

Holy Spirit Joel 2:28-32 & John 4:1-26

I've called this series "Christianity Nuts and Bolts" which gives the impression that I'm a pretty practical kind-of-guy, that I relish a bit of DIY and that, down at Homebase, they know me by name.

Well, after last week, you won't be surprised to know that I have a B&Q loyalty card however, although I would love to be amazing at DIY, I have got to be honest with you – it's not my strongest skill. That said, there are a lot of people who are worse than me.

Back in April last year a national newspaper ran a story with the headline;

"Should have waited for a professional!"

The story was full of people revealing their DIY fails after trying to do home improvements during lockdown. Such as...

While trying to strip off old wallpaper during a house renovation project, one person told how they got more than they bargained for as chunks of the wall came with it.

Another reader joked something didn't seem quite right with their kitchen cupboards - revealing a photograph of the doors on upside down.

And an artist made an unfortunate error while trying to construct a hat box, using No More Nails instead of PVA glue. They wrote: 'Now I've got no more nails or fingerprints and the kitchen worktop isn't looking too good either.'

I'm not that bad.

In fact, I was pretty impressed with myself when I received an email from B&Q about a week ago listing the 10 basic tools everyone should have in their toolbox - I could tick off nine.

I may not have all the kit that my very practical Father-in-Law has, but I've got (pretty much) what I need for day to day requirements.

And for Christians that's a good place to start with the Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit is what we need to live out practical godly lives, day by day, because we can't do it ourselves.

But actually, the first thing we need to grasp is that when we talk about the Holy Spirit we are never talking about an "it", we are talking about "he".

My drill, or sander, or power screwdriver's are all "its", but the Holy Spirit is one person of the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he is one person of God, so he is always a "he".

So, rather than saying "the Holy Spirit is what we need to live out practical godly lives, day by day" we always need to say, "the Holy Spirit is who we need to live out practical godly lives, day by day."

Now, a couple of weeks back, on Pentecost, we saw how, right at the beginning of our Bibles, God's Holy Spirit was at work in the creation of the universe – God's Holy Spirit has always been a part of God, a person of God, but he isn't all about drawing attention to himself.

You might go to some churches or meet some Christians who seem to make the Holy Spirit the main aspect of God that they worship, but the Holy Spirit himself never tries to make himself the focus of worship.

Of course, he is worshipped as a person of the triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) but what the Holy Spirit does is draw our attention to Jesus who leads us into the presence of the Father.

That's why in the Old Testament there is this real desire and expectation for the Holy Spirit to come in a greater measure, there is that famous passage from Joel 2 where God promises;

“And afterwards,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

Did you notice, God is speaking about a time that was to come, a point in the future when his Spirit would be poured out on all his people?

The incredible news for us as Christians is that we now live in the time when that has happened, when God's Spirit has been poured out upon all believers. God promised it back in the Old Testament and Jesus promised it would happen after he ascended to reign with his Father God and now that has come to pass.

John tells us in his Gospel “[Jesus] meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”¹ The Holy Spirit waited until Jesus had ascended so that then he could bring all the blessings of Christ's finished work into the life of the believer.

¹ John 7:39

So, God's Holy Spirit was promised to God's people and, as we saw at Pentecost, he came on God's people after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, but what does the Holy Spirit do for us and with us and in us?

The first thing God's Holy Spirit does it to convict us of our sin. People often talk about their conscience and that is an aspect of the Spirit's work, but more than that he opens our eyes up to see the depths of our fallen nature before God. Speaking to his disciples about the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, "When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment."

Like a lawyer in a court, the Holy Spirit presents us with our failings; failings of ourself and our failings towards others, but it is the Holy Spirit who really wakes us up to see that we have failed to live up to God's standards, God's holiness and that more than just letting ourselves and others down, we have let God down – remember "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God²" – that means us.

And it's not just that we are so clever that we reach this brilliant conclusion one day, it is God's Spirit who enables us to move from blindly disregarding God to the conviction that we are sinners.

But the Spirit not only convicts us of our sin, but he also then enables us to be spiritually born to new life.

People can get very snifty about Christians who describe themselves as "born again" – it has become associated with something a little undesirable, like American TV evangelists. But Jesus tells Nicodemus (a Jewish Pharisee and teacher of God's law) that we must all be born again;

² Romans 3:23

“Jesus answered, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.””³

You must be born again of the Spirit. No “ifs” no “buts”, there is no possibility of being a Christian and not being spiritually born again, of not being filled with God’s Holy Spirit and beginning a new life with him.

