**Lesson 16**

**The Spirit Witnessing**

The Holy Spirit is first a witness **for** Christ, and then He is a witness **to** His people **of** Christ.

***John 15:26— "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me***

* The Spirit bears His testimony for Christ in the Scriptures
* He bears His testimony to us in our renewed minds.
* He is a Witness for the Lord Jesus by all that is revealed in Scripture concerning Him.
* He bears witness to the abiding efficacy of Christ’s offering . . . that sin has been atoned for.

The Holy Spirit is both an **objective witness** and a **subjective witness**.

* As an **objective witness** the Holy Spirit bears witness **to God’s people**,
* As a **subjective witness** the Holy Spirit bears witness **in God’s people**.

**Objective witness—** In bearing witness **to** God’s people the Holy Spirit bears witness to believers that “***the Lord declares of His people, “their sins and iniquities will I remember no more***” (Heb 10:17). Whereupon the Holy Spirit points out, “***Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin***” (v. 18). Thus does He witness to us, through the Word, of the sufficiency and finality of Christ’s one offering.

**Subjective witness—** In being a witness **in** God’s people the Holy Spirit assures us of our salvation.

“They perceive that the faith of which many empty professors boast so loudly is *not evidenced* by their works. And they discover so much in themselves that appears to be altogether incompatible with their being new creatures in Christ, until they often fear their own conversion was but a delusion after all.

When an honest soul contemplates the amazing greatness of the honor and the stupendousness of the relation of regarding itself as a joint-heir with Christ, it is startled and staggered.

What, *me* a child of God! God *my* Father! Who am I to be thus exalted into the divine favor? Surely it cannot be so. When I consider my fearful sinfulness and unworthiness, the awful depravity of my heart, the carnality of my mind, such rebellion of will, so prone to evil every moment, and such glaring flaws in all I undertake—surely I cannot have been made a partaker of the divine nature. It seems impossible; and Satan is ever ready to assure me that I am not God’s child.

If the reader be a stranger to such tormenting fears, we sincerely pity him. But if his experience tallies with what we have just described, he will see how indispensable it is that the Holy Spirit should bear witness to him *within*.

Many believers have a “tormenting fear” that their faith is merely self-deception, that while they have knowledge of the truth, their knowledge is not a saving knowledge. But rather than saying such self-doubt is uncommon, Pink states that “if the reader be a stranger to such tormenting fears, we sincerely pity him. But if his experience tallies with what we have just described, he will see how indispensable it is that the Holy Spirit should bear witness to him *within*.” In other words, Pink is saying that true believers should have doubts and fear regarding his or her salvation! Do you agree? Why is it that believers should have such self-doubt?

**Doubting and Professing Christians**

“We may state it thus: Does God require anyone to believe he has been born again when he has no clear *evidence* that such is the case? Surely the question answers itself: the God of truth never asks anyone to believe a lie. If my sins have *not* been pardoned, then the more firmly convinced I am that they *have been*, the worse for me; and very ready is Satan to second me in my self-deception! The devil would have me assured that all is well with me, *without* a diligent search and thorough examination for sufficient *evidence* that I am a new creature in Christ. O how many he is deceiving by making them believe it is wrong to challenge their profession and put their hearts to a real trial!”

“Nothing is more absurd than to say that professing Christians are made partakers of Christ by holding fast the confidence *that they are saved*, for that is what many a *deceived* soul does, and does to the very end (Mat 7:22). There can be no well-grounded confidence unless it rests upon clear evidence or reliable testimony. And for *that*, there must be ***the appeal to God for a good conscience*** (1 Peter 3:21), and the confirmatory witness of the Spirit.”

The reason true believers question their salvation is because they have begun to see themselves and their sin as God sees it . . . a heinous offense to the holiness of God. But it is only when we see ourselves as God sees us that we, at last, have an honest appraisal of what we are without Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who bears witness in our spirit that we are wretched.

**The function of the Holy Spirit’s office of Witness**

The function of the Holy Spirit’s office of a witness is to bear testimony and provide proof of the gospel message. The first time this concept of being a witness appears is in Romans 2:15 . . .

***Romans 2:14-15— 14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, 15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them . . .***

In Romans 2:15 the reference is to those who had not received the written revelation of God’s word, as the Jews had. Nevertheless, all men are accountable to God and subject to His authority and will be judged by Him. The grounds upon which all men are held accountable to God is found clearly stated in Romans 1:18-32 . . .

***Romans 1:18-32—18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25 For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.***

***26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. 28 And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; 32 and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.***

Not only do natural man’s moral instincts instruct them in the difference between right and wrong, and warn them of a future day of reckoning, but their conscience also bears witness against them. The human conscience is a divine monitor within, supplying evidence that God is their Governor and Judge.

But while the Christian ever remains a creature accountable to his Maker and Ruler, he is also a child of God, and his **renewed conscience** bears witness to the truth of the Spirit’s witness.

