

The Christian Life (20): Sanctification (Part 5)

Having considered the source of our sanctification (union with Christ), we come this morning to its cause. By cause is meant the direct or immediate agent of sanctification. This is the Holy Spirit of Christ. "Sanctification is the all-absorbing focus of the Spirit's present ministry. The Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of holiness' (Rom.1:4)" (Hamilton).¹ While sanctification is ascribed to the Father (Jn.17:17) and Son (1Cor.1:30), "the proper and immediate Agent is the Holy Spirit" (Dabney).² We are sanctified by or through the Spirit (Rom.15:16; 2Thess.2:13; 1Pet.1:2). Thus, while "all external actions are common to all the persons" (Ames),³ "in the usual appropriation, creation is attributed to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit" (Ames).⁴

The Lord God designed that all the Persons in the blessed Trinity should be honored in the making holy of His people, so that each of them might be distinctively praised by us. First, the Father sanctified His people by an eternal decree, choosing them in Christ before the foundation of the world and predestinating them unto the adoption of children. Second, the Son sanctified His people by procuring for them a perfect and immutable standing before the Judge of all, the infinite merits of His finished work being reckoned to their account. Third, God the Spirit makes good the Father's decree and imparts to them what the work of Christ procured for them: the Spirit is the actual Securer of sanctification, *applying it* to their persons. Thus the believer has abundant cause to adore and glorify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁵

Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly – it is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ.⁶

I. Sanctification: Its Cause

1. *The Spirit unites us to Christ.* This He does in two stages (which can be distinguished only logically). (1) He breathes life into the soul by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ. "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...even when we were dead in trespasses, (He) made us alive together with Christ" (Eph.2:1, 5). This He does in relation to the gospel. "It is the Spirit who gives life. These words that I speak to you are spirit (i.e., spiritual) and they are life" (Jn.6:63). "The unenlightened understanding is unable to apprehend, and the unregenerate will is unable to believe. Vital force is lacking in these two principle factors. What is needed at this point is life and force itself. Consequently, the Author of spiritual life Himself must operate directly, and outright give spiritual life and power from that dead" (Pink).⁷ (2) He works faith within the heart whereby we are joined to Christ.

¹ Ian Hamilton, *The Beauty and Glory of the Holy Spirit*, 161

² R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 665

³ William Ames, *The Morrow of Theology*, 93

⁴ William Ames, *The Morrow of Theology*, 94

⁵ A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 131

⁶ John Owen, *Works*, 3:386

⁷ A.W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 55

"Spiritual union with Christ is union through a Spirit-worked faith" (Beeke).⁸ Thus, the soul's recovery, from quickening to glorification, is hidden with Christ and the product of our union with Him. Simply put, the Spirit first "imparts spiritual life into the soul (regeneration)," and then "stirs it up into exercise (conversion)" (Pink).⁹ "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal.5:25). That is, having been regenerated by the Spirit, let us now be empowered and sanctified by the Spirit. The latter is the necessary result of the former. "Regeneration is the spring, sanctification is the stream; if we live by the Spirit, we shall also walk by the Spirit; but we cannot walk spiritually, unless we be spiritually alive" (Buchanan).¹⁰

Not only the commencement, but the continuance of spiritual life in the soul, depends on the gracious operation of the Spirit of God. As the great initial change, by which we pass from death unto life, is wrought by Him, so is the succeeding course of our progressive sanctification; and as He brings us into the way, He must conduct us, from first to last, by the constant communication of His wisdom to direct, of His grace to animate, and of His strength to sustain us. We are made alive by the Spirit; and we are enabled to walk by the same Spirit. At the time of conversion, He may implant a gracious principle in the heart; but that principle is not self-sustained, nor does it derive its nourishment from the soil in which it is planted, but is fed from His secret springs. The liveliest Christian would soon decay, were the Spirit's grace withdrawn; he has no stability and no strength of his own; and there would be neither growth nor faithfulness, but for those constant supplies which he receives of all needful grace from the fulness that is in Christ.¹¹

