

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 56 – THE HOLY SPIRIT - BUILDER]

Last time we started to look at the work of the Holy Spirit as He sets about preparing a holy people for God.

- ◆ In order for this process to have any chance of success, a miracle has to take place in the heart of the individual.
- ◆ But before this miracle can occur at the heart level, there are three other important steps leading up to this process.
- ◆ First, and this is something that everyone experiences, one has to go through a softening up process.
- ◆ We looked at the example of the prodigal son to show how God uses the pain and suffering we bring on ourselves through our rebellion to bring us to our senses.
- ◆ The second thing that needs to happen has already been accomplished. That is the reconciling work of Jesus Christ that has restored “peace” between the two parties.
- ◆ The gateway through the veil has been opened for humanity to approach God, and for God to approach humanity through the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ The third thing that needs to happen is a personal decision made by the Father Himself.
- ◆ ***John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.***
- ◆ One of the great mysteries of the salvation process is this question of “election” or “calling” as it is called, this opportunity to experience and respond to God’s overtures of love.
- ◆ We cautioned against being too quick to impose our timetable on a loving God who is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

We have already spoken about the Holy Spirit being the “embracer,” the one who goes forth to embrace the lost sheep and draw them into fellowship with the godhead.

- ◆ Today we are going to look at another title that describes the work of the Holy Spirit and that is, the Holy Spirit as “builder.”
- ◆ There is an ancient parallel to the day of Pentecost when the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit and that is the story of the Tower of Babel.
- ◆ After the flood, God gave specific instructions to Noah and his sons on what He expected them to do.
- ◆ ***Genesis 9:1 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.***
- ◆ The first part of this instruction is jokingly referred to as being the only command God has given to mankind he has not had any problem obeying.
- ◆ But it is this second part of the instructions that is our concern here where God tells them to “***fill the earth.***”
- ◆ We pick up the story in Genesis 11.
- ◆ ***Genesis 11:4-9 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.***
- ◆ What we see here is the first recorded event where the entire community organises themselves in defiance of God’s clear instructions to “***fill the earth.***”
- ◆ It was man’s attempt to re-establish contact with God on their terms rather than on God’s terms.
- ◆ By claiming to make a name for themselves they were in direct opposition to God’s plan of taking on His name and becoming His holy people.
- ◆ There is also a similarity here to the lie the serpent told Adam and Eve, “***You will be like God***” (***Genesis 3:5***) in that this tower was man’s attempt to establish a sacred place with counterfeit priests claiming to be representatives of the true God.
- ◆ The tower would give the impression to the population of the city that the gods could descend and ascend between heaven and earth.
- ◆ As we discussed last time, part of the judgment that God permits rebellious humans to experience is to allow them to become their own gods, choosing for themselves “right” and “wrong” with the ensuing consequences.
- ◆ In order to quell this rebellion, God confused their language so they would scatter and populate the earth as He had instructed.
- ◆ ***Genesis 11: 5-9 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶The LORD said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to***

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 56 – THE HOLY SPIRIT - BUILDER]

do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”⁸ So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

There are a number of parallels we can draw from this story with what occurred on the day of Pentecost.

- ◆ Both stories centre on a building. One, the Tower of Babel is built to glorify man, while the second, the church is built to glorify God.
- ◆ In both accounts God uses language to either divide a community, the one in rebellion, or in the case of preparing a holy people, to build a community.
- ◆ ***Acts 2:4-6 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.***
- ◆ Right from the beginning of the church age, the emphasis is on building a community, not one in opposition to God, but one in cooperation with God.
- ◆ Paul describes this community God is building with His Spirit in Ephesians 2.
- ◆ ***Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.***
- ◆ What we see here are people who in the past were scattered, and at enmity with one another, (Jews and Gentiles) being brought together into one community (Galatians 3:28).
- ◆ But in contrast to the attitude of defiance displayed at Babel, we see a totally different perspective displayed by those involved with the construction of this building.
- ◆ ***V.20 ...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.***
- ◆ Unlike the tyrant (supposedly Nimrod) who organised the people in rebellion against God at Babel, here we see the one directing the building of this new edifice through the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ Himself.
- ◆ Those involved with the construction of this building will cooperate with the Spirit and take on Christ's name (Christians) as He conforms them into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).
- ◆ And amazingly, unlike the bricks and mortar used on most construction sites including the Tower of Babel, this building is being constructed with those individuals who willingly commit their lives to Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The apostle Peter refers to these individuals as “living stones.”
- ◆ ***1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— ⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***
- ◆ Instead of defiance and rebellion, we see “*spiritual sacrifices*” of adoration and obedience.
- ◆ And unlike the Tower of Babel that was built to glorify man, this building is being constructed to glorify God.
- ◆ Notice what this building is called and what its purpose is to be.
- ◆ ***Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.***
- ◆ This building is being constructed “living stone” by “living stone” to be God's dwelling place.
- ◆ Under this New Covenant, God is not interested in living in tabernacles of canvas or temples made of stone. No, His purpose from the beginning is to dwell with, and incredibly, through the Holy Spirit, within us, as Paul goes on to say.
- ◆ ***V.22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.***
- ◆ Notice the last part of this verse. God's purpose remains the same, to build a loving community between God and His people.

