

# Fellowship with the Spirit part 2

## Loving God with all your Heart Part 13

Selected Passages 9-11-11

Summary: The Spirit powers the Church. He enables all godliness, and empowers you to do everything God calls you to do (and only that). Get that power by being responsive and by keeping in step with the Spirit (moment-by-moment following His lead to keep the flesh from getting a head of steam). And make that obedience personal, obeying a person, not a set of rules (Because You want me to do this, I'm glad to do it). And let all this intimacy be governed by reverent worship.

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**Ezekiel 36:25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.**

## Introduction

We come this morning to the final message in our series on loving God. The greatest command is to love God, and the way to increase your love for God is to have fellowship with Him. And so we have been studying what Scripture says about how to have fellowship with each member of the Trinity. First the Father, then the Son, and then last week we began with the Holy Spirit. And we found that the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to receive all that the Father and Son offer. The main thing we get from the Father is *love*. The main thing we get from the Son is *grace*. And what the Holy Spirit does is delivers that love and grace from the Father and the Son directly to us. He takes grace from Jesus and applies it to your life (Jn.16:14), and takes love from God the Father and pours it out into your heart.

**Romans 5:5 hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.**

The only way the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ makes it into your life is through fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and the only way the love of God the Father gets into your heart is through fellowship with the Holy Spirit. That's why 2 Corinthians 13:14 says **May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.** We get love from God and grace from Jesus when we have fellowship with the Holy Spirit. And the way to

have fellowship with the Spirit is to be receptive and responsive to His work in your life. And that work consists mainly in two things. The first one we looked at last week - enlightenment. He turns on the lights, opens your eyes, and enables you to see and appreciate truth, and to welcome that truth into your heart. The other major function of the Holy Spirit that is emphasized in Scripture is empowerment.

## **The Empowerment of the Spirit**

Over and over in the Old Testament you read about the Holy Spirit coming upon a person in power.

**Isaiah 11:2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power**

In the Old Testament, if you are a Philistine or some enemy of Israel, and the Holy Spirit comes upon some Israelite, you had better run. And in the New Testament as well, power is associated with the Spirit almost as much as truth is.

**Luke 4:14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit**

**Acts 10:38 God anointed Jesus ... with the Holy Spirit and power**

**Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you**

**Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace ...so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

**Romans 15:18 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me ...19 through the power of the Spirit.**

**Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit**

It is the Holy Spirit who enables everything we do. All strength and all ability come directly from Him (including physical ability, mental ability, and spiritual ability).

### **The heavy lifting in the kingdom**

All the heavy lifting and the light lifting in the kingdom of God are done by the Holy Spirit. He supplies all the power. And when I say, "heavy lifting," I am talking about things that are not humanly possible – things that unbelievers cannot do because they are not empowered by the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:13 is a good example of that.

**Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace ...so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

People in the world can do some impressive things with their little, human strength. Some of them can dunk basketballs, or invent computers, or compose amazing symphonies. But none of them – even if they put all their strength and ability together – can fill themselves with joy and peace with overflowing hope. That is the work of God alone. When Jesus stretched out His hand over the raging storm on the Sea of Galilee and commanded the wind and the waves to be still, and there was instant

silence and stillness – those men knew that Almighty God was standing there in their boat. And when the Holy Spirit stretches out His hand over the chaos and turmoil in your heart and brings calm, and quiet, restful, peace; you know it is the work of God alone.

Another example of that heavy lifting is 1 Corinthians 12:3, where Paul says, no one can bow to the lordship of Christ except by the Holy Spirit. Natural human strength can never do the mighty work of taking a rebellious heart and bringing it into glad, willing submission to Christ.

Another example is Ephesians 3:16-17, where Paul prays for strengthening for the Ephesians.

**Ephesians 3:16-17 I pray that ... he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.**

Ryan Kennelly, the world champion weight lifter, has enough strength to bench press over one thousand pounds, but he does not have anywhere near the power you have. On his best day he could not begin to have the strength required for Christ to dwell in his heart. You can do that by the awesome power of the Spirit, but for anyone who does not have the Spirit, it is as impossible as jumping over the moon. Put all the collective ability and strength and wisdom of every natural person in the whole, wide world all together and no one will be able to transform their flesh-dominated lives into a life characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They can never even begin to put to death the deeds of the flesh. But you, according to Romans 8:13 can, by the Spirit, put to death the deeds of the flesh. The world might be able, in their little human strength, to put together tiny little short-term organizations like IBM or GE or the United States of America; but none of them can do anything really big, like make known the multifaceted wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to His eternal purposes. According to Ephesians 3:10, you all pull that off every single week by the power of the Holy Spirit. The cosmic, eternal purposes of God are accomplished by the mighty power of the Spirit of God working through the Church.

