

# CHIEF MINISTRIES

June 2019

*“We are the witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him”. (Acts 5:32).*

We need to understand and experience the Holy Spirit directly for ourselves. I believe the witness of the Spirit in the above verse was the Holy Spirit’s own direct witness - not merely indirectly through the Word, but coming immediately and directly to the disciples. The person of the Holy Spirit was therefore in them and making Jesus’s resurrection and ascension real as Peter spoke. This was both the disciples’ theological understanding and also their experience. The phrase, “and so is also the Holy Ghost”, is not an incidental or throwaway comment.

Not only had the disciples seen the crucifixion and the risen Lord, but the Holy Spirit also witnessed to it. You might say, “of course the Holy Spirits saw this. So what? Furthermore, that would have meant utterly nothing to the Jews.” But it meant everything to Peter. The Holy Spirit was witnessing to Peter at that moment as he spoke! The Holy Spirit’s witness was so real that the disciples would have believed in Jesus’s resurrection had they not seen him alive at all! Moreover, Peter and John affirmed that Jesus was at the right hand of God (Acts 5:31) – something no one could have seen. When the Holy Spirit told them that Christ ascended to the right hand of God, they knew it had literally happened!

But you ask, “why waste this information on the Jews who didn’t believe the disciples testimony or that of the Holy Spirit?” First, Peter knew that the Holy Spirit could convict these Jews there on the spot – telling them they could be given repentance and forgiveness of sins. But there’s more! God will give the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him! They could have the Spirit too! This was part of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost. His hearers that day wanted what Peter and the 120 disciples had. So, Peter told them: *“Repent and be baptized....and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).*

Every Jew knew that Peter had something they did not have, and they wanted it! Now Peter again speaks to the Jews, asserting: The Holy Spirit will be given to those who obey Him. What made Peter’s word attractive was the thought of having what Peter had – to have the Spirit make things real as they were real to the disciples; to give them power, boldness, and authority as Peter had before all these high-ranking Jews. How could Peter speak as he did? The answer is: he had the Holy Spirit Himself in him – immediately and directly.

How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God? Answer: by the inner testimony of the Spirit. That’s the exact answer John Calvin would give; it came right out of his Institutes of the Christian Religion. However, that’s not enough – it was for the Puritans – but we need to drive the point home by adding the words “immediate and direct”.

I’m going to add a highlighted text following this paragraph – which is some bonus material that takes a closer look at the theological position of the majority of the English Puritans who believed a person could be assured of his or her predestination to salvation – only by reflecting on their consciences. This became known as the – practical syllogism of the Holy Ghost or the reflex act. As a result of this belief, and the

teachings that followed as they further try to define their position, nearly every one of these Puritans died without any assurance of salvation. If you choose to dig deeper into this teaching, it is worth the effort it may take to understand their concept of assurance of salvation.

### The English Puritans and the “Reflex Act” or “Practical Syllogism”

Almost without exception the English Puritans that I studied could not conceive of assurance of salvation except through the conscience – and that by “reflection”. They knew nothing of an immediate and direct witness of the Spirit, but only what could be “reasoned”. From William Perkins (1558 – 1602) to the formation of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1648), these men believed a person could be assured of his predestination to salvation, “but only by reflecting on his conscience”. There assurance was therefore “indirect”. Using Aristotelian logic, they came up with a syllogism – “a kind of reasoning that led to a conclusion.” In fact, Perkins called it – “the practical syllogism of the Holy Ghost” – which he applied in more than one way: 1) assurance by reasoning, and 2) assurance by good works. It came down to this: a major premise followed by a minor premise led to a conclusion. So, the major premise was this: All who believe in Jesus Christ are saved. The minor premise: I believe in Jesus Christ. Conclusion: Therefore, I am saved. That was it. That was the main way they could know they were genuinely converted.

Now there is nothing wrong with this – not at all. It is a perfectly valid way to know you are saved. I am merely saying “reflecting” was the only way they could conceive of having assurance of salvation. Perkins and his followers called it the “reflex act” – a mental exercise by which you reflected on knowing you have believed. To them there was no assurance in faith itself. You came to assurance by reflecting on the fact that you have believed. From this you deduce you have been saved.

They also called it the “indirect” act of faith. You therefore come to assurance “indirectly” not directly. It is mediated, or applied, to you by the Word. They did not speak of an immediate coming of the Holy Spirit. In other words, you “reflect” on the fact that you have trusted Jesus Christ. One could say: I know I am saved because I have believed. It was a cerebral, intellectual but subjective exercise. Perkins even called this “full assurance”. It was to him the highest level of faith to which a person could attain. The reason it was called the “practical syllogism of the Holy Ghost” was that was God’s way of bringing His elect people to assurance of salvation.

I repeat: there is nothing wrong with a person coming to the knowledge that he or she is saved by this indirect act of faith. The problem was it was the only way they could think. This is why one needs to insert those words “immediate and direct” witness of the Holy Spirit when it comes to how you know the Bible is true.