**What the Spirit bears witness to**

“It is most important that the Christian should be quite clear as to **what it is**his own “spirit” or conscience bears witness to. It is **not**to the eradication of evil from his heart, nor is it to any purification of or improvement in his carnal nature—anyone whose conscience bears witness to that, bears witness to a **lie**.”

**“That which the renewed conscience of the Christian bears witness to is the fact that he is a child of God.”**

The true believer becomes increasingly conscious of and daily groans over his sin through the spirit of adoption that has been communicated to his heart.

* That filial spirit draws out his heart in love to God, so that he craves after the conscious enjoyment of His smiling countenance, and esteems fellowship with Him high above all other privileges.
* That filial spirit inspires confidence toward God, so that he pleads His promises, counts on His mercy, and relies on His goodness.
* That filial spirit begets reverence for God, so that His ineffable majesty is held in awe, His high authority is respected, and he trembles at His Word.
* That filial spirit produces subjection to God, so that he desires to obey Him in all things, and sincerely endeavors to walk according to His commands and precepts.”

These are the definite marks by which the Christian may test himself. True, he is yet very far from being what he shouldbe, or what he wouldbe could his earnest longings only be realized. Nevertheless, is not his present case very different from what it once was?

* Instead of seeking to banish God from your thoughts, is it not now the desire of your heart for your mind to be stayed upon Him, and is it not a joy to meditate upon His perfections?
* Instead of giving little or no concern as to whether your conduct honored or dishonored the Lord, is it not now your sincere endeavor to please Him in all your ways?
* Instead of paying no attention to indwelling sin, has not the plague of your heart become your greatest burden and grief? Well, then, **these very things bear witness and provide *evidence* thatyou are a child of God**.

**Great quote—** “If with honesty of purpose, lowliness of heart, and prayerful inquiry, I find myself breathing after holiness, panting after conformity to Christ, and mourning over my failures to realize the same, then so far from it being presumption for me to conclude I am a child of God, it would be willful blindness to refuse to recognize the work of the Spirit in my soul. If my conscience bears witness to the fact that I honestly desire and sincerely endeavor to serve and glorify God, then it is wrong for me to deny, or even to doubt, that God has “begun a good work” in me.”

**A stern self-examination**

The question that most deeply exercises a genuine saint is not, “have I repented, do I have faith in Christ, or do I love God?” but **rather, are my repentance, faith and love sincere and genuine?**

**1.** The true Christian discerns that Scripture distinguishes between false repentance and true, genuine repentance.

***1 Kings 21:27— It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently.***

“The ‘sorrow of the world’ is not at the sin itself, but at its penal consequences, so that the tears of pain are no sooner dried up, than the pleasures of ungodliness are renewed.”

Remorse will always accompany repentance, but

Remorse is not always accompanied by repentance.

**In other words**, remorse is not repentance. Remorse is an emotion. Repentance is a change in attitude and behavior.

***2 Corinthians 7:9-10— 9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.***

**2**. The true Christian discerns between faith and saving faith.

***Acts 8:13, 18-22— 13 Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed. 18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles’ hands, he offered them money, 19 saying, “Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.” 20 But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! 21 “You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. 22 “Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.***

***1 Timothy 1:5— But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.***

**3**. The true Christian discerns between love and ***incorruptible love***.

***Matthew 26:49—*** ***Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.***

***Ephesians 6:24— Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.***

Only by the gracious enabling of the Holy Spirit can any soul discern between false and true repentance, faith and love.

* He Who bestowed upon the Christian repentance and faith must also make him to know the things that are freely given to him by God. Grace can only be known by grace, as the sun can only be seen in its own light. It is only by the Spirit Himself that we can be truly assured we have been born of Him.

**Errors in subjective witness**

Jonathan Edwards: *“Many have been the mischiefs that have arisen from that false and delusory notion of the witness of the Spirit, that it is a kind of inward voice, suggestion, or revelation from God to man, that he is beloved of Him, and that his sins are pardoned— sometimes accompanied with, sometimes without, a text of Scripture; and many have been the false and vain (though very high) affections that have arisen from hence. It is to be feared that multitudes of souls have been eternally undone by it.”*

**Errors in subjective witness** occur because they are . . . **subjective**. The word “subjective” means “based on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions.” There are three primary errors in subjective witness.

**1.** “The Holy Spirit’s indwelling of the Christian is the sure mark of his adoption. Yet, the Spirit cannot be discerned by us in His essence; only by means of His operations is He to be known.