### ***Gifting***

The Holy Spirit is the power supply behind everything the Church does. That is why when the Church achieves unity, it is called the unity of the Spirit (Eph.4:3). And it is why spiritual gifts are called *spiritual* gifts. The Bible calls them spiritual gifts because they are gifts that come from the Holy Spirit. See if you can pick up on a theme in this paragraph from 1 Corinthians 12.

**1 Corinthians 12:8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ... 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.**

If you look really hard you can see a theme running through that section. If I can teach, it is because the Holy Spirit empowered me to teach. If you can encourage a friend, all the ability to do that came from the Spirit. Every time any of you use your gift you are being handled by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit powers the Church. So that leaves two important questions for us. First, how much power does He promise to you as an individual? Second, how do you get that power?

## **How much power?**

What are the limitations? We all know that there are things you simply cannot do. Al Mohler reads a book a day. I am doing good if I get a page a day. The Holy Spirit has empowered me to do a lot of things, but reading a book a day is not one of them. So what exactly is included in the promise of Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things”? One place to find the answer to that is in ...

## **2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.**

The Holy Spirit has not given me the power to read like Al Mohler because I don't need to read like that to carry out my calling. If you have an employee who needs access to the office, you give him a key to the office. But if he does not need access to the warehouse to do his job, then there is no reason to give him a key to the warehouse. In fact, you would be doing him a disservice if you gave him a key to the warehouse because it would make him think that some aspect of his job must require him to go into the warehouse, and he would be confused about what his job description is. Thankfully, God does not confuse us by giving us access to abilities that we do not need for our calling.

Now, God has called me to a ministry that does require a huge amount of reading. And so I do need to work hard at improving in that area, and taking full advantages of whatever capacity God did give me to become a better reader. But when I hit the ceiling of that capacity, I do not have to fret about the fact that I cannot do what other men can do. It is silly for the eye to fret and stew over its inability to smell or hear. God made you for a purpose in the body, and He promises to supply absolutely everything you need to fulfill that purpose.

### **Enables ALL godliness (No more "I can't")**

There is nothing He calls you to do that you cannot do. Whenever you say, "I can't..." followed by something that the Bible calls all Christians to do (like, "I can't control my temper" or "I can't break this addiction" or "I can't stay in this marriage" or "I can't love that person" or "I can't forgive") – what you are really saying is the Holy Spirit can't. If He is our power supply, then if we do not have the power to do something, it means the power supply is too weak. When you decide you can never change, or some other person can never change, or you decide you can not resist some temptation; you are accusing the Holy Spirit of being too weak to pull off what Jesus sent Him here to do.

## **How do you get the Power?**

Well we all know the Holy Spirit is not weak. He has plenty of power to do what He was sent to do, so the problem must lie on our end. If there is a lack of power, and there is nothing wrong with the power supply, then you know there is a bad connection somewhere. So how do we make the connection? How do we get plugged in? The empowering work of the Spirit is just like the enlightening work of the Spirit – it is not automatic. You get more of it or less of it depending on how receptive and responsive you are to the Spirit's work. So how can we become receptive and responsive to the Spirit's work of empowerment?

### **Be Filled**

Or, to put it in the words of Ephesians 5:18, how do you become filled by the Spirit? Last week we talked about how to be filled up to the brim full of enlightenment from the Spirit; so how do we become filled up full of the power of the Spirit? I was talking to someone last week about this and he put it really well. He said, "What do I do in those times when I'm trying to exercise self-discipline, and my flesh just takes a stand and says, "I'm not going to do that, and you can't make me"? How do you overcome the power of the flesh?"

### **Be Responsive**

Last week we talked about being receptive to what the Spirit is doing. Now let's take that to the next step and talk about being responsive to what the Spirit is doing. Fellowship is a two-way interaction. The Spirit supplies the power, and we respond by taking full advantage of what He has made available. When He provides enlightenment and understanding and insight, put that knowledge to work in the kingdom. And when He supplies power and ability and strength, put that to work in His

service. He did not give you your spiritual gift for nothing. Do mighty things in His power through the gifts He has given you. Put your gift to work. Your spiritual gift is not the only way He wants to use you, but it is the main way the Holy Spirit wants to use you in this world. It is a means of awesome power in accomplishing great things. So fan your gift into flame and put it to work in the kingdom.