2. *The Spirit indwells us.* The Spirit not only gives gifts but is Himself a Gift. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38; 10:45). After the Spirit works upon the soul through the word in calling and regeneration (1Thess.1:5; 1Pet.1:23), He is then received by faith. "This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith" (Gal.3:2). This is another way of saying that the Spirit is received when Christ is received. Logically speaking, regeneration (the impartation of life) precedes the reception of the Spirit. Thus, only those who have Christ have His Spirit, and they only have His Spirit when they have Him. "But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, He is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom.8:9-10). "Observe that the Spirit and Christ go together: if we have Christ for our Redeemer, then we have the Holy Spirit for our Indweller; but if we have not the Spirit, we are not Christ's" (Pink).¹² "The Spirit Himself abides in believers; He is present in the soul as Christ's agent to convey light, life, and love to us; and not as a distant agent, but as the immediate exciter of all that grace that is in us. There is His power and presence, as in His temple and proper place of residence; He first builds up His temple, and then dwells in it" (Manton).¹³ Within regeneration, the Spirit prepares a home for Him to dwell. "Hereby (regeneration) does the Holy Ghost prepare a habitation for Himself, and make way for all the following work which He has to do in us and towards us, unto the glory of God, and the per-

⁸ Joel Beeke, *Reformed Systematic Theology*, 3:251

⁹ A.W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 54

¹⁰ James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 439

¹¹ James Buchanan, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 443

¹² A.W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 91

¹³ Thomas Manton, *Works*, 21:229

fecting of our salvation, or the making of us 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light' (Col.1:12)" (Owen).¹⁴

Personally we are sanctified or consecrated unto God by the Spirit's indwelling us and making our bodies His temples. As He came upon Christ Himself ('without measure') so, in due time, He is given to each of His members: 'Ye have an Unction (the Spirit) from the Holy One'—Christ; 'the Anointing (the Spirit) which you have received of Him (Christ) abides in you' (1Jn.2:20,27) – it is from this very fact we receive our name, for 'Christian' means 'an anointed one,' the term being taken from the type in Psalm 133:2. It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit which constitutes a believer a holy person. That which made Canaan the 'holy' land, Jerusalem the 'holy' city, the temple the 'holy' place, was the presence and appearing of the Holy One there! And that which makes any man 'holy' is the perpetual abiding of the Spirit within him. Needless to say, His indwelling of us necessarily produces fruits of holiness in heart and life.¹⁵

(1) He indwells us uniquely. While God is everywhere present (Ps.139:7-12), He isn't present in every place in the same way. "Is God omnipresent everywhere in the same way? No, He reveals His presence in a different way in heaven than in hell, and differently on earth than above" (Vos).¹⁶ Scripture speaks of God uniquely dwelling in heaven, the OT temple, the NT temple (church), and the hearts of His elect people. "Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Ex.25:8). "For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, and with him who has a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa.57:15). "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt.18:20). Thus, the Spirit uniquely indwells believers as a sanctifier. The Spirit indwells them intimately and permanently. "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you" (Jn.14:16-17). This means the Spirit indwells believers in a way He does not indwell unbelievers. "He is in them as He is nowhere else" (Manton).¹⁷ Believers alone are God's temple, wherein His gracious and good Spirit dwells. They alone taste and see that God is good.

(2) He indwells us personally. By this is meant, He indwells the entire person of the believer (body and soul). "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own" (1Cor.6:19)? "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal.4:6)! As the Spirit indwells the whole soul, He sanctifies every faculty of the soul. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Thess.5:23). As the Spirit indwells the whole soul, He renovates (sanctifies) the understanding, affections, and will. "Christians are inherently sanctified in their persons by a gracious work of the Spirit within their souls. They are 'renewed' throughout the whole of their beings; for as the poison of sin was diffused throughout the entire man, so is grace" (Pink).¹⁸ "It is our *entire nature* that is

¹⁴ John Owen, *Works*, 3:408

¹⁵ A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 138

¹⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:12

¹⁷ Thomas Manton, *Works*, 21:230

¹⁸ A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 146

the subject of evangelical holiness" (Owen).¹⁹ Our sanctification is as wide or broad as the Spirit's indwelling.

