



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

<http://www.puritansermons.com/>

Richard Sibbes on Entertaining the Holy Spirit

by Rev. Joel R. Beeke¹

[Reprinted by permission from *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*,
vol. 6 issues 7-9, Sept.-Nov 1998.]

In his book *Preaching and Preachers*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote: “I shall never cease to be grateful to Richard Sibbes, who was balm to my soul at a period in my life when I was overworked and badly overtired, and therefore subject in an unusual manner to the onslaughts of the devil.... I found at that time that Richard Sibbes... was an unfailing remedy. His books *The Bruised Reed* and *The Soul’s Conflict* quietened, soothed, comforted, encouraged, and healed me.”

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) was one of the greatest Puritans of his age. He greatly influenced the direction and content of Puritan preaching, theology, and writing in England and America. Sibbes’s theology of the Holy Spirit is especially important because of its emphasis on how the Spirit operates in the daily life of the Christian. Sibbes winsomely referred to that process as “entertaining the Spirit” in the soul. For Sibbes, that entertaining meant to nurture the friendship and hospitality of an indwelling Spirit. “There is no one in the world so great and sweet a friend who will do us so much good as the Spirit, if we give him entertainment,” Sibbes wrote.

Sibbes’s teaching on entertaining the Holy Spirit can be divided into the following four categories: (1) the indwelling of the Spirit, (2) the sealing of the Spirit, (3) the comfort of the Spirit, and (4) grieving the Spirit. Before exploring Sibbes’s work on the Holy Spirit, let’s take a brief look at who Richard Sibbes was.

¹ Dr. J.R. Beeke is pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Synopsis of Richard Sibbes's Life

Richard Sibbes was a native of Suffolk, the Puritan county of old England that furnished numerous illustrious emigrants to New England. He was born a few miles from Bury St. Edmonds, in 1577, the year the Lutherans drafted their Formula of Concord. He was baptized in the parish church in Thurston, where he grew up and went to school. He was the oldest of six children.

As a young child, Sibbes loved books. His father, Paul Sibbes, who was a hardworking wheelwright and (according to Zachary Catlin, a contemporary biographer of Sibbes) "a good, sound-hearted Christian," became irritated with his son's book expenses. The father tried to cure his son of book-buying by offering him wheelwright tools. But the boy was not dissuaded. With the support of others, Sibbes was admitted to St. John's College in Cambridge at the age of eighteen. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in 1599, a fellowship in 1601, and a master of arts degree in 1602. In 1603 he was converted under the preaching of Paul Baynes, whom Sibbes called his "father in the gospel." Baynes, who is remembered most for his commentary on Ephesians, succeeded William Perkins (1558-1602) at the Church of St. Andrews in Cambridge.

Sibbes was ordained to the ministry of the Church of England in Norwich in 1607, was chosen as one of the college preachers in 1609, and received a bachelor of divinity degree in 1610. From 1611 to 1616 he served as lecturer at Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge. His preaching awakened Cambridge from the spiritual indifference into which it fell after the death of Perkins. A gallery had to be built to accommodate the visitors. John Cotton and Hugh Peters were converted under Sibbes's preaching. During his years at Holy Trinity, Sibbes also helped turn Thomas Goodwin from Arminianism, and moved John Preston from witty preaching to plain, spiritual preaching.

Sibbes came to London in 1617 as a lecturer for Gray's Inn, the largest of the four great Inns of Court, which still remains one of the most important centers in England for the study and practice of law. In 1626, Sibbes complemented this lectureship by becoming Master of Catharine Hall (now St. Catharine's College) at Cambridge. Under his leadership, the college returned to its former prestige. It graduated several men who would serve prominently at the Westminster Assembly, including John Arrowsmith, William Spurstowe, and William Strong. Soon after his appointment, Sibbes earned the doctor of divinity degree at Cambridge. He soon became known as "the heavenly Doctor," due to his godly preaching and heavenly conversation. Izaak Walton wrote of Sibbes:

*Of this blest man, let this just praise be given,
Heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.*

In 1633 King Charles I offered Sibbes the vicarage of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, which was the very church he had been forced to relinquish eighteen years earlier! Sibbes continued to serve as preacher at Gray's Inn, Master of St. Catharine's Hall, and Vicar of Holy Trinity until his death in 1635.

