

A True Work of the Spirit, Part 5

Code: A110

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This week, we've looked at the characteristics of a true work of the Holy Spirit, noting that it exalts the true Christ, opposes Satan's interests, points people to the Scriptures, and elevates truth. Today, we will conclude this series by looking at a final mark of the Spirit's work.

This material, again, is adapted from Jonathan Edwards's *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*.

It Results in Love for God and Others

"The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love" [v. 8].

If the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man, it is a sure sign that it is the Spirit of God. This last mark which the apostle gives of the true Spirit, he seems to speak of as the most eminent. He devotes more space to it and so insists much more largely on it than all the rest.

When the spirit that is at work among the people brings many of them to high and exalting thoughts of the Divine Being and His glorious perfections; when it works in them an admiring, delightful sense of the excellency of Jesus Christ, representing Him as the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely; when it makes Him precious to the soul, winning and drawing the heart with those motives and incitements to free love of God and the wonderful dying love of Christ -- it must be the Spirit of God.

"We love, because He first loved us," verse 19 says. The spirit that makes the soul long after God and Christ must be the Spirit of God. When we desire the presence and communion of the Savior, acquaintance with Him, conformity to Him, a life that pleases and honors Him, we must be under the influence of His Spirit.

Moreover, the spirit that quells contentions among men gives a spirit of peace and good-will, excites to acts of outward kindness, earnestly desires the salvation of souls, and arouses love for all the children of God and followers of Christ; I say that when a spirit operates after this manner, there is the highest kind of evidence that this is the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, there is a counterfeit love that often appears among those who are led by a spirit of delusion. There is commonly in the wildest enthusiasts a kind of union and affection arising from self-love. It is occasioned by their agreeing on issues where they greatly differ from all others and for which they are objects of ridicule from the rest of mankind. That naturally will cause them so much the more to prize those peculiarities that make them the objects of others' contempt. (Thus the ancient Gnostics and the wild fanatics that appeared at the beginning of the Reformation boasted of their great love to one another -- one sect of them in particular calling themselves "the family of love.") But this is quite another thing than that Christian love I have just described.

There is enough said in this passage of the nature of a truly Christian love to distinguish it from all such counterfeits. It is love that arises from apprehension of the wonderful riches of the free grace and sovereignty of God's love to us in Jesus Christ. It is attended with a sense of our own utter unworthiness (see vv. 9-11, 19). The surest character of true, divine, supernatural love- distinguishing it from counterfeits that arise from a natural self-love -- is that the Christian virtue of humility shines in it. It is a love which above all others renounces, abases, and annihilates what we term self. Christ's love is a humble love (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

When, therefore, we see a love attended with a sense of one's own littleness, vileness, weakness, and utter insufficiency; when it is united with self-diffidence, self-emptiness, self-renunciation, and poverty of spirit -- those are the manifest tokens of the Spirit of God.

He that thus dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.

Conclusion

These marks that the apostle has given us are sufficient to stand alone and support themselves. They plainly show the finger of God and are sufficient to outweigh a thousand such little objections as many make from oddities, irregularities, errors in conduct, and the delusions and scandals of some professors. But here some may object. After all, the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, "Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."

To which I answer that this can be no objection against the sufficiency of these marks to distinguish the true from the false spirit in those false apostles and prophets -- even when the devil is transformed into an angel of light. After all, the very reason the apostle John gave these marks was so that we could test the spirits. Therefore try the spirits by these rules and you will be able to distinguish the true spirit from the false -- even under such a crafty disguise.

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