The best trial of sanctification is by its *universality* with respect unto its subject. If any thing remain unsanctified in us, sin may there set up its throne and maintain its sovereignty. But where this work is true and real, however weak and imperfect it may be as unto its degrees, yet it possesses the whole person, and leaves not the least hold unto sin, wherein it does not continually combat and conflict with it. There is saving light in the mind, and life in the will, and love in the affections, and grace in the conscience, suited to its nature; there is nothing in us whereunto the power of holiness does not reach according to its measure.²⁰

(3) He indwells us corporately. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (1Cor.3:16-17). The phrase "you are the temple of God" refers to the collective church. The Spirit indwells them corporately as they assemble to worship God on the Lord's Day. "But You are holy, O You that inhabits the praises of Israel" (Ps.22:3). He inhabits the praises of Israel by inhabiting Israel as she praises Him.

3. *The Spirit helps us.* Just as Christ personally helped His disciples, so the Spirit is called "another Helper." "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever" (Jn.14:16). "The Greek word rendered 'Helper' is *parakletos* which means 'one called alongside to help.' In other words, Jesus is telling us that He will not be physically with us, but He is sending us precisely the same kind of Helper as He was" (MacArthur).²¹ The Spirit helps us in every aspect of our sanctification. "The special acts of the Spirit in carrying out the work of sanctification are manifold: He seals, He anoints, He bears witness, He gives assurance as an earnest, he leads, He intercedes, He comforts, He brings to mind, He expresses a peculiar affection, and He animates the private and public worship of the believer in all its acts – in the songs of praise, in reading the Scriptures, in listening to the preaching of the word, in the offering of gifts, and in the use of the sacraments" (Vaughan).²² In short, the Spirit stirs up and brings into exercise the graces He's deposited in the soul. This principally concerns the grace of faith. Having given this gift (Eph.2:8), it's now the task of the Spirit to ensure it never completely goes out. "The same Spirit first works faith in us (for it is the gift or work of God), and then preserves it when it is wrought" (Owen).²³

The Holy Spirit dwells in believers, preserving in them the root and principle of all their grace by His own immediate power. Hence all graces in their exercise are called 'The fruits of the Spirit' (Gal.5:22-23). He brings them forth from the stock that He has planted in the heart. And we cannot act any one grace without His effectual operation there: 'God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure' (Phil.2:13). He is the immediate author of every good or gracious acting in us. Wherefore, the Spirit of God dwelling in believers does effectually excite and stir up their graces unto frequent exercise and actings, whereby they are increased and strengthened. And there is nothing in

¹⁹ John Owen, *Works*, 3:419

²⁰ John Owen, *Works*, 3:421

²¹ John MacArthur, *The Silent Shepherd*, 76

²² C.R. Vaughan, *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, 214

²³ John Owen, *Works*, 3:409

the whole course of our walking before God that we ought to be more careful about than that we grieve not, that we provoke not, this good and holy Spirit, whereon He should withhold His gracious aids and assistances from us.²⁴

(1) He leads. "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Gal.5:18). To be "led by the Spirit" is the same as "walking by the Spirit" (Gal.5:16, 25). The Spirit leads us or enables us to walk in God's commandments. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezek.36:27). "As all sin is a transgression of the law (1Jn.3:4), so all holiness must be a fulfilling of the law. The Spirit is given to work in us conformity to the Law: first, by imparting a nature which loves it; second, by instructing and giving us a knowledge of its extensive requirements; third, by producing in us strivings after obedience to its precepts" (Pink).²⁵