Sibbes never married, but he established an astonishing network of friendships that included a variety of godly ministers, illustrious lawyers, and parliamentary leaders of the early Stuart era. "Godly friends are walking sermons," he said. On thirteen occasions he wrote introductions to the writings of his Puritan colleagues.

Sibbes was a gentle and warm man who avoided the controversies of his day as much as possible. "Factions breed fractions," he insisted. His battles with Archbishop Laud, Roman Catholics, and Arminians were exceptions rather than the rule for him. He remained close friends with many pastors and leaders who espoused more radical reform than he did for the Church of England.

Sibbes was an inspiration to many of his brethren. He influenced Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and Independency, the three dominant parties of the church in England at that time. He was a pastor of pastors, who lived a life of moderation. "Where most holiness is, there is most moderation, where it may be without prejudice of piety to God and the good of others," he wrote.

The historian Daniel Neal described Sibbes as a celebrated preacher, an educated divine, and a charitable and humble man, who repeatedly underestimated his gifts. Yet Puritans everywhere recognized Sibbes as a great Christ-centered, experiential preacher. Both learned and unlearned in upper and lower classes profited greatly from Sibbes, who was an alluring preacher.

Sibbes meant to woo. He wrote, "To preach is to woo.... The main scope of all [preaching] is, to allure us to the entertainment of Christ's mild, safe, wise, victorious government." Sibbes brought truth home, as Robert Burns would say, "to men's business and bosoms." Catlin wrote of Sibbes, "No man that ever I was acquainted with got so far into my heart or lay so close therein." Maurice Roberts adds, "His theology is thoroughly orthodox, of course, but it is like the fuel of some great combustion engine, always passing into flame and so being converted into energy thereby to serve God and, even more, to enjoy and relish God with the soul."

David Masson, known for his biography of John Milton wrote, “No writings in practical theology seem to have been so much read in the mid-seventeenth century among the pious English middle classes as those of Sibbes. “The twentieth-century historian William Haller judged Sibbes’s sermons to be “the most brilliant and popular of all the utterances of the Puritan church militant.”

Sibbes’s last sermons, preached one week before his death, were expositions of John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you.” When asked in his final days how his soul was faring, Sibbes replied, “I should do God much wrong if I should not say, very well. “Sibbes’s will and testament, dictated on July 4,1635, the day before his death, commences: “I commend and bequeath my soul into the hands of my gracious Savior, who hath redeemed it with his most precious blood, and appears now in heaven to receive it.”

The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes, meticulously edited in seven volumes with a 110-page memoir by Alexander Grosart, was published by James Nichol of Edinburgh in the 1860s and reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in the 1970s. Unfortunately, several of those volumes are out of print. Sibbes’s most famous work, *The Bruised Reed*, which has done so much good in healing troubled souls, is now available in paperback from Banner of Truth Trust.

Let’s turn now to Sibbes’s teaching on the entertainment of the Spirit.

The Indwelling Spirit

The Spirit’s indwelling is requisite to entertaining Him, Sibbes said. Sibbes taught that when the Spirit of God enters the heart of a sinner, regenerating him and persuading him of the truth of the gospel, the Spirit immediately begins to live within that person. The Spirit does not draw attention to Himself, however. Rather, the Spirit works to knit our hearts to God and to Jesus Christ. Sibbes wrote: “He, the Spirit, sanctifieth and purifieth, and doth all from the Father and the Son, and knits us to the Father and the Son -- to the Son first, and then to the Father, because all the communion we have with God is by the Holy Ghost; all the communion that Christ as man had with God was by the Holy Ghost; and all the communion that God hath with us, and we with God is by the Holy Ghost. For the Spirit is the bond of union between Christ and us, and between God and us.”

