

Sunday, December 23, 2012

## Distinct Characteristics of the Christian Faith (3) The work of the Holy Spirit within Christians (Cont.)

Summary of previous article on this topic:

- ❖ Man attains his knowledge of God by being created after His image and likeness.
- ❖ The knowledge of God was distorted by sin and being devoid of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ The Old Testament has prophecies about the Holy Spirit descending upon mankind once more. The lord Jesus spoke about the fulfillment of these prophecies and the work of the Holy Spirit within the believers.
- ❖ Christianity is not just a religion of laws, code of conduct, and manners; it is rather a fellowship with the Trinity through the work of the Holy Spirit within the believers.

### A New Covenant

The book of Jeremiah sights one of the most beautiful and most important prophecies of the Old Testament about the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament: *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”* (Jeremiah 31:31-34). St Paul pointed out this prophecy in his epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrew 8:8-12). This Prophecy reveals the knowledge of God in the New Testament, not through words written on stone tablets by the finger of God, but rather through the Spirit of God dwelling within Christians. Thus, the statutes of God are not external to us but rather internal and inscribed on our hearts to grant us the knowledge of the things that have been freely given to us by God, *“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.”* (1 Corinthians 2:11-12).

St. Hilary the Bishop of Poitiers (4<sup>th</sup> Century) comments on the previous verse saying: “Let us therefore make use of this great benefit, and seek for personal experience of this needful Gift... We receive Him, then, that we may know. Faculties of the human body, if denied their exercise, will lie dormant. The eye without light, natural or artificial, cannot fulfill its office; the ear will be ignorant of its function unless some voice or sound be heard; the nostrils are unconscious of their purpose unless some scent be breathed. Not that the faculty will be absent, because it is never called into use, but that there will be no experience of its existence. So, too, the soul of man, unless through faith it have appropriated the gift of the Spirit, will have the innate faculty of apprehending God, but be destitute of the light of knowledge. That gift, which is in Christ is One, yet offered, and offered fully, to all; denied to none, and given to each according to the measure of his willingness to receive; its stores the richer, the more earnest the desire to earn them. This gift is with us unto the end of the world, the solace of our waiting, the assurance, by the favors which He bestows, of the hope that shall be ours, the light of our minds, the sun of our souls. This Holy Spirit we must seek and must earn, and then hold fast by faith and obedience to the commands of God.”

Therefore, in Christianity, we don't have lists of what is lawful and other for what is not. The Church leads the believers to live by the Holy Spirit through the holy sacraments. Thus the Holy Spirit within them ignites and illuminates their path in life. The church does not lead the believers by issuing edicts to govern their conduct in all aspects of life. This of course doesn't eliminate the role of teaching in the church, rather it guides its course so that it becomes spiritual teaching that leads people to the freedom of the children of God. This freedom doesn't mean we satisfy the desires and lusts of the flesh, rather it is the liberation from all the bonds of sin. This is what St. Paul meant when he said that all things are lawful but with three conditions: if they are helpful, appropriate, edifying, and not have power over me, (1 Corinthians 6:12, 11:23).

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