While this practical reasoning which leads to a conclusion – I think, therefore, I am, is a valid way to know you are saved. It’s really an up and down aspect of Puritan thinking. It was not enough to know you are saved because you believe. They then asked: How do you know you have truly believed? The Puritans were always worried about a counterfeit faith.

This is where their doctrine of assurance was undermined by sheer legalism. It is at this point we see that virtually none of them (including their hearers) had the assurance they themselves taught. They brought in a teaching that you only know you are truly saved by godly living. Sanctification. Good works. So Perkins and those after him showed another way by which this reasoning that led to a conclusion (syllogism) was applied. You know you are one of God’s elect by your personal holiness. This too meant reflection by the conscience. This reflection was on whether or not you truly believed, the ultimate way you know you have truly believed is by your good works, or sanctification. They called it “universal obedience” (keeping all the Ten Commandments, not just some of them). Sanctification, the process of

being made holy – or “universal obedience” – meant endeavoring to keep the whole of the moral law of God. So, if you keep the Ten Commandments, if you love God’s ministers, if you love sound teaching, and are faithful in worship on the Sabbath, you may conclude that you are saved.

In a word: All who are living godly lives are saved. I am living a godly life. Therefore, I am saved.

This, then, was another way the “reflex act” was applied, that is, this “indirect” act of faith. Assurance was only mediated indirectly – by the experiential knowledge you have truly believed. I give them the name “experimental predestinarians”. They knew they were saved by their experiments – reflecting on whether or not they had truly believed. If they could conclude that they truly believed, they were assured they were not reprobate but elected of God. The saddest thing, of all is, most of these Puritans died without any assurance of salvation. Perkins went to his grave in great agony – not knowing whether he was saved.

Two exceptions to the Puritanical way of coming to assurance were John Cotton (1584 – 1652) and Thomas Goodwin (1600 – 1680). Cotton rejected the view we have no revelation but the word. In his “A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace” he said as much. Cotton believed that a person came to assurance of salvation not by the indirect route as he once believed before he founded Boston, Massachusetts, but by a direct witness of the Holy Spirit. Cotton argued that coming to assurance by good works is a “papist” position. You know you are justified by faith alone. Cotton insisted; sanctification is no proof of justification. There was assurance in faith alone. One did not need to add to it. He regarded it as a huge mistake to derive assurance of salvation by the conscience. He disdained the idea that “we have no revelation but the word, thus stating that the Spirit’s witness is immediate. Cotton rejected the notion of “reflex act” and believed that the immediate witness of the Holy Spirit assures one of his salvation and that this is for all ordinary Christians. Moreover, no one should be afraid of the word revelation, which comes by the immediate and direct witness of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit comes, He speaks “peace to the soul”. By the immediate testimony we have “full assurance” of our spiritual state. When John Cotton lay dying in 1652, his pastor, John Wilson prayed that God would lift His countenance on Cotton and shed love into his soul. Cotton’s last words were: “He hath done it already, brother.”

The truth is coming to assurance of faith by one’s good works, or sanctification, is a shaky foundation when it comes to dying. But the immediate work of the Spirit removes all doubt. To think that the Holy Spirit can speak only through the Word. When the Holy Spirit spoke to Philip, it was immediate and direct (Acts 8:29). It was apart from the Word. But it only did not go against Scripture – Philip was on his way to lead a man to Christ!

The word seal, or sealing has basically five meanings. First, it refers to that which authenticates or conveys authority. It establishes the validity or authenticity of a document or statement. A seal will indicate whether a document, or signature, is real or counterfeit. Second, it is a mark of ownership. It indicates that something belongs to another, that it is someone’s property. The seal has a particular image on it, showing it belongs to one person only. In the wild West, ranchers would brand their own seal on cattle to show their proper ownership (still do). Third, a seal is also used for the purposes of security. A seal may be put on a parcel (package), for example. But if that seal is broken and you know it has been tampered with. Fourth, a seal may indicate approval. We speak of having a “seal of approval.” This means we approve of a person on whom we put our seal. Fifth, we speak of one’s fate being sealed. We may say that a person “sealed his fate” by a comment he made. It refers to the possibility of an unchangeable destiny once a seal has been put on it.

All of God’s children have God’s seal on them. – All who have saving faith are sealed with the Holy Spirit. *“God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’ (2 Timothy 2:19).* First, He authenticates us. We have been given authority to become sons of God

(John 1:12). Second, He owns us. We are not our own; we are bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). Indeed, God “set His seal of ownership on us” (2 Corinthians 1:22). Third, the seal of God on us guarantees our safety. “*He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways*” (Psalm 91:11). Fourth, there is nothing greater than having the approval of one whose power, authority, and integrity matters. Timothy had Paul’s approval. “*I have no one else like him.....he “proved himself”*” (Philippians 2:20, 22). Finally, our destiny is sealed. Paul said, “*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption*” (Ephesians 4:30).