While the Father and Son perform no work without the Spirit, the Spirit also does no work apart from the Father and the Son. Sibbes explained, ‘As the Spirit comes from God -- the Father and the Son -- so he carries us back again to the Father and the Son. As he comes from heaven, so he carries us back to heaven again. The role of the Spirit is to introduce and intimately acquaint us with the Father and the Son.’”

Thus, if we are believers, the Spirit establishes communion between us and the other two Persons of the Trinity. It is as if He captures us and lifts us up to know the Father and the Son’s love for us. The Holy Spirit lifts us to see by faith the crucified and resurrected Jesus seated in glory. That is why the Spirit comes, and that is how He functions in our lives. Therefore we may say that while, in one sense, fellowship between ourselves and God is reestablished once and for all, yet in another sense the Spirit maintains and increases that fellowship during our entire lives.

Sibbes said that as the Spirit draws us to the Father and the Son, He confirms His government in our hearts. This government is not at odds with the Spirit’s purpose of revealing the things of Christ to us; rather, His internal governing reveals Jesus Christ seated on the throne of grace. indeed, the Spirit helps us conform to the character and behavior of Christ. The Spirit lives in us to restore and transform our souls, and ripens us for glory. Submitting to the Spirit is thus critical, Sibbes said. In *A Fountain Sealed*, he wrote: “Let us give up the government of our souls to the Spirit. It is for our safety so to do, as being wiser than ourselves who are unable to direct our own way; it is our liberty to be under a wisdom and goodness larger than our own. Let the Spirit think in us, desire in us, pray in us, live in us, do all in us; labor ever to be in such a frame as we may be fit for the Spirit to work upon.”

The believer is like a musical instrument, tuned and played by the Spirit. Sibbes wrote, “Let us lay ourselves open to the Spirit’s touch. When the Spirit has ruling sway in our lives he fine-tunes our souls much like a musical instrument, and then he plays our lives as a piano concerto before God.”

Sibbes went on to describe this process of tuning and the touch of the Holy Spirit: “The Holy Spirit must rule; he will have the keys delivered to him. We must submit to his government, and when he is in the heart he will subdue by little and little all high thoughts, rebellious risings, and despairing fears.”

How may we know that we have this blessed, indwelling, governing Spirit? Sibbes said, “By living and moving, by actions vital, even so may a man know he hath the Spirit of God by its blessed effects in operations; it is not idle in

us; but as the soul quickens the body, so doth the Spirit the soul. Every saving grace is a sign that the Spirit is within us.” Wherever the indwelling Spirit is, He gradually transforms the soul to be holy and gracious like Himself. The government of the Spirit is not realized immediately. Sibbes wrote, “The revolution and overthrow of our old nature comes upon conversion, while the government of the Spirit is established only in a process as we may learn more of and abide more to the constitution of our new life in Jesus Christ.”

Restored communion with God the Father and the Son by means of the government of the Spirit cannot but produce spiritual warfare. The transformation that the Holy Spirit effects in the believer is accompanied by external and internal struggle. Externally, we face the powers of darkness, even the prince of darkness himself, Sibbes warned, because the devil is profoundly envious of the man that walks in the Spirit. Satan will do all within his power to destroy that comfort.

Indeed, all spiritual graces meet with conflict, Sibbes said, “for that which is true is so with a great deal of resistance from that which is counterfeit.” What is of the Spirit is always in conflict with what is not of the Spirit. Internally, our fleshly desires are continually at war with the Spirit, for when the Spirit comes to a person, He pulls down all strongholds. He carves out a path for Himself in the thick of battle.

