

Are We Afraid Of The Spirit Of God?
Scripture Lessons: Romans 8

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Last week my youngest son, Mark, and I made a Galvanometer. A Galvanometer is a contraption that is able to detect very weak electrical currents. Mark got an empty bottle and wrapped about 20 or 30 feet of bell wire around in and hooked the two ends of the wire to a dry cell battery. An electrical current was created even though we couldn't see it, feel it, smell it or touch it because electricity is invisible. But there's a way to detect its presence. He took a very small finishing nail and magnetized it by rubbing it on a magnet. Then he suspended the nail from a thread in the opening of the bottle. When the wires were connected to the dry cell the nail swung around and pointed straight ahead. When he disconnected the wire, the nail swung back to its natural position. The movement of the nail indicated that the electricity was really there even though we couldn't see, feel, touch, taste, or smell it.

In one way the Holy Spirit is like electricity. We can't see, hear, feel, smell, touch or taste the Spirit. But unlike electricity, which is only a force, the Holy Spirit is personal. Paul refers to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Christ. He tells us that the Spirit gives us new life, dwells in us, leads us, adopts us in to the family of God, bears witness to us, helps us in our weakness, prays for us and will transform us eventually into the presence of Christ. This is not some impersonal force. This is none other than the Spirit of the God who has revealed himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who is a real Christian, Paul says, has the Spirit. If you don't have the Spirit, you aren't a real and you don't have a saving faith.

But since the Spirit is invisible we need something like a Galvanometer to detect the presence of this invisible, hidden person in our lives. Paul tells us how we can detect the Spirit's presence in our lives.

1. One sure sign that the Spirit's presence is that our minds are set on the Spirit. Paul writes, "Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit." The person whose mind is set on the flesh is someone who lives only for this life. That person is like the nail. When the

wires aren't connected to the dry cell battery it just goes in a natural direction. The person whose mind is set on the things of the Spirit is a person who sees beyond this life; who knows that money, fame, or pleasure can never be the goal of life. That person is like the nail when the wires are connected to the battery. When the Spirit is in us and we've connected with God. Through the Spirit our lives point towards Christ...we just don't go our own natural way.

So many people seem to think only of the things of the flesh...we so easily forget there is a spiritual dimension. In C.S. Lewis's The Silver Chair, Jill, Eustace and Puddleglum the Marshwiggle escape from some giants who planned to eat them by hiding in a cave. AS they went deeper into the cave they discovered a vast underworld ruled by an evil witch who has convinced all her subject that there's no world above, no sky, no sun, no stars, no fresh air, no trees and grass. She's convinced her subjects that their chief end in life is to dig in the earth for diamonds. And above all she's convinced her subjects that there's no Aslan, The King. But she's unable to completely succeed in casting her spell on the children of Narnia and the Marshwiggle. They've seen the sky and the trees and the grass. They know there's another world. So they rise up and slay the witch and make their escape.

If we've really trusted in Jesus Christ, God has given us the Spirit of Christ. Though we're tempted at times to live as though this world is all there is to live for; the Spirit won't let us forget that our chief purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. The Spirit will enable us to put to death those things which take us away from Christ and keep us pointed towards Christ. So one sign of the Spirits presence in our lives and that we are real Christians is that our Thoughts and Minds point more and more to the things of Christ and his kingdom.

2. A second sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, Paul tells us in verse 15, is when we cry, "Abba! Father!" Abba is the Aramaic word for daddy. Aramaic is the language that Jesus spoke. Abba is how Jesus addressed God in prayer. No one, before Jesus, ever used the word Abba to address God. To speak with God in such familiar terms was unthinkable. It was a term that expresses the most intimate relationship of love and trust between a young child and its father. Through faith in Christ we come to know God as our father. We are adopted in God's family. We stand before the Lord of the universe as a little child before its father. One sure sign

of the Holy Spirit in our lives is that we cry, “Abba! Father!” We speak intimately and personally with God as our Father in prayer. Notice Paul says that Christians don’t just pray to God as father. They cry “Abba! Father!”

When I was a little boy I once went into Wilmington with my father to the brand new Hearn’s Super Market to shop. Somehow I wandered away from him and got lost in a crowd of people. When I became aware that he was nowhere in sight I became alarmed. I looked up and down the aisle and couldn’t see him or hear him. I panicked. I started running up one aisle and down another crying, “Daddy! Daddy! I want my dad!” And when he found me I rushed into his arms crying, knowing that I was safe.

There are times that we wander off from God our heavenly Father. But if we really know God personally, through Jesus Christ, we become alarmed. A sure sign that we have God’s Spirit is that we cry to God, “Abba! Father!” We cry out to God in prayer like a little lost child. “Where are you God? I’ve wandered away from you.” And because God has become our Father we can never be lost. He’ll not ever let us wander so far from his grace that he’ll not find us. And not only when we’ve wandered but when we are in trouble, tempted, discouraged, depressed....

3. A third sign that we have the Spirit of God is that we’re willing to suffer for the sake of Christ. Paul writes that if we’re children of God then we’re heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ- “if, in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.”

What are we willing to suffer and die for. A cynical world believes there nothing worth suffering and dying for. I want my boys to believe that some things are worth suffering and dying for. I’m not sure of everything that’s worth dying for, but I’m sure it’s worth suffering with and for Christ.

When I was about 15 years old, my sister, Mary, gave me the book Jungle Pilot, the story of Nate Saint and Jim Eliot. Reading that book was one of the factors in my decision to go to Wheaton College. These two graduates of Wheaton College became missionaries to primitive Auca Indians in Ecuador who had never heard the Gospel. On the evening before Jim and Nate landed

their small one engine piper cub on a sand bar in the jungle river and made their first personal contact with the Aucas, they discussed whether they should take a gun for protection in case the natives attacked them. They decided that they couldn't go these natives with the Gospel of Jesus Christ in one hand and a gun in the other. So they went unarmed and were killed. But their suffering and death was not in vain. After their deaths, Elizabeth Eliot and Rachel Saint, Nate's sister, carried on their work. In fact they had the privilege of leading the very men who murdered their husbands into faith in Christ.

There is no force on earth more powerful than men and women who are willing to suffer and die with Christ and for Christ. If we're willing to suffer and die for Christ and His Kingdom we have a sure sign that the Spirit is leading us and that we are real Christians.

4. Paul gives us a fourth sign that we've received the Holy Spirit and that we're real Christians when he writes, "We ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." If God's Spirit is in us we're going to groan. We've experienced the first fruits of the spirit just a little bit of what it means to be a child of God, and we long for more.

When I was little my mother would make pumpkin pies with whipped cream on top for Thanksgiving dinner. I'd come into the kitchen and she'd give me just a little bite of the pie. It was delicious and I'd beg for more. But she'd tell me that I'd have to wait for Thanksgiving. So I'd groan inwardly while I waited for dinner and the opportunity to enjoy fully those pies of which I had been given only a sample.

God has given us only a sample of the first fruits of his Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, patience, kindness. We've only tasted a little bit of those things in our lives. We have a long way to go before those things come to fruition in our lives. The spirit to some degree controls our thoughts and actions...yet we long and groan inwardly for our hearts, mind and wills to be fully controlled. We know we aren't yet all that God intends us to be. We have tasted just a little bit of what God wants for us and for this whole world so we groan inwardly in anticipation of the day when we'll be fully conformed to the image of Christ.

So here are just four signs that help us to detect the Holy Spirit in our lives and already bear witness that we are really Christians.

Like the galvanometer detecting electrical currents... These things detect the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our minds are set on the things of the Spirit.

We cry, "Abba! Father!"

We're willing to suffer with Christ.

We groan inwardly as we await our full salvation.

May we recognize these signs of the Spirit in our lives and know that the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us up. May we be assured that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us pray: