

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 57 - THE HOLY SPIRIT – HEART SURGEON]

We have been looking at the work of the Holy Spirit as He sets about preparing a holy people for God.

- ◆ We have 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.
- ◆ Then last time we looked at another title that describes the work of the Holy Spirit and that is, the Holy Spirit as “builder.”
- ◆ We went back to the story of the Tower of Babel and compared the differences between two buildings. One being erected by a human community in defiance of God and one being built by Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit in glory to God.
- ◆ In both accounts language is used by God to either divide a community, the one in rebellion, or in the case of preparing a holy people, to build a community.
- ◆ 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 commit their lives to Jesus Christ.
- ◆ The apostle Peter refers to these individuals as “living stones.”
- ◆ This building is being constructed “living stone” by “living stone” to be God’s dwelling place, a holy temple.

We then went on to show how this new dynamic of the Holy Spirit indwelling God’s people is one of the major distinctions between the Old and the New Covenants.

- ◆ Under the Mosaic Covenant the people of God were identified by their relationship to the Torah or the law.
- ◆ Now under the New Covenant God would “***put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.***” (***Jeremiah 31:33***).
- ◆ The main reason for this change was to address the deficiency which existed between what the law required, holiness, and the people’s inability to attain the holiness it required.
- ◆ It is the presence of the Holy Spirit living in us that brings about 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.
- ◆ These individual saints or living stones come together and rise into a holy community called the church.

Now we need to look at the role of the Holy Spirit as “heart surgeon.”

- ◆ As mentioned, God is building a holy temple that is being constructed “living stone” by “living stone.”
- ◆ As we have emphasised throughout this series, God’s purpose from the beginning is to make man in His image.
- ◆ Now we need to address the question, what is this man in God’s image supposed to look like?
- ◆ Well we get an indication of this from what God expected of ancient Israel
- ◆ ***Leviticus 19:2 “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’”***
- ◆ His expectation in now dealing with the church remains the same.
- ◆ ***1 Peter 1:15-16 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”***
- ◆ And if that wasn’t enough, Jesus’ instruction in the Sermon on the Mount is, “***Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***” (***Matthew 5:48***).
- ◆ Now with all this talk of holiness and perfection, one could be forgiven for feeling a little inadequate in meeting God’s high expectation of fallible humans.
- ◆ But as we have seen with previous examples where we humans fall short of God’s expectations, He steps in and provides the means to achieve the impossible.
- ◆ Don’t also make the mistake of thinking that being in God’s image is just a matter of us achieving a better record when it comes to obedience to God’s law.
- ◆ Perfection and holiness in God’s eyes is much more than simply perfect obedience.
- ◆ Sadly, this limited perspective has been perpetuated over the centuries by the church itself with its overemphasis on obedience to the law.
- ◆ God’s expectation in us becoming holy and perfect goes back to God’s mission statement, of making us in HIS image.
- ◆ God does not want children who are obedient simply out of duty; He wants children who willingly choose to reflect all the divine characteristics of His loving nature.

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- ◆ As mentioned earlier, the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments including the law or Torah are a reflection of God's divine nature.
- ◆ Jesus criticised the Pharisees for their mistake in limiting God's requirement for "holiness" to mean dutiful obedience to the law.
- ◆ They went as far as tithing on their herbs, all the while neglecting "***the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness***" (***Matthew 23:23***).
- ◆ While righteousness is a very important aspect of God's divine nature, so are "***justice, mercy and faithfulness.***"
- ◆ The truth of the matter is, Israel would never have survived as long as they did if it weren't for God's justice, mercy and faithfulness to them over 1200 years.
- ◆ They even missed this connection when Jesus stood before them and told them stories like the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son and when the woman caught in adultery was brought before Him.
- ◆ The irony of it all was they failed to recognise this is precisely how a faithful, merciful God had related to them over the centuries.
- ◆ The point is, when we speak of God's holiness and perfection, we have to recognise we are talking about much more than righteousness. We are talking about all the many facets of God's divine nature of love.
- ◆ Over the centuries, many adjectives have been used to try to help finite humans to understand an infinite God.
- ◆ Yet each of these will be shown to be totally inadequate when we finally meet God face to face as He is transcendent, and at this present time we simply lack the capacity to comprehend a God who is infinite.
- ◆ Now just so we don't misunderstand, when we talk about being in the image of God, we have to recognise we will not be God, we will simply be in His image.
- ◆ We will not have those qualities of God that make Him uniquely God, such as His being eternal, omnipotent, omniscience, omnipresent, sovereign, creator, etc.
- ◆ However, what we will inherit as His children is God's divine nature of love.
- ◆ This is the miraculous benefit the Holy Spirit brings with Him when He takes up residence in God's people.

It is God living in us which now allows humans to bridge this gulf between what holiness requires and humanity's inability to live up to those demanding requirements.