Our soul is the battlefield upon which the Spirit marches and He will have the final victory, Sibbes said. For wherever the Spirit dwells, He also rules, for He will not be an underling to lusts. He repairs the breaches of the soul. In this battle we must submit to the Spirit in all things, however, for only then will we experience the victorious life that is the inheritance of believers in Jesus Christ. To be sure, the greatest battles were won on Calvary and in our hearts when we were brought to new birth, but we must also fight daily battles in our life of sanctification. Our ever present foes -- our flesh, the world, and the devil -- will unceasingly strive to tear up the foundation upon which we stand as children of the Most High.

Sibbes said that we must show that we treasure the indwelling power of the Spirit. We cannot value God’s love and holiness granted to us in the Spirit without exercising self-denial. Life in the Spirit, while beginning at conversion, must continue to bear fruit. As Sibbes wrote, “We may know who dwells in a house by observing who goes in and when they come out; so we may know that the Spirit dwells in us by observing what sanctified speeches he sends forth and what delight he hath wrought in us to things that are special and what price we set upon them.”

The believer's greatest encouragement in spiritual warfare is the abiding presence of the Spirit. "The Spirit is the leader and enabler of our soul," Sibbes wrote. It is through what Sibbes termed "the motions, or holy stirrings of the Spirit" that the Spirit enables us to overcome the sin that attacks us internally and the forces of darkness set against us externally. The Spirit of Christ is powerful and strong. Through His indwelling, we are able "to perform duties above nature, to overcome ourselves and injuries," Sibbes said. He added, "He makes us to be able to live and die, to do what others cannot do, just as he enabled Christ to do things that another man could not do."

Sibbes's conclusion was inevitable: "Where there is no conflict, there is no Spirit of Christ at all." In this he echoed the apostle Paul's teaching that if you mortify the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit, you are led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13). You then, by grace, entertain the Spirit. You befriend and show hospitality to that Spirit who gives you the victory over all enemies by faith (1 John 5:4).

But the Spirit does more than indwell the believer and give victory in spiritual warfare. He is also the sealer of our souls.

The Sealer of Our Souls

Sibbes often preached on the Spirit's sealing. A series of his sermons transcribed by a noblewoman, Lady Elizabeth Brooke, was published in 1637 as *A Fountain Sealed*. His sermons on 2 Corinthians 1:22-23, published in 1655 in *Exposition of Second Corinthians Chapter One*, were about the Spirit's sealing. So was a sermon on Romans 8:15-16, *The Witness of the Spirit*, which was published in 1692.

According to Sibbes and many other Puritans, looking at the role of the Spirit in sealing the soul of believers is very much like examining His work in personal assurance of faith and salvation. Sibbes did view sealing in the Spirit as two distinct matters, however. Sibbes distinguished between the office or function of the Spirit as a seal given in regeneration to a sinner and the work of the Spirit in applying that seal to the believer's consciousness.

John Owen would later call this distinction unbiblical, for he said we are sealed when we are born again, and the Bible gives no justification for a second kind of sealing. Owen, following the early Reformers, taught a one-to-one correlation between those regenerated by the Spirit and those sealed by the Spirit. Calvin, for example, said that it was impossible to believe without being sealed by

the Spirit. For Calvin, sealing represented the presence rather than the activity of the Spirit. Thus, the sealing work of the Spirit belongs to the essence of faith.

By the time of William Perkins, who was often called the father of Puritanism, more attention was devoted to the Spirit's activity in sealing the promises of the gospel to the believer. The focus was no longer on the Spirit Himself as the indwelling seal but on His activity in sealing or attesting the promises. Perkins's successor, Paul Baynes, attempted to reconcile the thoughts of Calvin and Perkins on the sealing of the Spirit. Baynes taught that sealing could be applied both to the Spirit as indweller and to the evidences of that sealing in the regenerate life. Baynes wrote, "The Holy Spirit and the graces of the Spirit are the seal assuring our redemption." Thus, Baynes distinguished between being sealed by the Spirit (which all believers possess) and being made conscious of such sealing (which only those who are conscious of the graces of the Spirit possess).