And do not just take advantage of your gift – take advantage of all our gifts. Immerse yourself in the church. Do you realize what this place is? It is a gathering of people, all of whom have some special fire hose of grace from heaven. Each spiritual gift is an outlet for the outpouring of grace. God has opened up portals to heaven – conduits that deliver grace from heaven to earth, and He has scattered them all over the world. When you go to work Monday through Friday, you might bump into one or two here and there. And it is such a great joy when that happens. But on Sunday morning, a really amazing thing happens. All these portals of grace come and gather together in one place! On Sunday mornings, the Holy Spirit is handing out freebies of grace by the truckload to anyone who comes with an expectant, receptive, responsive heart. Take advantage of that.

“Be filled with the Spirit” means let your life be topped off to the brim with the enlightenment and strengthening that the Holy Spirit offers through Scripture and through the ministry of the gifts in His Church. (And the primary format, by the way, that we have devoted to nothing but people using their spiritual gifts to pour out grace, is the prayer groups. So whatever you do, don’t miss out on that.)

Sometimes people get confused about the relationship between the empowering of the Spirit and our effort. Someone says, “I don’t have to study the Bible – I’ll just rely on the Holy Spirit to show me what it means.” That is like a farmer saying, “I’m not going to plant seeds or cultivate my field – I’m just going to wait for God to give me a crop.” Only God can provide a crop, but do not expect Him to do so if you neglect the means He has provided. The farmer who really trusts God will be the hardest-working farmer out there. And the Christian who really relies on the Holy Spirit will work as hard as he can to utilize the means the Holy Spirit has provided to gain access to His enlightenment and power.

### **Walk by the Spirit**

So, be filled up to the brim with enlightenment and enablement by the Spirit by being receptive and responsive to what He is doing through the Scriptures and through the Church. That is the basic principle of the filling of the Spirit. However, it still leaves us with the problem of the flesh. When the flesh takes over, it cuts us off from the power of the Spirit. (Remember – the flesh is that part of you that acts on the selfish impulses of the body without regard for what God wants.) So how do we deal with the problem of the flesh? If only there were a verse in the Bible that said, “If you just do this, then you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Oh, wait – there is a verse that says that.

**Galatians 5:16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.**

Overcome the power of the flesh by walking by the Holy Spirit. He says it again in verse 25.

**Galatians 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

### **Step by Step**

Life is a continuum of steps. Every thought you ever think is a step in some direction, taking you closer to some destination. Do not think of the steps in your life as just being the actions you do. Each thought is a step. That is why, in Job 31, he said “I’m not going to entertain lustful thoughts because God counts my every step.” Thoughts are steps. Attitudes are steps. Decisions are steps. Everything you do is a step, and the Holy Spirit reveals to us where He wants us to plant our next step every moment of the day. And all day long the flesh is making its demands too.

**Galatians 5:19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20**

**idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.**

Those are the kinds of things the flesh influences you to do. But the Holy Spirit is working in the opposite direction.

**22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.**

And the flesh and the Spirit are at war.

**17 the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.**

So there is a war. And the way to win the war is in verse 16.

**16 walk by<sup>1</sup> the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.**

I wake up in the morning, and it is time to start my work day, what does the Holy Spirit want me to do – roll over and stay in bed an extra half hour, or get up and get to work? He wants me to get up and get busy with carrying out my calling for the day. It is lunch time, what does the Holy Spirit want me to do? Assuming there are no unusual circumstances, He wants me to eat lunch. I need that food to carry out my calling. What if it is not meal time or snack time, my body does not really need any food, but I feel the impulse to eat just because I am bored or sad or depressed or whatever? What does the Holy Spirit want me to do? He wants me to realize that what I am hungry for is not really food; it is His presence, and I should respond accordingly. Someone in my family is being irritable and short with me, what does the Holy Spirit want me to do? Rehearse in my mind how ugly they are being, and wallow in self-pity or retaliate by allowing myself to drop into an irritable mood, or be harsh with them, or just walk away and ignore them and leave them in that condition? No – the Holy Spirit wants me to be patient and kind and encouraging. He wants me to overlook the offense and strive to bring them back to joy in Christ. The Holy Spirit always wants you to take the path of righteousness, love, and wisdom – one hundred percent of the time, no exceptions.

