
Question Time — What does it mean to have the Spirit of Christ with us?

--- by Elder Rich Jones

An easy question to answer—isn't it? When I was asked by Charlie Booth to write an answer to this question my first response was, "Sure; no problem; this will be easy; I can write an answer to this really quickly and be ready to tackle the next question." Wrong, wrong, wrong!

Like so many topics in religion the phrase "the Spirit of Christ with us..." is loaded with multiple meanings and nuances. Are we using it to refer to our own spirits, or spiritual conditions? Are we referring to the personage of Jesus Christ, unseen, but standing by us? Maybe we are using the term "Spirit of Christ" to mean the Holy Spirit. This is specifically inaccurate but a generally accepted usage when it is understood that the Holy Spirit, or Holy Ghost, bears witness of Christ the Son, and the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is in them and they are in the Holy Spirit. Then there is the condition we call the "truth" which is the "knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come..." (D&C 90:4b). The Spirit of truth is Christ (D&C 90:4c). The Spirit of Christ is given unto all people (Moroni 7:14) so that we may be able to discern good from evil.

Which one or ones should I pick? Here are a few short answers to the original question.

Let's start at what I think is the beginning. When we were created, we received the Spirit of Christ, who is the Spirit of truth, in us so that we can make informed choices. I say informed because agency, or the ability to make our own choices without being told how to do so, requires knowledge of good and evil. Knowledge of good and evil allows people to understand pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow. This understanding enlightens us to expect consequences of our choices, choices that are demonstrated by our actions.

Understanding is intelligence or the light of truth. Understanding the truth then allows us to freely choose evil or righteousness. If righteousness, we are accepting God's invitation via Jesus Christ and the Plan of Restoration to return unto him in eternal communion, which is joy and eternal life (John 17).

This is, hopefully, a good point to pursue the idea that "having the Spirit of Christ with us" means that we have ordered or structured our own spirits to be Christ-like in nature. Why have we done this? So that somebody who meets us on the street can say, "Wow, John Doe sure has the Spirit of Christ about him—doesn't he?!" That's nice, but our real reason is because we want Christ to be in us (D&C 50:8f, 3rd Nephi 9:30 and John 17) and we in him so that we can be acceptable unto the Father when we are eventually judged before God.

Is it hard to achieve this Christ-like spirit? It certainly seems so for most of us because we struggle within ourselves with temptations to rebel against righteousness. The actual process is really pretty simple. We must have faith in Jesus Christ being the Only Begotten Son of the Father. We must repent and be baptized with water, fire, and the Holy Ghost. Then to show our continuing commitment to our covenant with our Heavenly Father, we must do what Jesus did (3rd Nephi 12:34, 35). I don't mean the miracles, but the acts of goodness and kindness to your fellow human beings. Don't do these things begrudgingly or with prejudice; that is hypocrisy and sin, and will be accounted against you (Moroni 7:4-7)

If we have understood these ideas so far, then embracing them and putting them to work in our lives should result in our having received the Holy Ghost (the Comforter, the spirit which bears witness unto humanity of the Father and Christ the Son). This spirit abides with us in lieu of Jesus being with us in the flesh as he was with his disciples in Israel. When this spirit is in us, then the Spirit of Christ is with us.