

THE SANCTIFYING SPIRIT

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Romans 8:1-11.

The Holy Spirit is the One who produces holiness in the believer. Sanctification means 'to be set apart'. We are set apart as the Lord's chosen to live 'set apart' lives that are different to those who do not have faith. When we become Christians, it is a profound change that has taken place. We now have a new status. In many ways, given what we now have, we expect too little of ourselves and produce too little by way of holiness.

1. God indwelling us

This is a truth that is huge in its implications. God Himself is actually living in us, in the Person of the Holy Spirit. In relation to this, we are able to say, in effect, that Christ is dwelling in us, since the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. This is evident from Romans 8:9-11. We learn about how we receive the Spirit to live in us in Romans 8:15. The same truth about the Spirit living in us is repeated at different places, such as 2 Corinthians 1:22; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:16; and Colossians 1:27.

The Spirit lives in our heart, in the inner man. These are depths of our being that we are hard put to properly understand. This is where the Bible speaks of our soul, our mind, our heart. All of this is quite against the teaching of atheists and humanists who do not believe that we are anything other than physical material. We are hard pressed to say where our thoughts are taking place. Where and what is that inner space where we are self-conscious and have thoughts about things, including ourselves? Wherever it is, that is where the Holy Spirit dwells in us. It takes us into the whole realm of our inner attitudes and deepest motivations, reflections that have to take us much further than secular thinkers like Freud or Marx ever reached. This is the area of our deepest thoughts and inner resolves and conflicts, prejudices and fears. We may rarely think about this area of ourselves or even be greatly aware of it. This is where we have unspoken objectives and purposes.

The Holy Spirit works at this deepest level, in our soul, to bring about change. He might be at work to bring proverbial 'skeletons out of the closet' so that we might repent of them and He puts us in touch with fears, unresolved feelings, disappointments and prejudices so that we might be healed and be holy. The Holy Spirit will work on our thoughts and attitudes. To bring about that change, it might be that He has to make us progressively unhappier until we pay attention to what He is teaching us and doing in us.

2. The Spirit has a plan.

The Spirit is not passive or like a guest, waiting to be invited before He will do anything in us. Yet He is not overpowering, as though effecting a take-over of us so that we are unable to co-operate and be a willing participant. In this respect He does not stop us being 'us' by making us into something strange or weird. He actually makes us more fully human after the pattern of the only truly authentic and properly 'human' human, our Lord Jesus Christ.

So He creates an inner pressure within us (James 4:3-6) to move us toward His stated plan and objective. He has a road map for our sanctification which takes into account our personal histories and besetting sins. It is a very individual plan, personalized to who we are. It is creative, helpful and constructive.

Again, the stated objective of the plan is to make us Christ-like (Ephesians 4:20-24). What we are and who we are is to be renewed to produce true holiness and righteousness in us. It is the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34. He makes the writing of the Lord's law live in us, making us free from the condemnation of trying to live according to it in our own strength (Romans 8:2).

We can, however, even in this realm of where the Spirit is working out His plan in us, attempt to sabotage it or hinder it. Sin objects to what He is doing and attempts to put a brake on it or deflect it somehow. This produces friction and we are given to have feelings we might find to understand or process. This is what happens when we grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). Behaviours which grieve Him can be found in Ephesians 4:29, 31-32). The Holy Spirit expresses His grievance to our consciences and provokes discomfiture in our feeling system so that we might feel guilt, unease, confusion, unhappiness and depression. The feelings might only be relieved by repentance, by apologies, by restitution.

It is also possible for us to quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). This is where we suppress spiritual desires or calls to action such as in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18,20. Again, when we quench the Spirit, we might feel guilty, unfulfilled, or confused, for example.

3. The fruits of sanctification

Holiness of character, the results of the sanctifying work of the Spirit in us, means the defeat of sin. It is the production of such things as Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-24. This is the flesh crucified. This is to be led by the Spirit, since here we are not guilty of grieving the Spirit, but are living in harmony with His plan of sanctification for us. We are found to be submissive and obedient to the duties and obligations that are set before us. We are now more willing to forgive, to show love, to help. There is a greater warmth and genuineness about us as people. We are more generous, more willing to overlook

offences, and not to be argumentative. There is more joy in the soul for where sin has been mastered, we are lifted above depression and grief. The work of the Spirit in sanctifying us creates more room in the depths of the soul, in the areas of our humanity where He is especially at work. We then see more clearly and understand better the glory of the cross and what it has accomplished. We are supplied with more reasons to be content and thankful and receive a clearer vision of heaven. The grip of fear and unbelief is loosened, and we are now more free to experience true Christian joy.