Sibbes agreed with his predecessor Baynes, though he emphasized the sealing of the Spirit as a "superadded work and confirmation" of the believer's faith. In so doing, Sibbes turned the doctrine of the sealing of the Spirit in a direction that would gain prominence among the Puritans for several decades.

As was already implied, Sibbes thought of the Spirit's sealing in two ways: (1) a one-time sealing, and (2) a sealing that came later as one matured in the Christian life.

The once-and-for-all sealing of salvation is granted when a person first believes in Christ and God's promises. Sibbes taught that as a king's image is stamped upon wax, so the Spirit stamps the believer's soul with the image of Christ from the very moment of believing. Such sealing produces in every believer a lifelong desire to be transformed fully into the image of Christ.

This seal, which every believer possesses, whether he is conscious of it or not, serves as a mark of authenticity. It distinguishes the believer from the world. As merchants mark their wares and herdsman brand their sheep, so God seals His people to declare that they are His rightful property and that He has authority over them, Sibbes said.

The second aspect of Sibbes's doctrine of sealing is more elusive. Owen argued that Sibbes said sealing had to occur twice in the life of the believer. But Sibbes was not arguing for a second measure of *positional assurance*, as if to imply that God was not altogether sure of our stance with Him or His stance towards us upon regeneration. Sibbes plainly stated: "Sealing of us by the Spirit is

not in regard to God, but ourselves. God knoweth who are His, but we know not that we are His but by sealing. The sealing then is *for our benefit exclusively*, and not for God.”

So the second kind of sealing Sibbes wrote about was a process. It was the kind of assurance that could increase gradually throughout our lives by means of singular experiences and by daily, spiritual growth. This sealing had degrees; it could grow with spiritual maturity. Sibbes wrote: “The Spirit sealet by degrees. As our care of pleasing the Spirit increaseth so our comfort increaseth. Our light will increase as the morning light unto the perfect day. Yielding to the Spirit in one holy motion will cause him to lead us to another, and so on forwards, until we be more deeply acquainted with the whole counsel of God concerning our salvation.”

Sibbes learned through pastoral experience that many believers are content with the measure of faith and assurance they receive upon their conversion and do not labor for further growth. That prompted Sibbes to suggest that there are three kinds of Christians:

First, those who have saving faith, but live under a spirit of bondage. They are filled with doubts and fears. They lack the reflex act of faith which ascertains marks and evidences of the Spirit’s saving work in their lives. Sibbes said that they ought to pray for more faith and light to discern the Spirit’s work within them.

Second, some Christians are under the Spirit of adoption but still have fears. They are sealed with evidences of faith, but are often still beset with perplexity and doubt. Their degree of assurance is usually highest when their trials are greatest. Sibbes wrote, “For those who have been sealed by the Spirit and yet not so fully as to silence all doubts about their estate, those should, out of that beginning of comfort which they feel, study to be pliable to the Spirit for further increase.”

Third, Sibbes said that some believers are “carried with large spirits to obey their Father” as the fruit of the superadded, direct seal of the Spirit that persuades them of their sonship to God. Those who experience the freedom of a “large spirit” receive a private seal—an unmistakable witness of the Spirit to their soul. The Spirit’s private seal is a “stablishing, confirming grace,” Sibbes said. He identified this sealing with the immediate testimony of the Holy Spirit, by which the Father’s love is pronounced upon the believer in particular, usually through the application of such texts as “I am thy salvation” or “thy sins are pardoned.” According to Sibbes, this establishing seal grants believers freedom to appropriate

full assurance through the work of each Person in the Trinity, though the emphasis is on the Spirit in His saving activity. Sibbes wrote: “Every person in the blessed Trinity hath their several work. The Father chooseth us and passeth a decree upon the whole groundwork of our salvation. The Son executeth it to the full. The Spirit applieth it, and witnesseth our interest in it by leading our souls to lay hold upon him, and by raising up our souls in the assurance of it, and by breeding and cherishing sweet communion with Father and Son, who both of them seal us likewise by the Spirit. This joy and comfort is so appropriated to the Spirit, as it carrieth the very name of the Spirit.”