And as long as you are stepping along the path of wisdom or righteousness, you are keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. But as soon as you veer off that path – even if it is only in your thoughts – you are now out of step with the Spirit. If your wife is irritable and you spend five minutes thinking about how she is always like this, and she is such a hypocrite because if you were ever like this she would have a fit, but she does not realize she is like this way more often than you are, or whatever fleshy, sinful kinds of ungodly thoughts you might be inclined to entertain – each one of those thoughts is a step away from the Holy Spirit. When my kids were little, I made up an allegory for them for story time, and it was kind of my own version of Pilgrim's Progress. It was about a little girl who came across a moose, who terrified her at first, but ended up befriending her and becoming her guide up to the top of a mountain she was trying to climb. And as long as she stayed close by him, she was safe, and he would help her up the hard parts. But every once in a while something would catch her attention. Some little bunny rabbit would go hopping off to the side, and she would become intrigued and wander over to see it. And she would keep following it for a while until she lost interest, and then she would turn around and realize that her friend the moose was nowhere to be seen. She had wandered so far from him that now she was all by herself. That is what we do when we get out of step with the Spirit. We do not realize it is happening because the steps we are taking are only thoughts, and so they do not really seem like steps.

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<sup>1</sup> Dative of rule or norm (see Saur, Lightfoot, Meyer). The Holy Spirit is the norm or rule that determines where each next step should go.

### ***The Flesh Gains Strength when you are out of step with the Spirit***

But they are, and the really scary thing is this: From the first moment you get out of step with the Spirit, the flesh begins to gain strength. You know how sometimes you have the ability to say “no” to your flesh and other times it seems to just steamroll over you? Some days you have an impulse to be lazy or to overeat or to dally in some sinful habit, and you say, “No, I’m not going to do that” – and that is the end of it. And other times the flesh just rams through your defenses like a freight train going one hundred miles per hour and your little effort to say “no” does not even slow it down. What is it that makes the flesh so powerful sometimes and not other times? There are numerous factors, but one very important factor is this: The flesh is weak as long as you are in step with the Holy Spirit. The moment you get out of step with the Spirit, the flesh is like a snowball rolling down a hill. One of the most important keys to learning how to control the flesh is to realize that you cannot let the flesh get a head of steam. Once your flesh gets a running start, it is next to impossible to stop it. And every moment you are out of step with the Spirit, your flesh is gaining momentum.

So how do you get empowerment from the Spirit? Keep in step with Him. By the time your flesh gets to the point of saying, “I’m not doing this, and you can’t make me!” – usually by that time the reason the flesh has become so powerful is because there have been a whole lot of steps away from the Holy Spirit in your thinking and attitudes. For example, when you do your work in a way that is not a drawing near in fellowship with God, and you start looking at your work as a burden instead of a gift. Thinking like that will cut you off from empowerment by the Spirit because it is out of step with the way He instructed us to think. Let your mind step off in the direction of grumbling instead of gratitude and the next thing you know the flesh is overpowering.

Sit down in front of the TV, let down your spiritual defenses, watch a questionable show, or listen to some secular music that has an effect on your emotions in a bad way. Then let your mind run a little bit. Up to this point, someone watching you would have no clue that anything is wrong. No one would raise an eyebrow. Nothing scandalous yet, so the whole process goes unnoticed. You are thinking, “I’m OK – I haven’t really sinned yet. I won’t go all the way into sin.” Then temptation strikes, you fall like a house of cards, and you sit there and think, “What happened?” And the answer is, what happened was you took a bunch of steps toward a certain place and you ended up in that place.

When we lose a battle with sin, usually it is lost way before we realize it is lost. We think we lose the battle when some big temptation hits and we fall. But in reality, we lost the battle the moment we first departed from the Spirit and started taking steps away from what His will.

## **Do not grieve the Spirit**

So enjoy fellowship with the Spirit – and produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life – by keeping in step with the Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis. And one of our biggest motivations for keeping in step with Him is the fact that if we do not, it grieves Him.