(2) He comforts. He comforts us by ensuring us of God's love. "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom.8:15-16). He comforts us by revealing to us the glories of the gospel. "Though the Holy Ghost be 'the Comforter,' yet it is out of Christ that the consolation is drawn, with which He comforts the sorrowful. It is by unfolding the unsearchable riches of Christ, that He comforts. Christ is the well, out of which He brings the streams of abundant consolation, with which He refreshes and revives us in our weariness" (Bonar).²⁶ "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

(3) He teaches. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (Jn.16:14-15). While this promise has a unique application to the apostles (inspiration), it has a broader relevance for all Christians (illumination). The same is true of John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." The Spirit would enable them to remember His teaching so as to reflect upon it and in some case record it. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things" (1Jn.2:20). That is, they know all things so as to never be deceived by false teachers and leave the faith (1Jn.2:19). "The Spirit teaches the believer many things, but His supreme subject is Christ: to emphasize His claims, to exalt His person, to reveal His perfections, to make Him supremely attractive" (Pink).²⁷ "He will glorify Me" (Jn.16:14). This He does in and through the word. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2Cor.3:18). "If God, Christ, Heaven, engage the thoughts and affections of the soul, the Spirit of God is there" (Pink).²⁸ He makes the truth effectual in our hearts (1Thess.1:5). "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1Cor.2:12).

(4) He restrains. "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Gal.5:17). "Wherever the Spirit dwells, He, in some degree, mortifies and subdues the evils of the soul in which He resides. This is one

²⁴ John Owen, *Works*, 3:389-390

²⁵ A.W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 148

²⁶ Horatius Bonar, as quoted in, *The Beauty and Glory of the Holy Spirit*, 31

²⁷ A.W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 102

²⁸ A.W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 96

special part of His sanctifying work. Though He kills not sin in believers, He subdues it; though He does not so subdue the flesh so that it never troubles or defiles them again, its dominion is taken away" (Pink).²⁹ The Spirit enables us to resist and mortify the deeds of the body. "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom.8:13).

(5) He convicts. Jesus said one purpose of the Spirit was to "convict the world of sin" (Jn.16:8). This work is continued in the hearts of God people by the Spirit. He reveals to them their sin to humble them and drive them back to "a fountain open for sin and uncleanness" (Zech.13:1). "Though the only fountain for cleansing be nigh unto us, yet we cannot see it until the Holy Ghost open our eyes; He it is who shows it unto us and leads us unto it. This is an eminent part of His office and work" (Owen).³⁰ "To have a true spiritual sense of the defilement of sin, and a gracious view of the cleaning virtue of the blood of Christ, is an eminent effect of the Spirit of grace" (Owen).³¹ But the Spirit not only reveals our need and God's remedy, but He "actually communicates the cleansing, purifying virtue of the blood of Christ unto our souls and consciences, whereby we are freed from shame, and have boldness towards God" (Owen).³²

(6) He prompts. By this is meant He prompts or urges us to duty (prayer and praise). The Spirit moves us to praise. "For we are the circumcision who worship God in (by) the Spirit" (Phil.3:3). The Spirit moves us to pray. "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication" (Zech.12:10). He is "the Spirit of grace and supplication" as He gives us grace to enable us to pray. "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom.8:26).

(7) He empowers. "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" (Eph.3:14-16). "Paul prays that we may be strengthened in the inner man, that is, for the strengthening of our spirit, in distinction from the body. And he prays that we may be strengthened with respect to the inner man by God's Spirit, that is, for the divine strengthening of our inward man" (Warfield).³³ "The Holy Ghost does purify and cleanse us by strengthening our souls by His grace unto all holy duties and against all actual sins. Having given us a principle of purity and holiness, He so acts it in duties of obedience and in opposition unto sin as that He preserves the soul free from defilements, or pure and holy, according to the tenor of the new covenant; that is, in such measure and to such a degree as universal sincerity does require" (Owen).³⁴

²⁹ A.W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit*, 95

³⁰ John Owen, *Works*, 3:443

³¹ John Owen, *Works*, 3:443

³² John Owen, *Works*, 3:445

³³ Benjamin Warfield, *The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit*, 78

³⁴ John Owen, *Works*, 3:438