

The Spirit and Eschatology

INTRODUCTION: THE SPIRIT OF THE FIRST AND LAST THINGS

The Meaning of Eschatology

Eschatology is the study of the last things, that is, the things of the end time. When fully discussed they include ‘the last days’—which is a semi-technical term to cover the events of ‘the day of the Lord’, all that leads up to the final judgement. It also includes resurrection, the regeneration of the creation—the new heavens and the new earth—the final state of man in glorification, and other related elements.

However it is difficult to define what are ‘the last days’. For example, in Acts 2:14ff. Peter explains the coming of the Spirit in the light of Joel 2:28–32: ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh’. That shows that the last days stretch from Pentecost to the end. It means we are now in the last days. Eschatology, then, in a slightly different sense, is the study of the coming things. If we use that sense then the Spirit, from creation, has been the Spirit of the coming things. He has always been eschatological. And this is true. From Genesis 3:15 prophecy has been extant, and

has been concerned with 'things to come'. On the night of his betrayal Jesus said, of the Holy Spirit, 'he will declare to you the things that are to come'. This he has ever been doing, but in this era, the era that has been called the era of the Spirit, he has been telling us things to come.

Two views are held today: (i) that all eschatology is futuristic, it never seems to concern the actual present time; and (ii) eschatology is already realised (called 'realised eschatology'), that is, nothing has to be fulfilled. It has all happened and we have to live in the light of that. There is a third way of seeing things, namely eschatology is in the process of being realised. It is happening at present and will go on happening.

Our main point, however, is that the Spirit began his work at creation, and operated as agent of creation, just as the Father was the initiator, and the Son the mediator of that work. In time the Father has been the initiator of providence and salvation and will be seen at the end time to be the initiator of the regeneration of creation (cf. Matt. 19:28, 'the regeneration' or 'the new world'). The Son is the mediator in all these things, and the Spirit the agent. We have seen also that the Spirit yearns for the fulfilment of the plan of God and works to that purpose. He is the Spirit of life, of judgement, and of renewal.

The Eschatological Feasts

Israel had three great Feasts; those of the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. We would scarcely see them as eschatological except that Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). Calvary refers to the Passover, and the old Passover passes into the new communion, the celebration of the death. Whilst this ordinance or sacrament looks back to Calvary it is also presently showing the Lord's death, and this is 'until I come'. It looks to the future, and presages drinking the wine

anew in the kingdom of God, that is, the Messianic banquet to which Jesus often refers.

Pentecost was the feast of the offering of the first fruits. With the coming of the eschatological Spirit there was the offering of the first fruits, realised in the offering of those of Israel, Samaria, and the nations, that is, the Gentiles. This feast then has been fulfilled, or rather is being fulfilled in 'the last days'. The third feast—Tabernacles—is yet to be fulfilled. It is the offering of the whole harvest, the gathering in of the harvest, and praise to God for total fulfilment.

In this regard it is interesting to note in John 7:37–39, which was at the time of the feast of Tabernacles, that Jesus gave his great cry for folk to come to him, to drink and believe. If they did so then out of their bellies would flow rivers of living water. Tabernacles was connected with lights, and with the ritual of the priests bringing in water from Siloam, in golden vessels, whilst they chanted from Isaiah 12, 'With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation'. In Isaiah 12:4 it adds, 'And you will say in that day . . .' It points to the ultimate time. The water was poured out by the priests at the base of the altar, thus signifying that salvation and (the water of) life is linked with sacrifice, or as we see it, Calvary. The flowing waters from the believer are the Holy Spirit. In this sense the Holy Spirit is 'the fountain of living waters', a title normally used for God (e.g. Jer. 2:13), but now for the Spirit. It is used eschatologically in Revelation 7:17 and 22:17, and this almost certainly for the Spirit. The Spirit then is linked with Calvary (the Passover), Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

The Spirit's 'Salvation History'

Salvation history is of the Triune God, the entire Godhead. The Spirit is the Spirit of things to come. He both shapes them

up, and indicates them through prophecy. We have seen the pattern from beginning to end. The Son is eschatological in that what he has created (Col. 1:15–17) he will ultimately unify (Eph. 1:9–10). The Father is eschatological in that what He has created He will reconcile by the death of His Son (Col. 1:19–21). The Spirit is eschatological in that what he creates he will have fulfilled, purified, renewed. All history moves this way. *Always from the vantage point of the present, everything is building, mounting towards, the ultimate fulfilment.* That is, eschatology is in the process of being realised all the time. Thus in the days of Noah the flood is coming and is judgement. The Spirit will not strive or judge or dwell as he had. A new era is coming. Following the flood there is a new era of grace, God covenanting with His whole creation, but with the inception of the Abrahamic covenant all the future is in terms of that covenant. The inception of the Mosaic covenant is still within the broader canvas of the Abrahamic which relates to all the nations, and eventually Israel looks to its fulfilment in the new covenant. This covenant has as its initial gift, justification, and as its consequent and subsequent gift, the Spirit himself (Gal. 3:13–14).

