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The Witness Of The Spirit

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The witness of the Spirit is far more comprehensive than many suppose. Multitudes do not believe that there is any such thing, while others confine it to the forgiveness of sins and adoption into the family of God. But the truth is that the Holy Spirit witnesses to much more than this.

He witnesses to the sinner that he is guilty, condemned before God, and lost. This we call conviction; but it is none other than the witness of the Spirit to the sinner's true condition. And when a man realizes it, nothing can convince him to the contrary. His friends may point out his good works, his kindly disposition, and try to assure him that he is not a bad man. But, so long as the Spirit continues to witness to his guilt, nothing can console him or reassure his quaking heart.

This convicting witness may come to a sinner at any time, but it is usually given under the searching preaching of the Gospel, or the burning testimony of those who have been gloriously saved and sanctified; or in time of danger, when the soul is awed into silence, so that it can hear the "still small voice" of the Holy Spirit.

Again, the Holy Spirit not only witnesses to the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God, but He also witnesses to sanctification. "For by one offering," says the Apostle, "he (that is, Jesus) hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us."

Indeed, one who has this witness can no more doubt it than a man with two good eyes can doubt the existence of the sun when he steps forth into the splendor of a cloudless noonday. It satisfies him, and he cries out exultingly, "We know, we know!"

Paul seems to teach that the Holy Spirit witnesses to every good thing God works in us, for he says: "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (I Cor. 2:12). It is for our comfort and encouragement to know our acceptance of God and our rights, privileges, and possessions in Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit is given for this purpose, that we may know.

But it is important to bear in mind God's plan of work in this matter. The witness of the Spirit is dependent upon our faith. God does not give it to those who do not believe in Jesus. And if our faith wavers, the witness will become intermittent. And if faith fails, it will be withdrawn.

Owing to the unsteadiness of their faith, many young converts get into uncertainty. Happy are they at such times if some one is at hand to instruct and encourage

them to look steadfastly to Jesus. But, alas! many old Christians (?) through unsteady faith walk in gloom and uncertainty and, instead of encouraging the young, they discourage them. Steadfast faith will keep the inward witness bright.

We must not get our attention off Jesus, and the promises of God in Him, and fix it upon the witness of Spirit. The witness continues only while we look unto Jesus, and trust and obey Him. When we take our eyes off Him, the witness is gone. Many people fail here. Instead of quietly and confidently looking unto Jesus, and trusting Him, they are vainly looking for the witness; which is as though a man should try to realize the sweetness of honey, without receiving it in his mouth; or the beauty of a picture, while having his eyes turned inward upon himself instead of outward upon the picture. Jesus saves. Look to Him, and He will send the Spirit to witness to His work.

The witness may be brightened by diligence in the discharge of duty, by frequent seasons of glad prayer, by definite testimony to salvation and sanctification, and by stirring up our faith.

The witness may be dulled by neglect of duty, by sloth in prayer, inattention to the Bible, by indefinite, hesitating testimony, and by carelessness, when we should be careful to walk soberly and steadfastly with the Lord.

I dare not say that the witness of Spirit is dependent upon our health; but there are some forms of nervous and organic disease that seem so to distract or becloud the mind as to interfere with the clear discernment of the witness of the Spirit. I knew a nervous little child who would be so distracted with fear by an approaching carriage, when being carried across the street in her father's arms, that she seemed to be incapable of hearing or heeding his reassuring voice.

It may be that there are some diseases that for the time prevent the sufferer from discerning the reassuring witness of the heavenly Father. Dr. Asa Mahan told me of an experience of this kind which he had in a very dangerous sickness. And Dr. Daniel Steele had a similar experience while lying at the point of death with typhoid fever. But some of the happiest Christians the world has seen have been racked with pain and tortured with disease.

And so there may be seasons of fierce temptations when the witness is not clearly discerned; but we may rest assured that if our hearts cleave to Jesus Christ and duty, He will never leave or forsake us. Blessed be God!

But the witness will be lost if we wilfully sin, or persistently neglect to follow when He leads. This witness

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