

## **Understanding the Realm of the Spirit**

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood and daunting, yet dynamic and necessary aspects of Christian living, is that of the realm of the Spirit. Misunderstood, because it defies our natural thinking, and daunting, because it challenges us to move into the invisible areas of faith and discernment. But it is also dynamic and necessary, because without the insight and power of the 'God factor', we are left with nothing but 'form and ritual' in a natural world.

We need to make clear that there is a broader sense in which 'the spirit realm' can be understood. This would include all that is spiritual: the Holy Spirit, the human spirit, the angelic realm, and Satan and his evil spirits, which do all need to be understood, but our primary focus will be on the reality and the functions of the Holy Spirit, and our interactions with him that he is leading us into through our reborn human spirit.

### **Recognising our Christian Foundations**

As Bible-believing Christians, our starting point for understanding this vital area of Christian life will necessarily be the creation narratives and the whole Old Testament, from which the Christian revelation through Jesus Christ has come.

Who we Christians refer to as the Holy Spirit, was primarily known in the Old Testament as the 'Spirit of God', or the 'Spirit of the Lord', and sparingly as the Holy Spirit. Some examples:

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* (Gen 1:1-2)

*<sup>13</sup> So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David.* (1Sam 16:13)

David said much later: *<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.* (Ps 51:11)

After Israel's defeat and banishment into exile in Babylon, God began to inspire several prophets to proclaim God's vision regarding a future outpouring of the Spirit of God that would revitalise the nation's identity.

### **The Promise of a Future Outpouring of God's Spirit**

The exciting thing about these prophecies for a discouraged nation in captivity was, instead of the occasional outbreak of the Spirit of God's activity upon great leaders, like Abraham, Moses, King David, and a succession of prophets, the promise of these prophetic visions was about a renewal of the nation, and ultimately, of a time when there would be God's permanent presence with God's people from all nations.

Isaiah – <sup>1</sup>*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.* <sup>2</sup>*The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD –* <sup>3</sup>*and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.* Prophetic of the Messiah – Jesus! (Is 11:1-3)

Ezekiel – <sup>26</sup>*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* <sup>27</sup>*And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.* (Ezek 36:26-27)

Joel – <sup>28</sup>*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.* (Joel 2:28)

Israel were well aware of the dynamic and mystery of the realm of the Spirit, even though most had never experienced God's presence and power personally, but they had certainly heard about it, and their whole way of life was based on that reality.

In the same way, the Apostles had never experienced the reality of God's presence before they encountered Jesus! However, it was in his presence they did begin to experience God personally because the Spirit had come upon Jesus at his baptism – and this is how their journey of faith and understanding began to unfold within their lives.

### **Our Challenge is: we currently live in two realms simultaneously**

This is the part we sometimes find difficult to recognise. We are regenerated spiritual beings in Christ – we have entered the *new creation*, while still living in the *old creation*.

- Outward and inward – outwardly we tire, but inwardly we are renewed (2Cor 4:16)
- Visible and invisible – Jesus has made the invisible God visible to us. (Col 1:15-18)
- Natural and spiritual – The natural and the spiritual are part of God's plan (1Cor 15:46)
- Temporal and eternal – seen is temporal; unseen is eternal (2Cor 4:17-18)

### **What do we mean by the realm of the Spirit?**

- God's realm – God is spirit and Eternal Life Jn 4:24; 5:26
  - Born into God's domain of Spirit and eternity Jn 3:3-5
- Intimate friendship with the Holy Spirit 2Cor 13:14

– He reveals the Father to us Jn 16:14-15

– He draws us into a transforming relationship with God 2Cor 3:17-18

- The place of revelation – What cannot be known by our natural senses
  - Revealed by the Spirit 1Cor 2:9-10
  - He reveals the future to us as we need it Jn 16:13
- It is the freedom to live – in him is irrepressible life Jn 1:4; 10:10

Free to love God and others

Free to worship in Spirit and truth,

Free to pray in the Spirit

Free to exercise faith

Free to share our faith

Free to be on the journey of inner transformation

So, to 'be in the Spirit', 'walk in the Spirit', 'live by the Spirit', is simply to be in tune with God's realm, which is spiritual and eternal. It is not about geography but about awareness. As unconditionally loved, born-again children of God, we already have the necessary equipment we need to learn how to be in regular communication with our Lord and Saviour.

Jesus said, *I have come that you might have life, and have it to the full.* (Jn 10:10)

*The Spirit is the one who gives life; human nature is of no help!*

*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.* (Jn 6:63 NET)