

Receiving God’s Spirit

In Lesson 1, there was an indirect reference to our external calling. I wrote, “He enlightens and enlivens us prior to the call of the gospel...” I also made mention of the Arminian view that we may lose the Spirit, and our salvation. This gives rise to two related questions:

*When do we obtain God's Spirit so that we may discern spiritual things?
Where in Scripture does it say that we can lose the Spirit we received?*

We receive God's Spirit AFTER we declare our faith in Christ. The confusion comes up when we talk about God's Spirit acting to *prepare* us to receive him. The reformed view is that the Spirit acts ON us before we come to Christ, and before he takes up residence IN us. That is what is meant by the external and the internal call of the gospel. Someone who has not been acted ON, can hear the call externally, but cannot respond to it, and so there is no internal call.

In the Arminian view, we are regenerated¹ AFTER we declare our faith and repent. That's because they believe that what Christ accomplished on the cross was to enable us all to hear the gospel. Regeneration takes place afterward, because it enables us to change our behavior. So the Arminian looks at regeneration as the effect of the Spirit for purposes of sanctification only.

In the reformed view, regeneration is what enables us to receive the word of God in the first place (to respond to the gospel). We are first regenerated by the Spirit, and THEN we can declare our faith and repent. So the Calvinist looks at regeneration as changing the heart from stone to flesh. They believe it is a necessary pre-requisite to hearing the gospel.

“If God's Spirit is acting ON me to change my heart, then I don't see how he could not be IN me to change my heart.” That's logic talking. What the Bible says is that we RECEIVE the Holy Spirit when we believe in Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:15; 19:2; Gal. 3:2,14). And yet faith itself is a gift (Eph. 2:8). No one comes to Christ unless the Father draws him (Jn. 6:44). So you can see that it might seem vague. But here's where the rules of interpretation come into play: the specific overrules the general. The specific passages are the ones in Acts and Galatians that I just cited. They indicate that we "receive" the Spirit AFTER we declare our faith. The general passages are the ones in Ephesians and John which don't address the issue of *when*. The Bible is clear that the Spirit is given to us as a deposit AFTER we believe:

2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:5 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit , guaranteeing what is to come. NIV Eph 1:13-14 **Having believed**, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-to the praise of his glory. NIV

Let me give you two examples from the OT of the Spirit acting ON someone without saving them. Both Balaam (Numbers 22 and 23) and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4) were acted on by God: Balaam prophesied, Nebuchadnezzar acted like an animal. But they were not God's people, and they were not saved. The Spirit did not abide in either of them, even though he affected both of

¹ Regeneration is being made alive in Christ. The traditional term is “quicken.” It is the heart of stone becoming flesh or “born again.”

them in such a way that they did what God willed. We were elected in Christ before time began (Eph. 1:4-5). But the Spirit picks his time to act on us, and to draw us to Christ, which is God’s will for us. When the time is ripe, and we confess Christ, he then abides in us to comfort us, enlighten us, and ensure our perseverance.

As for the second question, these same passages say that the Spirit is given to us for a purpose: he is the **guarantee** of what is to come. If we can "lose" him, then he's not much of a guarantee. The only passages in the NT that talk about loss, are Matt. 10:42 and Mk. 9:41. They speak of losing our *rewards*, not our *salvation*.

The two key verses which suggest that we may lose our salvation (the Spirit does not abide in a condemned creature, and so he would be lost if salvation is lost), are Hebrews 6:4 and Hebrews 10:29. Hebrews 6:4, properly translated and read in its context, actually says that it is impossible to lose our salvation, not that it is impossible to be re-saved after falling. And 10:29 is a reminder that the sacrifice of Christ is not to be treated lightly – it is not a threat to throw us out of the kingdom.

Heb 10:26-29 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? NKJV

The troubling phrase here is this: "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." What does that mean? It cannot mean that we have no recourse for our sins. Why not? Because Christ's sacrifice was once for all – it covered ALL our sin. It is not applied sin by sin during the course of our lifetime. Notice that the supporting Scripture is also from Hebrews (same book, same author, same ideas):

Heb 7:27 who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. NKJV

So, if it cannot mean that we have “uncovered” sin, then it must be a very strongly worded reminder that Christ is our ONLY salvation. Obedience is not an option, because willfully sinning would be like spitting on the cross. The Calvinist says that’s all it means.

Now, in the Arminian view, if I can choose Christ willfully, then I can reject Christ willfully. In other words, my salvation (they say) is in my own hands, both to gain AND to lose. In the Arminian view, Christ only made me salvable on the cross. He did not finally and completely save me. As you well know, I disagree with that view. It comes from logic rather than Scripture, and it is dependent on Heb. 6:4 and 10:29 being read differently than I just suggested.

Summary -- we receive the Spirit AFTER believing in Christ, but he acts on us BEFORE believing in Christ. Once we have him, we cannot lose him.