* As we discern His work, we perceive the Worker; and *how* His work in the soul can be *ascertained* without diligent examination of our inward life and a careful comparison of it with the Scriptures, we know not.
* The Spirit reveals Himself to us by that spirit which He begets in us.”
* **In other words, we can’t perceive the presence of the Spirit. We can only be assured of His presence by the works that He accomplishes in us.**

**2.** “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16).

* Let it be carefully noted that this verse does not say the Spirit bears witness ***to***our spirit (as it is so often misquoted), but “***with.***” The phrase ***bears witness with*** is a single, compound Greek word, *summartureō*.
* It is deeply important to notice this distinction: the witness of the Spirit is not so much a revelation that is made to my spirit, considered as the recipient of the testimony, as it is a *confirmation* made in or with my spirit, considered as cooperating in the testimony. It is not that my spirit bears witness that I am a child of God, and that then the Spirit of God comes in by a distinguishable process with a separate testimony, to say Amen to my assurance; but it is that there is a single testimony which has a conjoint origin.”

**3.** “The “witness” of the Spirit, then, is *not* by means of any supernatural vision nor by any mysterious voice informing me I am a child of God, for the devil tells many a hypocrite that.”

* In other words, the Holy Spirit does not reveal Himself or His work through any manifestation but His work in us.

**Guidelines for the Spirit’s witness**

Arthur Pink lists 4 guidelines for how the Spirit bears witness in us.

**“First**, the Spirit’s witness is in strict accord with the teaching of Holy Writ.

* It is by the truth that the Spirit enlightens, convicts, comforts, feeds, and guides the people of God; and it is by and through the truth that He bears witness with their spirit.
* There is a perfect harmony between the testimony of Scripture and the varied experiences of each renewed soul, and it is by revealing to us this harmony, by showing us the correspondence between the history of our soul and the testimony of the Word, that He persuades us we are born again.”

**Second**, **He works** such graces in us as are peculiar to God’s children, and thereby evidences our interest in the favor of God.

* **He makes** the Christian to feel “poor in spirit,” a pauper dependent upon the charity of God.
* **He causes** the Christian to “mourn” over much that gives the worldling no concern whatever.
* **He bestows** a spirit of “meekness” so that the rebellious will is, in part, subdued, and God’s will is submitted unto.
* **He gives** a “hunger and thirst after righteousness” and gives the soul to feel that the best this perishing world has to offer him is unsatisfying and but empty husks.
* **He makes** the Christian “merciful” toward others, counteracting that selfish disposition which is in us by nature.
* **He makes** the Christian “pure in heart” by giving him to pant after holiness and hate that which is vile.”

**Third**, He helps us to discern His work of grace in our souls more clearly.

* Conscience does its part, and the Spirit confirms the same.
* The conjoint witness of the Spirit gives vigor and certainty to the assurance of our hearts.
* When the flood-waters of a land mingle themselves with a river, they make one and the same stream, but it is now more rapid and violent. In like manner, the united testimonies of our own conscience and of the Spirit make but one witness.

**Fourth**, He helps us not only to see grace, but to judge of the sincerity and reality of it.

* It is at this point many honest souls are most sorely exercised. It is much easier to prove that we believe, than to be assured that our faith is a saving one.
* It is much easier to conclude that we love Christ, than it is to be sure that we love Him in sincerity and for what He is in Himself.
* Our hearts are fearfully deceitful: there are many minglings of faith and unbelief (Mar 9:24), and grace in us is so feeble that we hesitate to pronounce positively upon our state. But when the Spirit increases our faith, rekindles our love, strengthens us with might in the inner man, He enables us to come to a definite conclusion.
* First He sanctifies and then He certifies.

**But how do I know if my faith is real?**

“The deceits of Satan, though often plausible imitations up to a point, are, in their tendency and outcome, always opposed to that which God enjoins. On the other hand, the operations of the Spirit are ever in unison with the written Word. Here, then, is a sure criterion by which we may test *which* spirit is at work within us.”

The three truths of Scripture that more directly concern us are **our ruin by nature**, **our redemption by grace**, and **the duties we owe by virtue of our deliverance**.

* If then, our beliefs, our feelings, our assurance, tend to exalt depraved nature, depreciate divine grace, or lead to a licentious life, they are certainly not of God.
* But if they have quite the opposite tendency, convincing us of our wretchedness by nature, making Christ more precious to us, and leading us into the duties He enjoins, they are of the Holy Spirit.

“Why does not the Holy Spirit grant unto the Christian a strong and comforting assurance of his divine sonship *at all times*?”

**First**, we must distinguish between the Spirit’s *work* and His *witness*: often it is His office to convict and make us miserable, rather than to impart comfort and joy.

**Second**, His assuring consolation is often withheld because of our slackness: we are bidden to “make your calling and election sure” and “*be diligent* that ye may be found of him in peace” (2 Pe 1:10; 3:14)—the comforts of the Spirit drop not into lazy souls.

**Third**, because of our sins: “The Holy Spirit fell on all them which *heard the word*” (Act 10:44)— not while they were walking in the paths of unrighteousness. His witness is a *holy* one: He will not put a jewel in a swine’s snout (Pro 11:22).

**Keep yourselves in the love of God (Jude 21), and the Spirit’s witness will be yours.**