The Testimony of Jesus Is the Spirit of Prophecy

Jesus, the Son, the Word, the Messiah, has always been the core and substance of prophecy (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10–11). So he will be to the end time. His coming was the word of prophecy. Having come he was the fulfilment of prophecy. His current work is realising eschatology, and this is yet to be fully realised. Acts 1:8 says that the coming of the Spirit will make his people witness to Jesus, that is, to have the testimony of Jesus. The book of the Revelation expands this very powerfully. The conflict in that book is between Satan (and his

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powers) and those who ‘have’ or ‘hold’ or ‘bear’ the testimony of Jesus.

This makes us look again at Pentecost and the new ministry of the people of God. ‘And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit *on all flesh*; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . . Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit’ (Joel 2:28f.). This is what happened at Pentecost, but it is spoken of for all the days which are the last days, until ‘the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day’. The proclamation at Pentecost was at once *kerugma* (proclamation, the evangel) and *prophecy*. It is speaking about what God has done to save men, and what He is about doing. In this sense the Spirit is showing ‘things to come’.

We need to see that *in general* all the new people of God are in the ministry of prophets, although comparatively few are prophets—for example, Agabus, Judas, Silas, and so forth—whilst prophetic utterances may happen from time to time, but rather as manifestations of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7) than the ministry of one called a prophet. Whatever, the element that is of the Spirit, whilst containing exhortation for the present, is also connected with the work of Christ, that is, ‘the testimony of Jesus’. In reality ‘the testimony of Jesus’ is that active working of Christ, in and through his people, in order to fulfil the plan of God.

THE SPIRIT OF THE THINGS TO COME

The Spirit of Judgement

We previously touched on this aspect of the Spirit’s work. We need to repeat what we have said, in slightly expanded

form. John the Baptist spoke of Messiah who was to come, and his words are couched in those of Isaiah 40, Malachi 3 and 4, relating to the messenger of the covenant, and one coming in the spirit of Elijah (cf. Matt. 3; Mark 1; Luke 3; John 1). Jesus later showed clearly that this was John. He had come in this Spirit.

John's statement concerning Messiah was that he would 'baptise . . . with the Holy Spirit and with fire'. Messiah, of course, was the sum and essence of the prophecies of the last days. He would come as judge (cf. also Acts 10:42; 17:31). However, *his judgement would be by the Spirit*. He would baptise with the Spirit and with fire. 'Spirit' and 'fire' are Hebraic parallelism, that they stand for the same thing. Jesus himself was to have a baptism of fire. In Luke 12:49ff., he says, 'I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!' He was to go through the fire of suffering. He was to take the judgement of the world. In so doing he would prepare for the Spirit's coming. He would gather the grain into the granary, but through the Spirit would burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable. Hence he says to certain of the Pharisees and Sadducees that they are snakes running before a grass or bush fire. They see the judgement. In fact they do not see it! Nevertheless it is coming!

This spirit of judgement and burning is mentioned in Isaiah 4:4 (cf. 9:19). The fire in Scripture has at least four meanings:

- i) judgement that destroys,
- ii) judgement that cleanses and purifies, taking away the dross,
- iii) fire that gives power,
- iv) fire that is suffering.

To speak of God as consuming fire is not against speaking of Him as love. In the deepest understanding these two may well be the one, even to 'the lake of fire'. Doubtless this is a mystery. The Spirit who comes at Pentecost is the one who at the same time brings the remission of sins for some, and the retention of sins for others. That is, judgement cleanses on the one hand and burns up on the other. Hence at Pentecost those who repent (through the Spirit) receive forgiveness and life, and those in the Sanhedrin who hear the same word, and are 'cut to the heart' and seek to destroy the apostles have their sins retained.

In Isaiah 11—that most eschatological of chapters!—Messiah is anointed with the seven-fold Spirit. He then proceeds to judge, and especially with 'the [*ruach*] of his mouth', and with 'the [*ruach*] of his lips he shall slay the wicked' (v. 4). Likewise in Isaiah 42:1 the servant will have the Spirit put upon him and 'he will bring forth justice to the nations'. The same phrase 'breath of his mouth' is used in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, 'And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming'. This latter reference is most important because it really says that the ultimate judgement *will be by the Holy Spirit*, that is, the 'spirit of judgement', and the 'spirit of burning' (Isa. 4:4). Not for nothing is judgement pictured in terms of fire eternal.