Sibbes sounds mystical at times in describing this special sealing, particularly in statements such as “the Holy Ghost slides and insinuates and infuseth himself into our souls.” But Sibbes warded off mysticism in two ways. First, he maintained that this special sealing must never be divorced from the Word of God. By speaking of sealing in degrees, Sibbes linked all advancement in grace to the Spirit and Word, for any consciousness of sealing by the Spirit is always through the applied Word.

Second, Sibbes said that the genuineness of such sealing may be readily examined. One may know the voice of the Spirit of God by inquiring what followed “this ravishing joy” of experimental sealing, Sibbes wrote. Fruits of sanctification, such as peace of conscience, the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, “Abba, Father,” prayers of fervent supplication, conformity with the heavenly image of Christ, and applying ourselves to holy duties rather than old lusts inevitably result from such “a secret whispering and intimation to the soul.” Sibbes thus emphasized both the intuitive testimony of the Spirit and the sanctifying fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit’s sealing is inward in its essence and outward in its fruit.

Sibbes taught that this special sealing was granted by the Spirit to saints particularly in times of great trial. He said that the Spirit gave such seals, even as parents [who] smile upon their children when they need it most.” Such sealing was “a sweet kiss vouchsafed to the soul.” Paul in the dungeon, Daniel in the lion’s den, and his three friends in the fiery furnace all experienced that encouragement.

In summary, Sibbes’s interest in sealing was more pastoral than academic. He knew that true assurance results in an increased desire for holiness and for more intimate communion with God. Sibbes’s argument was clear: when the Holy Spirit puts His holy seal on a believer, that person will bear the fruits of holiness. Sealing prompts assurance, and the more assurance we have, the more love we

will feel for God and the more we will obey Him. Consequently, all Christians ought to pray for “a spirit of revelation that we may be *more* sealed,” Sibbes said.

Owen understood why Sibbes and other Puritans in his era proposed the notion of a sealing subsequent to regeneration. He recognized that Sibbes and others were attempting to call believers to a life of *assuredness*. Owen affirmed the call for this kind of assurance, yet he argued against equating full assurance with the sealing of the Spirit. He felt that the exegesis of Ephesians 1:13 didn’t support such a view.

Though some of us may also fear that Sibbes went beyond Scripture at times in his doctrine of sealing, yet we should recognize that Sibbes was discussing a different sort of event than what Owen suggested. Sibbes had a dynamic view of sealing. Sealing is a continuous and progressive activity, Sibbes said. Owen held a more static view of sealing. He viewed the seal “as sealed,” whereas Sibbes viewed the seal primarily as “a sealing.” Sibbes was talking about an experiential, behavioral, and character-modifying realization of the depth of the love of God. Sibbes was saying that this kind of sealing is a great boost to our sanctification.

The Comforter

Sibbes taught that sanctification is not only promoted by the Spirit’s indwelling and sealing, but also by the Spirit’s activity as comforter. He wrote, “Is it not the greatest comfort to a Christian soul when God, in want of means, comes immediately Himself unto us and comforts us by His Spirit?”

If you are a Christian, you know that life and its difficulties can be discouraging. Especially when God’s promises and providence seem to contradict each other, we are prone to lose our quiet confidence in God, and become, like David, cast down and disquieted within. We yield to the discouragements of the flesh. Sibbes said such disquiet and grief is “like lead to the soul, heavy and cold.”

At those times especially we need the Holy Spirit to draw close to our souls. In his book *Yea and Amen*, Sibbes wrote, “It must needs be so because no less than the Spirit of God can quiet our perplexed spirits in times of temptation.” He went on to say, “Spiritual comforts flow immediately from the Spirit of comfort who hath His office designed for that purpose.”