However, there is a crucial distinction at stake here. Do not miss this: Although all who are saved are objectively sealed with the Holy Spirit, not all who are saved have experienced the conscious seal of the Holy Spirit. This distinction is equally relevant when it comes to the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

A very relevant verse in this connection is Ephesians 1:13; “*And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.*” Now the King James uses the word “after” they believed, indicating the sealing is subsequent to faith, most versions now read so that all Christians have the seal of the Holy Spirit when they believe.

Objectively, all Christians are sealed with the Spirit. But not all Christians are subjectively – consciously – sealed with the Holy Spirit. The same question could be asked: Are all Christians baptized with the Holy Spirit? Objectively, yes (see 1 Corinthians 12:13). But do all Christians automatically experience the baptism with the Spirit as described by Luke in the book of Acts? No.

This baptism in verse 13 is a baptism into the body of Christ, upon conversion, the Holy Spirit does 4 things for every believer: 1) He gives us new birth (regeneration) – (see John 3:5, Titus 3:5); 2) He comes to live inside us (indwelling – see Romans 8:9); 3) He places us into the body as a member of Christ body on the earth (spiritual baptism – 1 Corinthians 12:13); 4) He seals us as the possession of Christ until the redemption of our human body (Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30).

My point is this: The Holy Spirit’s seal is this Spirit’s own witness and that it came after one’s conversion. It was real – that is, conscious and immediate. It did not require any accompaniment (such as good works) to assure one of his salvation.

Many conservative Evangelicals hold onto a soteriological (meaning salvation) doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This means that the Holy Spirit can only speak through the Bible and apply it when the gospel is preached. And yet they rightly believe that the Holy Spirit makes the Bible come alive and make Jesus Christ real. This is what we all believe! But, according to many of them, the Holy Spirit would not speak directly today as He did to Philip – “*Go to that chariot and stay near it.*” (Acts 8:29). Some have no concept of an immediate and direct witness of the Holy Spirit Himself. The Spirit “applies” the gospel to the mind and heart when it is preached. What is wrong with this? Nothing! This is the normal and necessary and needed witness of the Holy Spirit when the Bible is preached. The Holy Spirit reaching the hearts of men and women through the Word is absolutely essential to the preservation of historic truth.

But there is more to be had. Either we believe that God – the Holy Spirit is alive and well today – or our Trinity is merely God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Bible. It is this undoubted anointing of the Holy Spirit at work directly and immediately that is needed today! It is what was going on when Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37). It is what happened to the disciples in Acts 4:31. It is what Peter preached and experienced as we saw in Acts 5:31. It is what happened when Peter preached in the house of Cornelius. As he spoke, the Holy Spirit “fell” on all who heard the message (Acts 10:44). It was the immediate and direct witness of the Holy Spirit that “fell” on them.

Some of the greatest reformers in church history “believed in the immediate and direct witness of the Holy Spirit, not the result of reflection or argumentation.” – John Wesley said that George Whitefield, Charles Simeon, Charles Hodge, Thomas Goodwin. According to Wesley’s teaching you can be a good Christian, and you can have experienced the operations of the Spirit in many ways including foretastes of joy and peace and of love from God Himself, long before you have the direct witness of the Spirit, this overwhelming experience.

The sealing of the Spirit is a “conscious experience”. It is not sanctification, but it has an inevitable effect on it. Sanctification is not an “experience to be received”, and yet the sealing of the Holy Spirit promotes sanctification. This sealing follows the believing, it is different from, separated from, distinct from believing and not a part of believing. Nor is it something that happens inevitably, inexorably to all who believe. Not true. Men who believe that are afraid of excesses, so afraid of being labeled a certain way that they claim the baptism of the Spirit to be something unconscious, non-experiential, a happening that does not affect man’s feelings. Such an argument is not scriptural. Not conscious! The disciples were in a state of ecstasy. They were accused of drinking “new wine”.

The Galatians had experienced this coming of the Spirit subsequent to their conversion. In Galatians 3:2 Paul says, I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?” How can anyone answer that question if this is something outside the realm of experience? How can I know if I have or have not received the Spirit if it is not something experiential?”

This “sealing” or “baptism of the Spirit” is the highest form of assurance. It is a conscious experience and something that follows saving faith. The immediate and direct testimony of the Holy Spirit is optimum! Go after God! Go after His Holy Spirit! Don’t Give Up! Until you know you have the life of God in your soul.

Be saved, be sealed, be baptized both in water and with fire!

I’m praying for your eyes to be opened.

## ***Chief***

*If you want to know more about CHIEF Ministries or would like to be a part of this, please go to [www.chiefministries.com](http://www.chiefministries.com) and [www.chiefshouse.org](http://www.chiefshouse.org)*

*Christ’s*

*Heart*

*In*

*Every*

*Felon*