

## Chapter Three

### The Gift of the Holy Spirit: 1

#### The Holy Spirit makes us Heirs

*Purpose:* The principal aim of this teaching is to help us to realize that the Holy Spirit is given to every Christian, to grasp the richness and abundance of this gift, and to understand our dignity as sons and daughters of God, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8: 17).

*Presentation:* Full use should be made of the key passages in Romans 8 and Galatians 4. The Trinitarian structure of all Christian and ecclesial life should be brought out, by showing the position and dignity of Jesus the Son, in whom we become sons and daughters of the Father. It may be felt that the opening section on “Jesus the heir” complicates the teaching too much. In this case it can be left out, though it remains important that the teacher understands well that the Christian’s position as heir is a participation in the one heir, the only Son of the Father. It is helpful to accompany this teaching by a testimony that witnesses to a new grasp of the abundance of the Father’s gift of the Spirit and of the dignity we have as the sons and daughters of the Father.

#### Jesus the Heir

We read in the letter to the Hebrews: “in these last days he [the Father] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things” (Heb. 1: 2). The parable of the vineyard owner who goes to a far country and then sends servants to collect the fruit is a clear reference to God the Father and to the Old Testament prophets. When the tenants abuse and even kill the servants, the vineyard owner sends his son, saying, “They will respect my son.” (Matt. 21: 37). But they do not respect the son either: “when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’” (Matt. 21: 38). We cannot seize the inheritance from Jesus, but he gives us freely a share in his inheritance through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In his human nature, Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit and then at his baptism he is filled with the Holy Spirit. But in his resurrection and ascension to the Father, the humanity of Jesus is totally glorified and

penetrated by God's glory; this is also the work of the Holy Spirit: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear." (Acts 2: 33).

The Scriptures use this image of abundance, of "pouring out", of holding nothing back. "I have come", says Jesus, "that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10: 10). God is not stingy or mean with the Holy Spirit. "For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that he gives the Spirit." (John 3: 34). The apostle Paul also uses the image of "pouring out": "hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." (Rom. 5: 5).

With his resurrection-ascension the total fullness of the Godhead is diffused through every fibre of the humanity of Jesus. In consequence, he can be the perfect vehicle for the transmission of the Spirit to his disciples (see John 7: 39). Through the gift of the Spirit we are given a share in this fullness: "For in him [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head" (Col. 2: 9 - 10). The apostle John expresses this with his usual profound simplicity: "And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace." (John 1: 16).

### Through the Holy Spirit we become heirs in Christ

In both Romans 8 and Galatians 4, Paul makes clear that we are made sons of God through the Holy Spirit. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Rom. 8: 14). The apostle continues: "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship." (Rom. 8: 15). This spirit of sonship is manifested through the way that we pray. "When we cry, 'Abba, Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." (Rom. 8: 16). When we know that we are sons or daughters of God, we spontaneously cry out "Abba, Father": and Abba is an intimate family-context usage like "Papa" or "Daddy". When we cry out to the Father, the Holy Spirit is working within us through and on our spirits. The Holy Spirit does not just cause us to be born as children of God, but dwells permanently within the children of the Father. The sons/daughters of God know that the Spirit of God is

present and at work in them. The language of Galatians is similar: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba, Father!’.” (Gal. 4: 6).

Both passages move directly from being sons to being heirs. “So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.” (Gal. 4: 7). In Romans the dignity of heir is related both to the Father and to the Son: “and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8: 17). We only become heirs of God, because we are co-heirs with Jesus. This is another aspect of the revelation concerning Jesus as the only Saviour (see Acts 4: 12), and as the only way to the Father, for “no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14: 6). It is only as we are baptized into the death of Christ that we share in his resurrection-life (see Rom. 6: 3 - 8). As we are united to Jesus in his death, so we rise to share in the inheritance of Jesus that is the kingdom of eternal life.

What does it mean to be an heir? Basically 2 things:

1. To have an inheritance that is guaranteed,
2. To have to wait to receive the inheritance.

Both these aspects are expressed by the apostle Peter: “By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1: 3 - 5).

Chapter Two examined the essential link between the gift of faith and receiving the promises of God. Our inheritance is what God has promised. “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” (Gal. 3: 29). While a human being determining his or her heir(s) can change his/her mind, God does not go back on his promises. Once an heir of God, always an heir of God.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The possibility of losing our salvation remains, though refusing God’s choice is not easy because of God’s faithfulness and determination. But where this happens, it is not a question of God “changing his mind”, but of our resolute determination to refuse what God has given and never revokes. It would be like an heir who renounces an inheritance, which remains his entitlement.

How do we enter fully into the inheritance of the sons and daughters of God? The New Testament uses two different images. The first is a comparison with childhood: “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate; but he is under guardians and trustees until the date set by his father:” (Gal. 4: 1 - 2). Here the time of childhood is speaking of the Jewish people prior to coming to receive Jesus as Lord and the gift of the Holy Spirit. “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Gal. 4: 4 - 5). Here Paul is teaching that Christians who have received the Spirit have in one way already entered into the inheritance. A degree of fulfilment comes with the gift of the Spirit. The coming kingdom already enters into us. But there is still the fulfilment to come: “For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness.” (Gal. 5: 5).

But in Romans we find a slightly different emphasis based upon our current status as children of God. Paul tells the Romans that if they are children, then they are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Rom. 8: 17). Here he focuses on the coming glory with which it is not worth comparing our present sufferings (Rom. 8: 18): remember that there were already martyrs in Rome. Paul now speaks of the longing of creation “for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom. 8: 19). But it is not only the creation that groans in travail for the manifestation of the sons of God, that means redeemed humanity, finally glorified at the resurrection of the just. It is also us: we also groan in travail: “we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” (Rom. 8: 23). Here, differently from Galatians, Paul is seeing our final glorification in our bodies on the last day as our full adoption as sons of God. Here we find a message that runs throughout the New Testament: our inheritance is full salvation, our total deliverance from all sin, from all suffering, from all temptation, in the resurrection of the body on the last day.

Thus, while we have begun to enter into our inheritance through the gift of the Spirit already poured into our hearts, we remain subject to

suffering, temptations and mortality. We have not yet entered fully into the inheritance. This has to wait until the last day, until Jesus comes in glory, until the dead are raised, and we are seen and we see each other as the glorified sons and daughters of God freed from all the trials and limitations of our present life on earth.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Do you know that you are a son or daughter of the Father? If so, have you moved on to understand that you are also an heir with an inheritance?
2. What difference do these realizations make to our experience of disappointment, of frustration and of suffering?