**Foundations (31 of 60) The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament - RC Sproul**

Although the Holy Spirit is an equal member of the Trinity, He is often stereotyped as a phenomenon of New Testament times alone. That's our subject on Renewing Your Mind. Whether descending like a dove during Christ's baptism or filling the believers at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit played a prominent role in the New Testament.

But what was His function in Old Testament times? Today on Renewing Your Mind, Dr. R. C. Sproul points to several passages to find relevant clues about the Spirit's activity prior to the incarnation of Christ. We're about halfway through a comprehensive 60-part study titled, Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. And right after today's lesson, we'll explain how to get a copy of the entire series on DVD.

Here's the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R. C. Sproul. The older I get, the more I tend to be nostalgic, reminisce, look back over the years of my life and think of the regrets and those crossroad experiences that I've had. And every time I do that, the one thing that jumps out at me, of course, is that the most overwhelmingly significant event that changed my life more than any other crossroads event in my life was my conversion to Christ.

I mean, that, of course, turned my life upside down. And I remember when it happened that I talked to every person I knew, every friend that I had, and tried to lead them to Christ and to no avail. And, of course, the immediate crisis for me was that I was engaged.

I had gone with this girl for five years, and I wrote to her since she was attending a different college from the one I was going, and explained in great detail the circumstances of my conversion to Christ and what that would mean to our relationship and all the rest. I later found out that she thought that I had simply lost my mind altogether. And so, I had many discussions with her for many months on the phone and through the mail and so on, and was getting nowhere.

And she then came to visit our campus and came to a Bible study that we had on campus. And I picked her up late in the afternoon, and I'd spent the entire morning on my knees praying for her and for that occasion. And to my great delight, that woman was converted to Christ at that meeting, and I went on to marry her.

But I remember Vesta's response to her conversion the next day. She said to me these words. She said, Now I know who the Holy Spirit is.

And I thought that was an interesting and fascinating response to one's awakening to Christ in the first instance. And I've reflected on it more and more over the years, because she had grown up in the environment of the church, and she had heard about the Holy Spirit. She had heard the Trinitarian benediction in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, but she didn't have a personal understanding of the Holy Spirit.

But what I'd like to pick up on right now as we introduce this next segment of our study and overview of theology in the area of what we call pneumatology or the study of the person and work of the Holy Spirit or the Holy Ghost is that Vesta said in that awakening experience, she said to me, Now I know who the Holy Spirit is. And I think it's significant that she didn't say, Now I know what the Holy Spirit is. Because if there's any misconception that abounds in the world's perception of Christianity is that we have this view of some kind of Holy Spirit who is an impersonal force or simply an active power of God.

But it is not to be understood as a true person who is a personal member of the divine Trinity. Again, if you would go through the New Testament teaching, look at the way Jesus speaks about the Holy Spirit. Look at the way in which the apostles write about the Holy Spirit, where the Holy Spirit is referred to as He.

And He does things. He has a will. He has knowledge.

He has affections. All of the things that make up personhood are attributed to God, the Holy Spirit in the Scripture. So the first thing we have to understand about the Holy Spirit is that He is not an it.

Now one of the points of confusion that we have in studying the Holy Spirit is the relationship between the Spirit's activity in the Old Testament and how the Holy Spirit is manifested in the New Testament and in the lives of Christians today. So I want to spend some time doing a little bit of overview of the work of the Holy Ghost in the Old Testament as preparation for a fuller understanding of the Spirit as it is revealed to us in the New Testament. But let's go back to the beginning because it's in the beginning that we first encounter any reference in the Scripture to God the Holy Spirit.

I'm sure most of you are aware of precisely where that is. It's on page 1 in the first chapter of Genesis where we read these words, "...in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep." Those are the first two verses of Genesis. I've gone over this in other series.

In our Dust to Glory series we looked at this in brief, and I've written a book on this whole subject of the person of the Holy Spirit called The Mystery of the Holy Spirit. But now I want to look at this initial confrontation that we have with Him. The Bible tells us, "...in the beginning God makes the heaven and the earth." That's the thematic statement.

And then verse 2 of Genesis is somewhat problematic and has caused quite a bit of consternation among interpreters of Genesis, "...and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep." You know, the popular gap theory that is popular, I would say at a popular level, but doesn't have much credibility in the world of biblical theology, carries the idea that in between verse 1 and verse 2 is the fall, and that the only real verse in Genesis that refers to creation is verse 1. Everything else is referring to something that happens in the gap. But the gap theory to the side, you're still left with this struggle of this portrait of the as yet unordered creation that is described in the categories of darkness and emptiness and formlessness. The earth was without form and was void, and darkness is upon the face of the deep.