We should also see that as the word is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, currently there is judgement taking place. It is either grace received (the forgiveness of sins) or grace rejected (the retention of sins). The one repenting sees that in fact his judgement has taken place on the cross and that judgement has freed him ('he who has died is freed [justified] from sin', Rom. 6:7). The other refuses the judgement borne by Christ and so must come into judgement. In these 'last days'

the Spirit is active in judgement. The ‘wrath to come’ hangs as doom over a system upon which climactic judgement must come in ‘the day of the Lord’. Current judgements are described in powerful and terrible terms in the Revelation of John.

The Spirit of Hope and Glory

From the rather fierce and sharp judgemental ministry of the Spirit we turn to the beautiful ministry of hope. This hope is ‘the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27) and the ‘hope of sharing the glory of God’ (Rom. 5:2).¹ A number of Scriptures show us the links of the Spirit and our hope of glory.

In 1 Corinthians 2:6–14 Paul says in effect that God had always planned our glory, but that the glory to come has never been envisaged by man. Sinful man could not believe in such great grace, and he has no criteria by which to understand it. Therefore the Spirit has been sent to teach us, for he searches God’s deeps and tells them to us, and helps us to know the gifts of God.

In 1 Peter the writer speaks primarily of suffering and shows us that suffering relates to ultimate glory. He says, ‘rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also *rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed*. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you’ (1 Pet. 4:13–14). This is a theme which Paul also expounds (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16f.).

Paul, in Romans 8:14–30, has a whole thesis on this score. He says that those who are sons of God are led by the Spirit. He then says that the Spirit of sonship leads to suffering: ‘we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him’ (v. 17). Suffering is not the cost of glory but the way to

¹ For a detailed treatment of hope see LFS no. 26, ‘The Biblical Doctrine of Hope’ (*Living Faith Studies—vol. 3*, NCPI, Blackwood, 2000).

glory, or the way of glorification (2 Cor. 4:16f.). He then says that the sons of God will be shown in their glory and when this takes place creation itself will be released from its (current) bondage to corruption. It will share in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. He shows in verses 28–30 of Romans 8 that suffering conforms us to the image, that is, to the glory of the Son. However in all this he is speaking of hope, that is, the hope of glory. In this passage the Spirit is the Spirit of hope. He says that creation groans, and even the believer is convulsed with groaning, even though he has the 'first fruits of the Spirit'. The first fruits can mean 'the first things the Spirit gives', for example, the fruit of the Spirit, and so on (cf. Rom. 5:3–5). Yet better still it means the first fruits of what will be. The Spirit is giving us more than a taste of what will be. Hence 'hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God [now] is shed abroad in our hearts' (Rev. 5:5, AV). We *now* experience something of what will be. The first fruits are not the whole harvest but they are of *the quality* of the whole harvest.

The Spirit is also called the guarantee or pledge (Greek: *arrobōn*) of what is to come (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14). This means an immediate down payment, or a sod of the whole soil, something on which we can put our hand as an assurance that what has been promised will come to us. This is not only the gift of the Spirit to assure us, but also the life of the Spirit within us which keeps us oriented to the glory and inheritance to come. The Spirit keeps us in this anticipation. As the ultimate glory hastens towards us, so do we hasten towards it. This is what Paul means when he says the Spirit makes us long and groan for that day, and his presence rather than satiating us in the present puts a keen edge onto our anticipation.

Of course our hope is not simply for our own glory, although this is wonderful, but seeing ourselves as sharing the very glory of God Himself: 'when he appears we shall be

like him, for we shall see him as he is', as Christ changes these bodies of our humiliation, making them like his own body of glory (1 John 3:2). It is in this hope that the Spirit keeps us free and the dynamic of this hope makes us live in a useful manner within this present aeon.

CONCLUSION

In our study on the new people of God we say that the Spirit uses his church as the means of proclamation, and so of conflict with evil powers. He gives his people weapons of the Spirit, and powerful gifts by means of which the enemies are beaten down under the feet of Christ. These things may be studied in the Revelation. It is the saints, clothed in fine linen, who follow the Word on his white horse and do battle with evil. These are empowered by the Spirit of power.

We see, too, that as the world is convicted of sin and righteousness and judgement, they who repent are filling up the role of the elect people of God, and so the end is being hastened. In seemingly dark ways, as in ways of holy light, the Spirit is shaping things up to the end time, looking for the consummation of the plan of the Father when 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ' (Rev. 11:15), and when 'every knee [shall] bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2:10–11), that is, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power—when every enemy is put under his feet (see 1 Cor. 15:24–28). At that time the Son shall turn to the Father and give him the kingdom, that God may be all in all, or, 'everything to every one'.

Then shall the eschatological Spirit, also, 'see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied' (Isa. 53:11).