outgoing in witness-is supernatural; only the Spirit can initiate and sustain it."

The Holy Spirit is active in all of creation. Dr. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), one of the most prominent representatives of modern Calvinism in the Netherlands, points out that every creature depends on God for its existence. All creatures are maintained, moment by moment, by God's Spirit. With all creation, man has this in common, he has been given natural life by the Spirit (Job 27:3; Acts 17:28). But man is set apart from all other creatures. Though his body is out of the earth, he received from God's Spirit his own created spirit. God breathed into man and he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). To understand the work of the Holy Spirit, we must not begin with Pentecost, but with creation.

Cosmic View

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), theologian, party leader and statesman, regretted the lack of emphasis on the Holy Spirit in his time. So few have Him as their object of worship, he felt. In response to the need for an in depth study on the Holy Spirit, he wrote a massive volume. In his other works, he also made frequent references to the Holy Spirit.

Like Calvin and Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper had a cosmic view of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is not limited to Christian believers, but it spreads to all mankind, even to the atheists. No human life is imaginable apart from the Holy Spirit. He works in natural life, in the giving of talents. Kuyper was not a universalist. He was simply saying that apart from the Spirit, life is not possible.

Since God is Triune, the three persons of the Godhead are involved in all of creation. Kuyper wrote:

"In every work effected by the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, in common, the power to bring forth proceeds from the Father; the power to arrange from the Son; the power to perfect from the Holy Spirit. "

In the division of the Triune God's work, Kuyper singles out the Holy Spirit as the One who perfects.

"Thus to lead the creature to its destiny, to cause it to develop according to its nature, to make it perfect, is the proper work of the Holy Spirit. "

The Holy Spirit is savingly present in the church. He is always within the church. But too often it is forgotten that though He is within the church He is not necessarily in each member. We are the body of Christ. We may not be individualistic. In the body is life. An amputated leg is dead. The Holy Spirit will never leave the body. Every living member is organically united with Christ through the Spirit. Yet we must have a personal walk with the Lord. We need an encounter between the I of God and the I of our heart. Fellowship with the Holy Spirit leads to a personal relationship with God the Father and the Son.

Another Pentecost?

Will the church have another Pentecost? Kuyper didn't believe in a repetition of the Pentecost event. Whenever the New Testament speaks about the Spirit baptism, it refers to the salvation of individuals, or the strengthening of those who are already brought from spiritual death to life in Christ (John 14:23). The work of the Holy Spirit is not limited to regeneration, our personal walk with God, but also embraces restoration. The purpose of God's saving work is not just to usher the elect into heaven, but the restoration of creation.

As we pray for a reawakening of the church, and as we long for a close walk with the Lord, the broader work of the Holy Spirit must be kept in focus, lest we narrow God's plan of salvation to our own personal spiritual welfare. The Third Person of the Trinity as revealed in Scripture, and as expounded by John Calvin, Herman Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper and other Reformed scholars should be kept in focus as we discuss the-so often highly individualistic-trends in the charismatic movement.

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