Some of you certainly observed from time to time the PBS television segments of Carl Sagan's work called Cosmos, and perhaps even read Sagan's popular book by that same title called Cosmos, which was a runaway bestseller. And if you're at all familiar with the work of Carl Sagan, you remember that Carl Sagan carried no brief for Christianity. He was a scientist, and he didn't appeal to religion in order to ground his own scientific theories.

But one of the things that I found fascinating about him is that in the very first page of his book, which is called Cosmos, he makes the dogmatic assertion that the universe in which we live is cosmos, not chaos. And the difference between cosmos and chaos is the difference between order and confusion. It's the difference between formlessness and form.

And in biblical categories, it's the difference between pure darkness and light, between a vacuous universe that is ultimately empty of anything significant, and that which is filled and teeming with the fruit of the Creator. And so what we have here in the beginning verses of the book of Genesis is a dramatic proclamation of cosmos. And we see in this proclamation of cosmos that the initial verse declares the origin of the universe, not to chaotic soup exploding by itself and creating magically cosmos, as so many people think it did, but a who, who Himself is the author of order and not of confusion, even God, who creates the world.

But still we have this situation, the world was set without form and void, darkness upon the face of the deep, until what? The very next verse is where we meet for the first time God the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Another word for hover that we find in the New Testament is the word brood. It is the same idea that is communicated when the angel Gabriel is sent by God to visit this peasant girl in Nazareth and says to her that she is about to become a mother.

And she says, how can that be since I don't know a man? And the angel says to Mary, here's how it will be, that the Holy Ghost will come upon you so that that which is born by you will be called the Son of the Most High God. And that verb that is mentioned about the Holy Spirit coming upon Him is the same concept that is used here of the creative generating power of the Spirit of God, that God the Holy Spirit comes into this situation of darkness, of formlessness, of emptiness, and He hovers or He broods as a hen broods over her chicks in order to bring forth life from their gestation. So the Spirit produces order and substance and light, and God says, let there be light.

And there was light, and the lights came on. But again, we see that the Holy Spirit, as the New Testament says, is not the author of confusion. He does not generate chaos.

And that's something we need to understand, that the Spirit of God is a Spirit who brings order out of disorder, who brings something out of nothing, who brings light out of darkness. Now, how does He function then in the Old Testament? The first thing, of course, I remember my virgin reading of the Bible right after my conversion was I was overcome by a couple of things. I was overwhelmed in my first initial reading, like reading a novel, of the scariness of God.

You know, I hear people tell me all the time they don't like the God of the Old Testament. They think He's nasty and fierce and mean. But you know, I read it as a converted person, and I would read about these manifestations of the justice of God, of the wrath of God.

Never really bothered me, because I was so acutely conscious of my own sinfulness, I could understand that it was perfectly proper for this God, who was altogether holy, to respond to sin the way He did in the Old Testament. I had no complaint with that. Because the first thing, the first thing that came across to me by reading the Bible was the holiness of God, the overwhelming majesty of God the Father just hit me between the eyes.

And I've never gotten over it, as many people realize. But the second thing that hit me through the reading of the Old Testament was this idea of power, the power of God, the overwhelming power of God. And when we have earthquakes, or if we have tornadoes or volcanic eruptions like at Mount St. Helens or the tornado that swept through the Plains states in Oklahoma and Kansas, where the funnel cloud was reported to be a mile wide, and you see the devastation that was left in its wake, you're overwhelmed by the power of nature.

But those things are nothing compared to the transcendent power of the Lord of all nature that goes beyond anything that happens on this planet, but in the whole cosmic scope of things has the power to create a universe. And you see this power being manifested in the Old Testament principally in terms of the Holy Spirit, who is called in the Greek, by the way, the dunamis of God. And the word dunamis is translated power.

He's the spirit of power. And you can guess, I think, what English word comes from the Greek word dunamis. The word dunamis comes over to English, you just change a couple of letters, and you get dynamite.

Because that's what we encounter when we encounter the power of God the Holy Spirit in Scripture. Well, we see that power manifested in the Old Testament principally two ways. One, we've already indicated, the power of creation.

And the second one is in the power of redemption, where it is the Holy Spirit who is the one who is actively empowering the redemptive process in the Old Testament. Now, we've already looked at the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. And I said that those three offices in the Old Testament, the office of the prophet, the office of the priest, and the office of the king, were all offices of mediators.

Now I'm going to say something else about those offices now. They were all charismatic offices. They were all charismatic offices.