- ◆ ***Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.***
- ◆ Notice again how all humanity has been implicated in Jesus' life, death and resurrection.
- ◆ Now notice the miraculous change of nature that comes over a person once the Holy Spirit takes up residence in their lives.
- ◆ ***V.12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.***
- ◆ Despite the evil influences that surround a Christian in this present age, they are now given the capacity to overcome evil in all its forms.
- ◆ ***V.13 ...while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.***
- ◆ There is a process God's people are being taken through to purify them as His holy people.
- ◆ But notice the dramatic change in a person's attitude regarding good and evil, "***eager to do what is good.***"
- ◆ This takes us back again to what motivates us internally.
- ◆ In the past, prior to our conversion, the apostle Paul tells us, we lived a life motivated by what he calls "the flesh."
- ◆ A caution here about this term, "the flesh."
- ◆ The flesh of and by itself is not the problem. After all, at creation God pronounced it "very good."
- ◆ The problem lies with the use to which the "flesh" is put and this goes back to motivation.
- ◆ In Romans 8 Paul contrasts the effects of a mind motivated by the flesh as opposed to a mind motivated by the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ ***Romans 8:5-7 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is***

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hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

- ◆ Living according to the "flesh" is the unfortunate state mankind brought on itself when they rebelled against their Creator.
- ◆ God honoured their selfish desire to be their own gods by allowing them to experience a life motivated by selfishness.
- ◆ This is why humans in their fallen state are selfish by nature. We are self-centred, self-serving, self-absorbed and egotistical.
- ◆ The results of this self-centred approach leads to the following problems.
- ◆ ***Galatians 5:19-20 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.***
- ◆ However, it is in the midst of our selfish, depraved behaviour, that God comes to our rescue.
- ◆ He forgives us through the saving work of Jesus Christ, and then if we are responsive to the grace He extends us, He promises to replace this heart of stone motivated by selfishness with the heart of God motivated by love.
- ◆ This turns our motivation from one of selfishness to one of selflessness, the same kind of selflessness that inspired Jesus to present Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.
- ◆ And if we want a role model for what it means to be a man in God's image, we will ultimately be directed back to the self-sacrificing example of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ ***Romans 8:29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.***
- ◆ It is through Jesus that we are truly introduced to God's divine nature as He is the perfect reflection of that nature (Hebrews 1:3).
- ◆ And in the same way Jesus allowed Himself to be directed by the Holy Spirit during His earthly life, this divine help is also available to those who willingly submit to His leading.
- ◆ In contrast to the acts of the flesh mentioned earlier, we are now introduced to the acts or fruits of the Spirit by the apostle Paul.
- ◆ ***Galatians 5:22-24 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.***
- ◆ The goal of the Holy Spirit as our heart surgeon is to inspire us to allow Him to come and live in us so that we develop the divine nature of God reflected by these virtues.
- ◆ In the past the law or Torah was to be the vehicle to teach holiness. Now it is the Lawgiver living inside of us.
- ◆ ***Hebrews 8:10 This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.***
- ◆ The law in this context is meant to be a reflection of God's divine nature of love.
- ◆ It is only natural if God is living in us that there will be a change in our nature.
- ◆ When Jesus promised the disciples He would send the Holy Spirit to be in them (John 14:17), He was not limiting the indwelling to just the Holy Spirit; the whole Trinity was going to show up.
- ◆ ***John 14:23 Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father, will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.***
- ◆ Believe me, when the Trinity is invited to take up residence in our hearts, things are going to change.
- ◆ And as this is happening internally rather than externally as it did in the past under the law, the holiness of God is the end result.

There is much more going on here than just achieving individual holiness. Ultimately God living in us is about developing a holy community.

- ◆ Last time we talked about the building made up of living stones being made into a dwelling place for God.
- ◆ Let me ask you this question. Will we learn more about God's nature from a list of external laws or from God Himself living in us?

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- ◆ God through successive stages is drawing closer and closer to man so that we get to know Him intimately.
- ◆ He first revealed Himself to Israel through the law. He then revealed Himself to humanity through Jesus. Now He reveals Himself to us through the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ We now have three very tangible methods of coming to understand and know God on a personal level.
- ◆ 1) We have the teachings of the Old Testament which were expanded on and magnified by the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament writers (Matthew 5:17-30).
- ◆ 2) We have the personal example of God in the flesh, Jesus, recorded for us in the New Testament.
- ◆ 3) We have the Holy Trinity taking up residence in our lives inspiring our thoughts and actions so that we begin to think and act as God does.
- ◆ So not only is the Holy Spirit teaching us to conduct ourselves as God's holy people, He is also revealing the Father's divine nature of love to us so we get to know Him on a very personal level.
- ◆ Unfortunately, when Christianity places too much emphasis on the external law, it hinders the work of the Holy Spirit who is working internally to reveal and create in us God's divine nature of love in all its facets.

Next time we will look at more aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit.