

**Devotional Thoughts :: The Holy Spirit and Going On with God by Bob Hoekstra**

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Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? (Galatians 3:2-3)

The work of the Holy Spirit is required for people to start out with God through new birth and justification. The Holy Spirit must also be at work in believers if they are to go on with God in growth and sanctification.

The opening portion of our present Scripture passage uses a question to address our starting out with God. "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" The answer to this question is obvious. No one could ever have the Spirit of God come to indwell them on the basis of their performance before God's law. Only the "hearing of faith" could ever cause that. The Holy Spirit came to live in us when we heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and believed in Him. At that time, our sins were forgiven, we were justified (declared not guilty, righteous in God's sight), and we were born again by the Spirit. All of this marked our beginning with God. All of this involved the work of the Holy Spirit on our behalf.

The closing words of the passage use two additional questions to apply this issue of the Spirit's work to our going on with God. "Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" We who are the children of God began with Him "in the Spirit." Now, it would be spiritually senseless to think that we could progress with God "by the flesh." Surely, we agree with the Lord that we could not produce our own spiritual birth into His family. We had to be "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6). Certainly, we want to agree with God that we cannot manufacture our own spiritual growth, that is, be "made perfect by the flesh."

The Lord desires that we mature and develop in this new life in Christ. Such growth in Christ is a spiritual matter. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." The resources that we have all received from our earthly parents are of the flesh. These natural capabilities cannot develop us spiritually. The perfecting process (becoming increasingly like the Lord Jesus Christ) necessitates the Holy Spirit's working in us. Remember, the means God used to start us out with Him (to justify us) are the means He uses to grow us up in Him (to sanctify us).

O Holy Father, I humbly admit that I have foolishly thought, at times, that I could produce godliness in myself through my own best efforts. Lord, I see that I need Your Spirit as much for spiritual growth as I did for spiritual birth. As I seek You through prayer and Your word, please take me on with You in growth and sanctification by the work of Your Holy Spirit, through Christ, I pray, Amen.