

Life in the Spirit.

Heidelberg Catechism Question 1 asks: What is thy only comfort in life and death? The response: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, *and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him* (emphasis mine, wa).

These closing remarks of this Question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism echo the Apostle Paul's statements in Romans 8 about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Robert Haldane's in his introduction to Romans Chapter 8 declares "this chapter presents a glorious display of the power of Divine grace, and of the provision which God has made for the consolation of His people."¹ Speaking of believers, as those who are "spiritually-minded, have the Spirit of Christ, and possess spiritual life"² are "led by the Spirit, are the sons of God, look to Him as their Father; are heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ."³ Haldane goes on to explain that the Apostle Paul's assertions are "(to) encourage believers to sustain the sufferings to which, while in this world, they are exposed, the most varied and abundant consolations are exhibited."⁴ Varied and abundant are the consolations exhibited in this chapter indeed, however our theme shall be "walking in the Spirit."

Walking in the Spirit.

Romans 8:1 tells us that those who are in Christ Jesus "walk after the Spirit" (see also v:4) and that 5b: "they that are after the Spirit; (do mind) the things of the Spirit"; and 6b: "to be spiritually minded, is life and peace"; 13b: "do mortify the deeds of the body"; are 14: "led by the Spirit and 26a: helped in "our infirmities" by the Spirit. All these activities can be simply described as "walking in the Spirit"⁵. The same is said of such terms as "filled with the Spirit", "baptised in the Spirit", "receive the Spirit", "filled with the Spirit" and "sealed with the Spirit" (though which is an aspect of adoption). "They describe, more or less indiscriminately, the same experience."⁶

¹ Haldane, R., *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, (Banner of Truth, London, 1963) p. 310.

² Ibid p. 310.

³ Ibid. p. 3.11.

⁴ Ibid. p. 311.

⁵ Charles Hodge makes similar comments regarding being "led by the Spirit" and "walking in the Spirit" in his commentary *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Banner of Truth, London. 1964) p. 265.

⁶ Macleod D., *A Faith to Live For*, (Christian Focus Publications, Fearn. 1998) p. 164

Minding the things of the Spirit v:5b; is life and peace v:6.

John Hannah's essay "Love as the Foundation of Theology"⁷ makes some very interesting observations concerning Jonathon Edwards writings on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer and the implications of this for the believer. Let me quote what Hannah understands Edwards on the indwelling of the Spirit. "The indwelling of the Spirit is, then, the infusion or communication of the life of God into the believer. It is the Spirit of God as expressed by the fruit(s) or moral character of God."⁸ This indwelling of the Spirit of God make us "become instantaneously attracted to the things of Christ"⁹ Romans 8:5b describes this as minding the "things of the Spirit". The whole character of the believer has changed. Now their "thoughts, affections, and pursuits"¹⁰ become a test or witness of their new character. They now possess a "sense of the loveliness of God's character."¹¹ It is this that spurs on the believer to walk in newness of life. Paul is moving us along from faith and justification (v1) to holiness. This life of holiness is not one that can be lived minding after the things of the flesh. Such only comes from the Spirit "ruling and possessing"¹² the believer. Paul repeats this very same message to the church in Galatia in Chapter 5:16-26. As in Romans 8 he keeps repeating "walk in the Spirit" Gal 5:16 and v:18 "be led of the Spirit." Notice too the similarity between Romans 8:6 and Galatians 5:22. Those who are spiritually minded do have life and peace. The Spirit of God is a quickening Spirit. They have eternal life. Living or walking or minding the Spirit produces fruit. An aspect or quality of that fruit is peace. So too is patience v:24. Leon Morris has a very nice quote from Ridderbos, "A fruit is not something that is made or done."¹³ It is a grace that grows (see 2 Peter 1:1-8).

Minding the things of the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit produces the same spiritual activities. In Ephesians 5:18-21 we see the believer minding the things of the Spirit in the speaking of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs for the edification of the brethren of whom they love cp Gal 5:13. They have a heart mindful of the graciousness of God the Father in all things which has come to them through His Son Jesus. In the Spirit they submit one to another, in the fear of God. These activities require a mortifying of the deeds of the body (Romans 8:13).

To mortify the deeds of the body is contrary to walking after the flesh. It is *through* (emphasis mine, wa) the Spirit that we mortify the deeds of the body. This is part and parcel of holiness. Sanctification is a process. It is a gradual work but necessarily it is a visible work. JC Ryle commenting on visible evidence of

⁷ Hannah J., *The Practical Calvinist: Essays, Love as the Foundation of Theology*, (Christian Focus Publications, Fearn. 2002) p. 267 - 279.

⁸ Ibid p. 273.

⁹ Ibid. p. 273

¹⁰ Hodge C., *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Banner of Truth, London. 1964) p. 262

¹¹ Hannah J., *The Practical Calvinist: Essays, Love as the Foundation of Theology*, (Christian Focus Publications, Fearn. 2002) p. 273.

¹² Haldane R., *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, (Banner of Truth, London. 1963) p. 332.

¹³ Morris L., *Galatians* (IVP, Illinois. 1996) p. 173.

sanctification, “True sanctification does not consist in talk about religion.”¹⁴ “God does not want His people to be mere empty tubs, sounding brass and tinkling cymbals. We must be sanctified, not only ‘in word and tongue but in deed and truth’ 1 John 3:18.”¹⁵ And it is only as we walk in or after the Spirit that we shall be both minded and able to mortify the deeds of the body through the Truth. Recall Jesus word’s in His high priestly prayer, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” John 17:17 “Jesus Christ came by water and blood; not by water only, but by water and blood, - signifying by the blood of expiation of the guilt of our sins by His death, and by water the virtue of His Spirit for our sanctification in washing our souls from the pollution of sin.”¹⁶ Mortification or the putting to death of sin is undoubtedly something in which “the saints are active (but) under the influence of the Spirit of God.”¹⁷ This must be done if we are to be more Christ-like.

The Apostle Paul, as he goes through Chapter 8, builds as it were verse by verse the Christian to see the great victory that is had in Christ v:37. Yes as in chapter 7 we shall struggle with sin, but look, we have great provision and many and varied are our consolations!

Led by the Spirit v:14

The Holy Spirit leads a sinner away from sin, from dependence upon their own righteousness, from dead works. John Gill summarises what it is to be “led of the Spirit”. “He (the Holy Spirit) leads them to the person, blood, and righteousness of Christ, and to the fullness of grace in Him; into the presence of God, to the house and ordinances of God; into the truths of the Gospel, from one degree of grace to another, and at last to glory.”¹⁸ This is what it is to walk after or in the Spirit.

Helped by the Spirit in our infirmities v:26a

Despite building verse upon verse, encouragement upon encouragement the Apostle Paul now “points out an additional and internal source of encouragement of the highest consideration, namely, that the Holy Spirit helps their infirmities, and also prays for them, which is sufficient to allay every desponding fear, and to communicate the strongest consolation.”¹⁹ Many are the weaknesses and sufferings of the saints of God. Indeed John Gill gives quite a comprehensive list, many of which I own for myself. But yet it is the Holy Spirit who brings help or better translated, “helps together.”²⁰ This is important. This represents a condescending Spirit. Just as Christ was “despised and rejected of men; a man

¹⁴ Ryle JC., *Holiness*, (Evangelical Press, Darlington. 2004) p. 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 24.

¹⁶ Haldane R., *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, (Banner of Truth, London. 1963) p. 330.

¹⁷ Gill J., *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, (Particular Baptist Press, Lebanon. 2002) p. 260.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 261-2.

¹⁹ Haldane R., *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, (Banner of Truth, London. 1963) p. 385.

²⁰ John Gill, Charles Hodge and Robert Haldane translate “helpeth” as either helps together or to take hold of any thing with another.

of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” Isaiah 53:3 so to then do this verse in Romans 8:26 represent “a taking upon himself (the Holy Spirit), a portions of our sorrows to relieve us of their pressure.”²¹ The pressures which the believer faces in this life are that which the Shorter Catechism calls the “estate of sin and misery.”²² It is in these infirmities that the Holy Spirit brings support. The question must be asked, how then does the Holy Spirit support the believer? By way of hope and patience, graces which He has implanted in the heart of the believer v:25. This is done by the Holy Spirit “by bringing to remembrance, and applying the precious promises of the Gospel, by shedding abroad the love of God in their hearts, by acting the part of a comforter to them, by putting strength into them, and by assisting them in prayer to God.”²³ God the Holy Spirit we are told in the later half of verse 26 intercedes for us also. Just as the Psalmist was “inditing a good matter” and that his “tongue is the pen of a ready writer” so too does the Holy Spirit indites upon the hearts of believers. Old Testament believer Hannah (Elkanah’s wife) is a perfect example of such help from the Holy Spirit. We read that “she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.” 1 Samuel 1:10. Her praying was such that words did not come from her mouth. Yet the Holy Spirit indites the prayers of believers, as Hannah, upon their hearts. Stirring up their hearts of their needs, wants, with arguments, giving words for their mouths, enlarges their hearts, giving strength of faith in prayer. Coming before or rather being led before God by the Spirit crying Abba, Father (see Romans 8:14-15).

The Apostle Paul clearly stated his case in verses 1-27. The stark reality of living after the flesh is death whereas without exception, all who have been given the Holy Spirit will pursue holiness. His holy presence and holy ministry within us cause us to love holiness, to long for it, and at times grieve over our lack of it. Having assurance of eternal life, and have been made sincerely willing and ready, henceforth live unto him. This *is* walking in the Spirit,

²¹ Hodge C., *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Banner of Truth, London. 1964) p. 278.

²² Shorter Catechism Q/A 17

²³ Gill J., *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, (Particular Baptist Press, Lebanon. 2002) p. 281.