It is very important to understand exactly what is happening here, as this is one of the most important distinctions between the Old and the New Covenants.

- ◆ God dwelt with Israel in a corporate sense first through the tabernacle and later through the temple. But never was this privilege extended to individuals.
- ◆ The prophecies of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:26-27) spoke about a time in the future when God's presence would once again dwell with His people.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 56 – THE HOLY SPIRIT - BUILDER]

- ◆ God withdrew His presence from Israel after their persistent disobedience. Solomon's temple was destroyed and the survivors were marched off into captivity in Babylon.
- ◆ **Jeremiah 31:33** *"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*
- ◆ The Mosaic Law was an external law written on tables of stone (2 Corinthians 3:7).
- ◆ As such, there was a vast gulf between what the law required, holiness, and the people's ability to attain the holiness it required.
- ◆ This deficiency had to be addressed and God's answer under the New Covenant is to actually come and dwell with them internally.
- ◆ This fact creates a whole new way of identifying God's people.
- ◆ In the past under the Mosaic Covenant the people of God were identified by their relationship to the Torah or the law.
- ◆ The law spelled out in minute detail every aspect of their lives from their worship to their eating habits, etc.
- ◆ Even today, it's easy to identify a Jew by the day on which they worship, what they eat, and what they wear, etc.
- ◆ But the purpose of the law was not just so outsiders could identify Israelites by external means. The primary purpose of the law was to make them holy as God is holy (Leviticus 19:2).
- ◆ First and foremost, the intent of the law and the commands of God both Old and New Covenant, are a reflection of God's holy nature of love.
- ◆ They were given to Israel in a very elementary form in order for them to strive to become a holy people reflecting God's holy nature (Leviticus 19:2).
- ◆ But becoming holy is more about internal change than external change.
- ◆ As Jesus' many arguments with the Pharisees exposed, the Jews had become experts obeying the externals, but had neglected the real change that needs to happen on the inside.
- ◆ **Matthew 23:23** *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.*
- ◆ The Jews had become masters of the externals, but in order to become God's holy people, change was required on the inside and this was the failing of the Mosaic Covenant.
- ◆ **Hebrews 8:7-8** *For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸ But God found fault with the people and said: "The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.*
- ◆ The problem was not with the law. The problem was with the people's inability to live up to its righteous requirements even in its most elementary form expressed in the Mosaic Covenant.
- ◆ This explains the disciple's astonishment when Jesus comes along and claims, *"... unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).*
- ◆ The good news is our righteousness does indeed exceed that of the Pharisees because it is Christ's righteousness that is attributed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- ◆ This is the righteousness associated with our salvation, which justifies us in God's sight.
- ◆ But there is a second righteousness that the Holy Spirit is to develop in God's people, righteousness that is a reflection of God's holy nature of love.
- ◆ This is the righteousness Jesus expressed through His teaching and exemplified in the life He lived.
- ◆ His life and teachings show us what true holiness looks like.
- ◆ But in response to the failing of the Mosaic Covenant to bring about this transformation, God's response with the New Covenant is for God to come and literally live in us.
- ◆ **Jeremiah 31:33** *"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*
- ◆ It is the presence of the Holy Spirit living in us that brings about a transformation on the inside.
- ◆ And rather than being recognised by externals like circumcision, days and diet (Romans 14:17), our godly behaviour inspired by the Holy Spirit living in us is now what identifies God's holy people.

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 56 – THE HOLY SPIRIT - BUILDER]

- ◆ ***2 Corinthians 3:2-3 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone.³ You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.***
- ◆ God's people are now identified by the degree by which they allow the Holy Spirit to reflect God's divine nature in them.
- ◆ These individual saints or living stones come together and rise into a holy community called the church.
Prior to Jesus' resurrection, the Jews on Pentecost would celebrate the giving of the law to Israel, laws that were written on tables of stone.
- ◆ After the New Testament Pentecost, Christians, both Jews and Gentiles celebrate God writing his holy nature on the hearts of believers through His Holy Spirit.
- ◆ The New Covenant under the guidance of Jesus Christ, through the Spirit is the framework on which this holy temple is being built.
- ◆ The necessary factors for the preparation of a holy people are now in place.
- ◆ Now we need to look at other roles of the Holy Spirit.