Now, what do I mean by that? And they weren't the only charismatic offices, the prophet, priest, and king, but you also had during a special time period in Israel before kings were anointed, you had other charismatic leaders who were called judges. Now, to say that they were charismatic does not mean that they belonged to a Pentecostal church. That's not the point.

The point comes from the meaning of the term in the Greek charisma, which has to do with the concept of giftedness. Those who were uniquely gifted were anointed by the Holy Spirit. Samson, the Spirit of God came on him, and he was empowered to do the mighty feats that he did, not through his known natural ability, but because he was anointed or gifted charismatically by God.

So, it was the same with Gideon and the prophets. As the Holy Spirit came upon them, the Holy Spirit empowered them for their ministry. The Holy Spirit anointed the priests for ministry.

The Holy Spirit was anointing the king to carry out the work of kingship. And of course, the most gifted person in the Old Testament charismatically was Moses, who received this empowerment from God to lead His people out of the exodus. Now, to illustrate the kind of power that was working out here redemptively in the Old Testament, we see that during the ministry of Moses, his father-in-law, Jethro, observed Moses in all the things that he was doing, that obviously Moses was somewhat pleased about with himself and proud of his accomplishments.

And he explained to Jethro, he said, you know, I judge all the disputes among the people. I give them the law. I intercede with God.

I do this. I led them through the exodus, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And Jethro looked at him and he said, Moses, I perceive that what you were doing is not good.

Not good? What do you mean not good? He said, it's too much for one man to lead these hundreds of thousands of people. You need to organize this new nation that you formed, to break it up into smaller groups. And under the inspiration of God, the Holy Spirit tells Moses to do that.

And so Moses is instructed to separate for himself seventy men that he knows to be the elders of the people. And the point that God says is, I will take the Holy Spirit, Moses, that is upon you, and I will distribute it among these seventy men so that they can minister to the community and to the congregation along with you. Now that's a critical juncture in Old Testament history, and the record of it in its details and in all of its humor, by the way, is found in Numbers chapter 11, where God does just that.

He takes the Spirit that's upon Moses, transfers it to the seventy elders, and they begin to prophesy, and this creates something of a crisis there. But what is going on here is, again, we're seeing the anointing power of the Holy Spirit in order to perform certain functions. Now, one of the things that confuses us is that just because a person is anointed by God the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, or is empowered or enabled to do some of these tasks, does not mean that they have been born of the Holy Spirit, doesn't mean that they're necessarily saved or that they're necessarily believers.

We see the Holy Ghost coming upon Saul and then departing from Saul. We see this where we see people like Balaam inadvertently giving prophecies under the power and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and other people of that ilk who are not necessarily believers. And so that the anointing of the Holy Ghost in the Old Testament, under most circumstances, was a gift, a special gift given to believers, but not only to believers, and was not the same gift as the gift of rebirth.

And we'll see how that works out in the New Testament. But we see some parallels between the Old Testament and the New Testament because we see that in the Old Testament, first the Spirit as an empowering thing is given only to believers. To isolated individuals, to prophets, to priests, to kings, to judges, to Moses, to the artists and craftsmen who were called by God to fashion the furniture for the Ark of the Covenant.

By the way, the first time that the Old Testament says that anybody was filled with the Spirit, it was the craftsmen, it was the artists who were uniquely endowed and gifted by the Holy Spirit to do their work of craftsmanship. But in a sense, the critical point is that not everybody in the camp, not every believer had this gift. It was limited in its dimension in the Old Testament.

And this is what Moses hoped would come to pass and would change in the future, that the new mediator would take His Spirit and give it not just to 70, but to all of His people. And so that this empowerment for ministry would be given to the whole church. And that's exactly what happens at Pentecost, and we'll explore that in greater detail at a later time.

But for now, I want us to see that the basic function of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament that we read about is the empowerment of individuals to carry out functions for God. That doesn't mean that people weren't born of the Spirit in the Old Testament. You couldn't be a believer anymore in the Old Testament when you could in the New Testament without the Spirit's inward work of regeneration.

But we'll consider that in our next discussion. You're listening to the weekend edition of Renewing Your Mind with Dr. R.C. Sproul. Today's message on the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is part of a larger 60-part series titled Foundations, an overview of systematic theology.

This comprehensive presentation from Dr. Sproul is available to you right now on DVD when you give a gift of any amount to the ministry. Request your copy by calling 1-800-435-4343 or look for the title Foundations when you go online to rymoffer.com. If you've listened to Renewing Your Mind for any length of time, you know it's our passion to help you understand what you believe and help you know how to share your faith effectively with others. We believe the comprehensive study of systematic theology with R.C. Sproul is an appropriate way to do that.

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