Don’t be put off by people who speak of being filled with the Spirit or born again as if that means you must suddenly start prophesying or speaking in tongues. That is not the primary work of the Spirit – first and foremost God’s Holy Spirit is pointing us to Jesus and helping us to become more like Jesus in our everyday lives.

But living daily for Jesus can be quite difficult – it involves a change of attitude – no longer “my will be done” but “Thy will, God’s will, be done”. For that to take place we need help and we need assurance.

And God’s Spirit then enables us to know (as we open up God’s Word) how to live a life that honours and glorifies God as well as what not to do – what actions, thoughts, words, attitudes are not Christlike, are not God-honouring and not appropriate for followers of Christ crucified to exhibit.

Galatians 5:16-18 tells us;

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.

³ John 3:5-7

They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.”

There we are encouraged to allow the Holy Spirit to be at work in us so that we live more Christ-like lives and less sin-like lives which reject or replace God.

The Holy Spirit helps us to find ways out of temptation, anger, selfishness – he produces in us what the Bible calls the “fruit of the Spirit”;

“love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”.

I haven't got that cracked yet! Every Christian is a work in progress – none of us are all fruit of the Spirit, but as we daily submit to God's Holy Spirit in our lives, we will become less god-less and more god-ly – God pleasing in what we say, do and think.

One of the ways that we do that is that we will find, as Christians, that we will want to engage with God's Word, the Bible. The Holy Spirit makes God's Word attractive to us, desirable and fascinating. We are going to think more about the Bible in a couple of weeks so we will pick this up then.

Sometimes some of us have a spiritual wobble. We wonder whether or not we really are saved. Well, the Bible which is the “sword of the Spirit” tells us that as we are filled and filled again with the Holy Spirit⁴ and therefore we become a Temple of the Holy Spirit⁵ - the place on earth where God dwells just as in the Old Testament times he dwelt in the Holy Of Holies at the centre of the Jerusalem Temple.

⁴ Ephesians 5:18

⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:19

Basically, God's Spirit gives us assurance of our salvation because in 1 John 4:13 we read, "This is how we know that we live in [God] and [God] in us: he has given us of his Spirit."

The very fact that God is present in us by his Holy Spirit is the assurance that we are saved!

And so, our lives become daily acts of worship to God empowered by His Holy Spirit. When Jesus encountered the women at the well, he was radical – for a start, he talked to her which was not the sort of thing a man would do in that time.

Secondly he (a Jew) spoke to her (a Samaritan) which was doubly unheard of. But then, amongst the challenging and encouraging things he said to her, he announced that a time had arrived when God would be worshipped not in the Jerusalem temple as the Jews thought that he had to be, nor on the top of Mount Gerizim where the Samaritans had set up an alternative venue but rather John 4:23-24; "a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Where God was worshipped was not the important point – how God was worshipped was. It doesn't matter if you are in Jerusalem, up Mount Gerizim, in a traditional medieval building or a purpose built modern worship centre, your lounge or a forest. It doesn't matter if you use the Book of Common Prayer, Common Worship, traditional hymns or modern worship songs, what is important is whether or not we are allowing God's Holy Spirit to motivate and empower our worship of God.

The kind of worshippers the Father seeks are will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth.

So, what assures us of our salvation is not our weekly attendance at church – we do that to worship God together in community, rather it is the way we worship – the way we rely on God’s Holy Spirit to lead us into truthful/biblical worship of God.

So, what is the Holy Spirit?

Wrong question – the Holy Spirit is not a tool from a toolbox, he is a “who” not a what.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is God in us, given to assure God’s people of their salvation through faith in Christ alone. He is the essential presence of God in a believer’s life to enable, empower and equip us to live for God and to become more like Jesus.

He is freely given to all who have trusted Jesus with their salvation, but he is not to be neglected, side-lined or dismissed. Without allowing him to have his way in our lives we will not honour God and our worship will not be acceptable to God.

So, have we been born again, filled, and filled again daily with God’s Spirit? None of us are perfect, but are we trying to be more like Jesus in our own strength or are we allowing God himself to make us more like Jesus day by day through his Spirit.

If I want to attach something to a door with a screw I would be mad to try to do it with my fingers – I have a power screwdriver at my disposal. If we want to live for God, we would be equally foolish to try to do it ourselves when God has given us himself for that purpose.

God has poured out his Spirit on all his people, so let’s worship him in Spirit and in truth. Amen.