Sibbes excelled in showing why the Spirit alone can comfort our battered souls. He wrote, “When the soul is distempered, it is like a distempered lock that no key can open. So when the conscience is troubled, what creature can settle the troubled conscience, can open the winding passages of a troubled conscience in such perplexity and confusion? And therefore to settle the troubled conscience aright, it must be somewhat *above* conscience; and that which must quiet the spirit must be such a Spirit as is *above our spirits*.”

Sibbes appreciated the complexity of individuals and understood how that complexity remains even after we become believers. Hardships are part of being a Christian, for a Christian is engaged in the pursuit of holiness. Yet the Spirit is able to give grace to the believer to rise above discouragements, no matter how great they are. Sibbes wrote: “Oh, therefore get this blessed Spirit to enlighten thee, to quicken thee, to support thee; and it will carry thy soul courageously along above all oppositions and discouragements whatsoever in the way to happiness. As surely as the difficulties of life are genuine, so too the comfort of the Spirit is genuine and able.”

The Spirit is more than just a spiritual bandage. He is *the* Comforter, the healing balm for our hearts. We wholeheartedly agree with Sibbes that “the Holy Spirit is a Comforter, bringing to mind useful things at such times when we most need them. What are these useful things if not the profound love of the Lord for us *in spite of our wretched state* -- a love which ushers us through suffering and gives purpose to all our life.”

Sibbes also taught that the role of the Holy Spirit as comforter is tied to the Word of God. “If it be God’s comfort, assure thyself God would have his word to make way unto it,” Sibbes wrote. He said that in times of discouragement the believer must question his own soul about the causes of discontent. He must charge himself to trust God and His Word, recognizing that with the Spirit as his indwelling comforter, there is no good reason to be discouraged. He must “meditate on the promises of God, and wedge them home upon the heart,” Sibbes said. By using the promises, he must labor for a calmed spirit by insisting that until the Spirit “meekens” the soul, it is not quiet enough to receive the seed of the Word. As Sibbes wrote, “It is ill sowing in a storm; so a stormy spirit will not suffer the word to take [its] place.”

Sibbes taught that in applying the Word to the believer’s troubled soul, the Spirit calls forth answering motions in the believer, leading him to find quiet and rest in God. Indeed, the believer must continue to examine his soul by faith until he finds rest in God. Perfect rest in God will only be found in heaven, Sibbes said.

Here on earth, however, the believer can find rest by means of sanctifying and quieting graces.”

Quieting the soul helps a believer recover some of the communion with God that was destroyed by the fall. Prior to the fall we were like “instruments in tune, fit to be moved to any duty; as a neat, clean glass, the soul represented God’s image and likeness,” Sibbes wrote. After the fall, the only way to find such harmony of a soul “fitted as a clean glass to receive light from above,” is to depend on the Spirit and aim for peace and harmony with God who is “the God of peace, the God of order.” Sibbes called believers to “the beauty of a well-ordered soul” that is in tune with the Spirit of God. Such a soul is comforted even in great trials, Sibbes said. It receives with meekness the engrafted Word and, by keeping its affections in due proportion, responds to the Holy Spirit’s internal motions which lead the soul to find rest and peace in God. All such motions “tend to rest and end in God, the center and resting-place of the soul,” Sibbes wrote. “Then whatsoever times come, we are sure of a hiding-place and sanctuary.”

Would you be comforted and quieted in your soul? Labor to entertain the Spirit. Give room to His motions in your soul, remembering as Sibbes concluded, “The soul without the Spirit is darkness and confusion, full of self-accusing and self-tormenting thoughts. If we let the Spirit come in, [he] will scatter all and settle the soul in a sweet quiet.

