

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Openness to the Holy Spirit Life in the Spirit Seminar Saturday, May 19, 2001
St. Joseph, Downers Grove Church Hall 8:30 a.m.—3:00 p.m. (Blocks to
welcoming the Holy Spirit)

Creation and Fall

In the Book of Genesis where the author describes the creation it says, first of all, that God saw what he created was all good. That's point number one; you must never forget that everything God creates is good. All evil comes into the world through an abuse of what is good, a misuse of what is good. If we are going to talk about the need for repentance, where sin entered the world was at the very beginning when Adam and Eve—this is a story, but it is an expressive story—when the human nature decided that it could become equal to God by throwing God out of the picture. The serpent said to Eve, “Eve, don't you know if you do as you please and ignore God's will, you will be equal to God, knowing good and evil.” Well, of course, that's a big lie. They were already made in the image and likeness of God, but they cannot be equal to God. “Jesus, Son though he was, did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at, but emptied himself.” Why? Because that's how to be a creature. And Jesus in his human flesh showed us the way to be a human person. And it's the opposite to what Adam and Eve did in the garden when they decided not to be a creature but to try to be the Creator, to try to be equal to the Creator by making up in their own mind what is good and what is evil, which amounts to listing what is good for me is good, what is bad for me is bad—and that, we have no right to do. And when we do that, when we take over that kind of direction for our own lives, we push God out. And conversion is letting God back into the center.

Conversion

Now this can only be done very gently; actually it's the Spirit who does it. The Spirit resumes his place at the center of our lives when we are ready to let the Spirit return. There are many reasons, however, that we are not ready. Some might be total abject sin. Probably in terms of deliberate sin that's not the case for probably anyone here today because you come drawn by something; and I doubt there are other ulterior motives—you could get a better lunch somewhere else, but not a free one! It's a beautiful day, so you're not coming in out of the cold or out of the rain. So you are probably motivated rightly. But there is perhaps woundedness from someone else's sin or perhaps some of your own sins of the past that have left some sort of wound within you.

Now today, right now, you may want to mention something to the person who prays with you so that—that's a way of letting go. So, for example, maybe your entire life long you have suffered because you had a terrible relationship with your mother. Now if you had a terrible relationship with your mother, that's a deep wound—it really is serious—or father. So you might want to say, “You know, I have never ever been able to relate to my father,” or “I never was ever able to relate to my mother,” or “I went through a terrible, nasty divorce, and there is still unforgiveness in my heart.” Those things could hold us back from the Spirit entering, so you may want to mention it.

But there are other reasons which are even harder to understand, but are just as real. We might simply be uptight emotionally or physically. So we always recommend that people relax. When the Book of Genesis talks about the creation it says, you know, God started with clay, and then he breathed breath into the clay. And breath is the word “spirit,” in Hebrew, “Ruha,” used for breath. All right? And it says, “And man became a living soul.” See, so what do we start with? Clay—matter, then the breath of God, which is life. That’s another word for spirit. “Spirit, life,” in fact in Greek, the word “life” and the word “breath” are both “psyche,” although there are other words too for both of them. But there is a word “psyche”; it means “life” and also means “breath.” And lately it even came to mean “mind.” Psyche—that’s where we get the word “psychology.” So there is matter and there is life, and then together there is a living soul, a living identity, a living person. Okay? But we are composite. That’s why Bill put it very well, “The Lord is either the Lord of the whole thing, or he is not the Lord of anything.” But we try to let God be the Lord of part of us. “Okay, well, God, you can have this little section, but over here I’ve got to be in charge!” It doesn’t work that way. It’s either all or nothing. So for even psychological reasons we could have been keeping the Lord out of some part of our life. And that could be blocking the fullness of the Spirit and the true Lordship of Christ over our entire lives.

We are Physical, Spiritual, and Composite of the Two

So we are three things. We are physical. We are spiritual. And then we are the composite of the two. And that’s important to keep in mind. Problems can come from anywhere. The point is, no matter where our problems come from, God can heal them. We see in the desert Jesus—no matter what the problem is, mental, emotional, physical, whatever, he can heal it. That’s the point. There is nothing beyond the domain of God—nothing! So we need to come to the Lord as physical, spiritual, composite persons and ask him to take over the whole of us. In this gift of ourselves we need to then encompass this sort of way of thinking into our prayer life. Now actually as western people we usually don’t. Our prayers are almost all mental—we just pray up in our head. How many times—just think about it—we don’t even pray *The Lord’s Prayer* out loud. But actually the prayers of Scripture, for example—the really right way to pray Scripture is out loud. The right way to pray the psalms, even when you are by yourself, is out loud. Why? Because your body has got to be involved. Don’t you want your body to praise God? Well, as westerners we don’t. We have pretty well left our bodies out of our prayer, so we pray with our mind alone. That’s not a good idea. We need to let everything be God’s, including our bodies.

Involving Our Bodies in Prayer

So in the early Church when people prayed, they prayed with their arms upright. It says that in Scripture: “Pray with hands raised.” Why? Well, what does raising your hands look like? What does it look like? It looks like you’re ready and you’re open—you’re not defending yourself; you’re not closing in on yourself; you’re opening yourself. It’s a physical sign that is indicative of your desire to be open. So, is it absolutely essential? I wouldn’t say that, but it’s very helpful if you want to be open to the Lord to be physically open. So we pray with our bodies as well as our minds and our voices. Okay? That’s why the Church has encouraged us to return to the early practice of singing

in church. In the early Church people always sang everything, but then they quit singing and let some other group sing. That's not the idea; the other group is just supposed to help the rest of us. So we sing; we praise; we're open physically as well as mentally so our bodies reflect our minds and our wills. So we are living in the three-person image of God. And the will means we are capable of making choices. So deliberately we open ourselves to God physically and ventilate emotionally. We open our hearts to the Lord, to whatever we need.

Gift of Tongues

Now the fact that I'm saying you should do this doesn't mean you will be able to do this today because your whole life—you have lived so many years, and maybe you have lived so many years all more or less bound up. Well, I've rarely seen—I'm not saying it's impossible—I've rarely seen someone completely let go all at once. Sometimes maybe, but often it takes a little time for you to open up. Now as you open up your body, you open up also your voice. We talked earlier about the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues won't come if your mouth is shut—it won't! Well, you're not going to receive the gift if you're not open to it. You have to open your body, open your arms, open your mouth. One priest I know says, "Be a fool for Christ!" And it may make you feel foolish at first to open your mouth and start—and you say, "That's not a word." No, they're not words, not per se. They're forms of praise; that's what they are.

Now I know of a church in Chicago where Puerto Ricans were having a Life in the Spirit Seminar, and this guy who left the Church, left everything, he was really—he had been a Catholic, an Iraqi, Caldean Catholic from Baghdad, and he thought Church was all for babies. Well, anyway somehow he came into this church. And he heard—so he said—he heard an ancient language, which he had studied at the University of Baghdad, in the prayers. Now, is this because God let him hear that, or was it really what it was? I don't know, but according to him the language coming out of people's mouths was really this ancient language. Whether God just wanted him to hear this ancient language, or whatever, it doesn't matter to me. It was a sign for him, and he returned to Christ and to practice in the Church. And there are times when the Lord opens our minds, and anyway that's what happened to him. But it's openness. Now this particular community—I knew them, and they were very open people. So the Lord used them to get to him. He really uses us if we're open. Openness is the essential thing, so we need to be open today, open to do whatever the Lord wants to do. If he wants to give you the gift of tongues, then praise him for it. If you don't receive the gift of tongues today, that's all right—maybe some other day. Or maybe he has some other plans, but he has got plans for you, you can be sure of that! "Say not, 'I am too young,'" God said to Jeremiah. He might say to others, "Say not, 'I am too old,' say not, 'I am a woman,' say not 'I am a man.'" Don't make excuses because God uses everyone.