### **Ephesians 4:30 do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**

The Greek word for **grieve** is just like the English word – we usually do not use that word for mild sadness. Normally, we only use the word “grieve” for really severe sorrow, like when you lose a loved one. So this is a very strong word. He is saying, “You know how you would feel if someone really close to you died? Do not make the Holy Spirit feel like that.”

### **Make it personal**

And one thing that shows us that is that the Holy Spirit is a person. He is not just some force or influence or ideal or life principle floating around between the atoms or something. He is a person who feels emotions like pleasure and anger and compassion and grief. And of all the many different motives Paul could have appealed to when he calls us to obey, he tells us to obey in order to avoid

causing grief to the heart of God the Spirit.

It is very important that when we obey, we obey a Person rather than a set of rules. Make your obedience *personal*. Following a rule and conforming to the will of a person are very different things. Obeying a rule is not necessarily an act of fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Obedience to His Word is an act of fellowship with Him when there is an awareness that He is right there with you in the room, and He has certain desires for how you act, and you want to align yourself according to His desires. That kind of obedience is like a conversation. The Spirit speaks to you by bringing to your mind a principle from His Word, and you respond to Him with a willing attitude that says, “Because it is You who wants me to do this, I’m eager to do it.”

### **Love the Spirit!**

One of the best things that can ever happen in your spiritual life is when you stop thinking of the Holy Spirit as a doctrine and start interacting with Him as a person. Doctrine is important – you cannot know the Person without doctrine. But the purpose of learning the doctrine must always be to increase love for the Person. Do you love the Holy Spirit? He loves you. He is praying for you. He is using all His considerable influence with the Father to gain blessings for you. He was the one who first opened your eyes to see the truth and beauty of the Gospel. He is the one who enabled you to believe. It was the Holy Spirit who set you free from the law of sin and death. Any time you have felt peace in your heart – that was Him. Any spiritual life and strength and health and motivation – that was Him. Every temptation you ever resisted – that was Him holding up your feeble arms and weak knees in the battle. Every time you knew which way to go – that was Him. Every time something about God delighted you instead of bored you – that was Him. Every good thing you have ever done was by His power and enablement. And some day, when Jesus returns and the trumpet sounds and your body is a cold, decayed corpse in the ground somewhere, it will be the Holy Spirit who will bare His mighty arm and raise you from the dead and give you a redeemed, glorified body that will be capable of enjoying paradise with the Lord forever.

### **Conclusion: Worship!**

In all that we have said about interacting with God, there is one topic I have not mentioned yet, and that is worship. I wanted to leave that for the end, so we can wrap up this whole study of loving God with a word about worship. Worship is the most fundamental way we are to respond to God.

What is worship? Worship is any act that honors God as God. The biblical word for “worship” does not mean “sing.” Singing is an important way to express worship, but singing itself is not worship. The biblical word for “worship” means to get on your face before God. The Hebrew word is SHACHAH – to bow down, do obeisance. The Greek word is *proskuneo* – to prostrate yourself. So the biblical words for worship have to do with an action of the body designed to honor Him as God. But you do not see those words much in the epistles, because the agenda in the epistles is to emphasize the fact that worship must come from the heart. External-only religion is worthless. All true worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. Empty ritualism and ceremonialism are worse than worthless.

So you put those two things together – worship is honoring God as God, and it must come from the heart – that is the core of biblical teaching on worship. And this is a good way to wrap up our thoughts on fellowship with God because when we talk about drawing near to God, relational closeness with Him, intimacy with the Lord – there is a real danger of becoming over-familiar to the point where we lose our reverence. So when we talk about all those things, we need to make sure we don’t forget – God is God. He is the Almighty, before whom angels tremble and cover their faces. He is the one who looks at the earth and it trembles. He touches the mountains and they smoke. He is awesome and terrifying, and worthy of the deepest reverence and fear. When we approach the Father, do we call Him “Abba” (Dad), and come boldly into His presence as His children? Yes – but we also fall on our faces in worship and awe. Is Jesus our Brother? Yes, but He is also our God and our King,



before whom we bow in humble reverence. Is the Holy Spirit our Comforter and Friend? Yes, but He is also the mighty Spirit of the living God who, when Ananias and Sapphira lied to Him, struck them dead on the spot. He is the one who, if you blaspheme Him, you can never be forgiven either in this life or the one to come. Draw near to God with confidence and joy, commune with Him in the sweetness of intimacy, but also tremble before Him in reverent fear.

**Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**