Grieving the Spirit

If the Spirit helps us commune with the Father and the Son, governs our spirit, defends us in spiritual conflict, leads us in faith, seals our souls, and comforts us until death, then what happens when we fail Him and succumb to our own sin and folly?

At such times we grieve the Spirit, Sibbes said in *A Fountain Sealed*. Sibbes cried, “What greater indignity can we offer to the Holy Spirit than to prefer base dust before his motions leading us to holiness and happiness. What greater unkindness, yea, treachery to leave directions of a friend to follow the counsel of an enemy; such as when we know God’s will, yet will consent with flesh and blood in leaving a true guide and following a pirate.”

Like his fellow Puritans, Sibbes was most critical of people in the established church who didn’t exhibit the fruits of saving faith. He challenged those who claimed to have walked with God for many years but whose lives

showed little effect of their relationship with the Almighty. He warned, “Of all the sins, the sins of professors [of religion] grieve the Spirit most. And of all professors, those that have most means of knowledge, because their obligations are deeper and their engagements greater. The offense of friends grieves more than the injuries of enemies.”

Sibbes did not stop there. He went on to say that as the Holy Ghost is a Spirit, so spiritual sins like pride and envy and an evil spirit grieve Him most. Carnal sins grieve the Spirit, too, for they drown the soul in physical delights and defile the Spirit’s temple. We need to be changed from the inside out by the Spirit of God. As long as we do not aim for a life of devotion and conformity to Jesus Christ, we grieve the Spirit.

Sibbes offered still more ways in which we grieve the Spirit. He wrote, “We commonly grieve the Spirit of God when the mind is troubled with a multitude of busyness; when the soul is like a mill where one cannot hear another; the noise is such as takes away all intercourse.” That is to say, when we fill our lives with things other than spiritual concerns, we bring grief to the blessed Spirit. Activity is not synonymous with spirituality, as popular Christian culture would have us believe. Rather, we are called to humble dependence and meditation upon the Spirit. As Sibbes said, “This grieves the Holy Spirit also when men take the office of the Spirit from him,” that is, when we will do things in our own strength and by our own light. We all too willingly, go about our Christian tasks in our own strength, never realizing that in doing so, we become our own end, and with a theft of God’s honor our activities become meaningless.

Conclusion

According to Sibbes, the Spirit must be an integral part of our lives, our churches, and our world. The Spirit must be entertained in every facet of Christian life and experience. We must relish His indwelling, His sealing, and His comforting work, while striving not to grieve Him. Sibbes labored to make biblical theology relevant to the person in the pew. His books challenge us to pursue a biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit and to faithfully communicate that understanding to others in the body of Christ.

Today, the relationship between believers and the Holy Spirit is too often like a bad marriage in which a husband takes advantage of his wife’s contributions but fails to appreciate and celebrate his relationship with her. To reverse this

situation, Sibbes advised that we should make a daily effort to appreciate the Holy Spirit, and to share our thoughts and plans with Him in prayer as we gaze by faith into the face of God. We should walk in daily communication with the Spirit, through the Word, relying upon every office the Holy Spirit provides, as described in Scripture. In this way, the blessed Spirit, who speaks not of Himself, but of Christ and the Father, also reveals Himself to the believer, through display of His attributes, as true God, the third Person of the Holy Trinity. As Sibbes wrote: “The Holy Spirit being in us, after he that prepared us for a house for himself to dwell in and to take up his rest and delight in, he doth also become unto us a counselor in all our doubts, a comforter in all our distresses, a solicitor to all duty, a guide in the whole course of life, until we dwell with him forever in heaven, unto which his dwelling here in us doth tend.”

Lord, ever more grant us to entertain Thy Holy Spirit. Sanctify us by Thy Spirit. Indwell us, seal our souls, comfort us, keep us from grieving Thy Spirit. Prepare us for eternal communion with Thee.

Visit *Fire and Ice: Puritan and Reformed Sermons* at
<http://www.puritansermons.com/>