

Sanctified by His Word and Spirit

MEDITATIONS ON THE OF THE SAVOY DECLARATION OF FAITH

CHAPTER 13

Of Sanctification

They that are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also further sanctified really and personally through the same virtue, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened, and mortified, and they more and more quickened, and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part; whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome, and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

INTRODUCTION

“SANCTIFY THEM BY THY TRUTH”

It is wonderful how God's word can condense so much truth into so little space, if we only take the time to recognize it. For instance, in these words from John 17, the Lord's "high-priestly prayer," we find the following most important principles: 1) The sanctification of believers is at least one objective of the High Priest of the Church, one

end for which “sanctified” himself.¹ It is, therefore, a part of the covenant of redemption, grounded upon the plea, “I have finished the work which you gave me to do.” It is consequently a result of his obedience unto death. As such it is connected with the entire divine economy of redemption, which is aimed at God glorifying himself by transforming fallen, guilty, cursed, corrupted, ignorant, perverse, Satan dominated, God-hating, truth-hating, sin-loving, sin-captive, objects of God’s free and immeasurable love, into creatures which are fitted to blissfully dwell forever amid the undiminished glory of the thrice-holy God. 2) It is a prayer to God, which tells us that the sanctifier is God Himself. The prayer is from the Son to the Father, which strongly argues that sanctifying grace, like the salvation of which it is a part, originates with the Father, the one who sent the Son, promises the Spirit, and who with the Son and in answer to the Son’s asking, sends the Holy Spirit to the church. 3) The prayer states the *means* of sanctification, which is the Truth, i.e., the Word of God. The absence of qualification is consistent with the Scriptural principle that the Truth of God is sanctifying in a wonderful variety of ministrations: reading, preaching, meditating, remembering, the administration of the sacraments (Calvin’s “visible word”), the fellowship of the saints “speaking the truth in love,” and the right exercise of church discipline.

THE ORIGIN OF SANCTIFYING GRACE

Savoy’s chapter “Of Sanctification” might have begun differently. It might have begun, as John Owen actually introduces it in his work on the Spirit, with a reminder that “in every great work of God, the *concluding, completing, perfecting acts* are ascribed unto the Holy Ghost.” This fact, Owen observes, is evident in the creation of the natural world, and particularly in the creation of man in the image of God. That is, just as the initial creation of the image of God was by the immediate agency of the Spirit, so it is by the same Holy Spirit that that image is restored and ultimately perfected in the new creation. The true beginning of sanctification is in the operation of the Spirit on the human nature of the Head of the church, Jesus Christ. The conception of that “holy thing” in the womb of the virgin should be regarded not as the taking of an untainted human nature

¹cf. Eph. 5:25-27; Titus 2:14; Heb. 2:10-11; 10:5-10.

from the immaculately conceived Mary, but as the creating, “preparing” of a perfectly pure humanity in the body, and from the substance of a sinner, through the operation of the Spirit.² Owen is surely correct in seeing this as the archetypal spiritual anointing that flows from the Head to His members.

And this belongs unto the establishment of our faith, that he who prepared, sanctified, and glorified the human nature, the natural body of Jesus Christ, the head of the church, hath undertaken to prepare, sanctify, and glorify his mystical body, or all the elect given unto him of the Father.³

SANCTIFICATION BEGUN

The chapter in Savoy actually begins, however, with the application of this grace to the sinner in his union with Christ, his regeneration, and the “creation of a new heart and spirit within.” It is well that it did, and that this topic is receiving its own thorough treatment at this conference, for two reasons: because it is a generally neglected and very important point in its own right, and because it is fundamental for everything that follows. As John Murray expressed it,

It is biblical to apply the term “sanctification” to this process of transformation and conformation. But it is a fact too frequently overlooked that in the New Testament the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a process, but of a once-for-all definitive act.⁴

Murray’s analysis of this “Definitive Sanctification” and “The Agency in Definitive Sanctification” provide a clear and convincing exposition of our chapter’s opening phrases: “They that are united to Christ, effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, ...” since what is in view here is the definitive change in the regenerate due to their

²This is not to say that the human nature of Christ was ever sinful, for it was created holy by the Spirit from the substance of Mary, prior to, though temporally simultaneous with, its assumption by the Son of God.

³ John Owen, *The Complete Works of John Owen, D.D.*, 24 vols., ed. William H. Goold. London and Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850) Vol. III, p. 236. Please note: regrettably, at the time of this writing, volume 3 of the standard hardbound Goold edition of Owen’s works was unavailable to me, so all references in this paper are to the Ages Software digital edition of Owen’s Works.

⁴Collected Writings of John Murray, Volume two: Select Lectures in Systematic Theology, “Definitive Sanctification,” (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977) p. 277.

union with Christ in his death and resurrection.⁵

The point is that at the moment of his regeneration, certain things become true of the new Christian, true because of his union with Christ, which *radically determine the nature and course of his subsequent life*, and which, at the risk of repeating Pastor Weibley's emphases, must be reasserted here as the foundation for what follows:

1. There is a genuine breach with the dominion of sin. The presence of indwelling sin does not in any way contradict this fact. In Romans 6 and Colossians 3, for example, Paul sets this definitive union with Christ in his death and resurrection as the reason why Christians are not to live in sin any longer. Indeed, the "reckoning" as a *fait accompli* that one has indeed died to sin and is now alive to God is the first step in dealing with indwelling sin.
2. There is a genuine implanting of a new power of godliness. There is not only the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but the creation of a "new man," with new affections, new dispositions, a new "*habitus*" preserved, maintained, increased, by that indwelling Spirit.⁶
3. By the Holy Spirit's indwelling the believer is in vital union with the risen, glorified, reigning Christ, from whom proceeds a perpetual communication of spiritual life and light unto all the members of His mystical body by the Holy Spirit.

These three things are fundamental to the further, personal, and real sanctification that follows.

"FURTHER SANCTIFIED"

The word "further," however, tells us that this definitive sanctification, though radical, and "total" *in the same sense that our depravity is "total,"* is nevertheless the beginning of a process which must be carried onward. Like Adam, not only Christ but all men are created not only to be righteous before the law, but holy in terms of true fel-

⁵ Cf., Murray's commentary on the sixth chapter of Romans and the sermons of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones on the same chapter.

⁶ For an extensive exposition of this see Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, Vol 6, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in our Salvation*, Book V. James Nicholl, 1861-1866, Reprinted by Reformation Heritage Books (Grand Rapids, 2006) p. 187-230. See also Jonathan Edwards very important *Treatise on Grace*, (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd.) 1971.

lowship with God and actual conformity to his character. As Jesus keeps telling his followers, “In so doing you will be like your Father in heaven.”⁷ In other words, justification of the ungodly was the beginning condition, but never the ultimate objective in the work of Christ, who came to purify a people unto himself who are zealous of good works. Like Adam, the regenerate are *posse non peccare*. Unlike Adam, the Christian has indwelling sin in his members, and lives not in an Eden, but in a world of sinners. Adam was never intended to sustain his sinlessness in independence from God, and neither is the saint. Unlike Adam, however, the new believer is in an indissoluble union with Christ. He was never intended to live the Christian life, in independence from Christ, and he cannot: “without me you can do nothing.” The Holy Spirit is in the believer, supplying this for the physically absent Christ. It is easy to see from this one reason why sanctification by the Holy Spirit is a gradual process rather than an instantaneous one, i.e., why there is no crisis experience of “entire sanctification.” Such an instantaneous work would deprive the saint of a major element of the experience of likeness to Christ his mediator and head, namely, that of learning obedience in dependence upon God and by so doing, like the Only-begotten, growing in wisdom and favor with God. Paul’s experience of straining forward to grow in the knowledge of Christ, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being made conformable unto his death, would be utterly meaningless if there was not some duration of fellowship in walking the way of the cross.

“REALLY AND PERSONALLY”

“Really and personally” tell us something which needs stressing. As the Puritans were careful to make plain that man was still the possessor of remnants of a fallen nature (e.g., the Diablonians in Bunyan’s *Holy War*), they were equally determined to build on the fact that there was a new nature in man which was the agent of the sanctified life. Thus Thomas Manton describes the Christian as a “partaker of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1.4) and somewhere describes this as “his communicable excellencies, or such divine properties as can be imparted to the creature, and these not considered in their absolute

⁷ Matthew 5: 45,48.

perfection, but as they are agreeable to our present state and capacity.” As a person is united vitally to Christ, he is given a new principle of life. William Gurnal describes this as an “inward disposition and quality, sweetly, powerfully, and constantly inclining it to that which is holy; so that the Christian, though passive in the production, is afterward active, and co-working with the Spirit in all actions of holiness, not as a lifeless instrument in the hand of a musician, but as a living child in the hand of a father. Therefore, they are said to be led by the Spirit. Rom. vii, 14.”⁸

There is, I believe, a tendency to so insist on depravity and indwelling sin that the change effected by the indwelling Spirit becomes underestimated, as if the sanctified life were only the Holy Spirit Himself acting through a spiritually inanimate object. It seems more honoring to the Spirit and more humbling to the human to say this, but it is neither, for it diminishes the Spirit’s work as the agent of new creation. The authors of Savoy were very insistent on just the opposite, arguing not only for the necessity of the *continual* supply of grace from the Spirit, but *also* for the reality of the change wrought by that Spirit on the object of that grace. In our day, for example, it is not uncommon for evangelical people to talk about “getting out of the way,” and “turning it over the Lord” and “allowing the Spirit” to do something “*through* me.” We do not say that the Spirit believes or repents for us or through us, though His work is necessary for both, but rather that the human enabled by the Spirit, i.e., the newborn “spiritual” man, believes and repents. It is no different with subsequent acts of Christian godliness or righteousness; they are acts not of the Spirit directly, but of the spiritual man, for which God is ever to be praised. This is what is meant in the words “really and “personally,” and understanding this is critical to our understanding of the work of the Spirit in sanctification.

The Indwelling Spirit

Though engaging the entire Trinity, “sanctification is peculiarly the work of the Holy Spirit.” In answer to the question of why the Holy Spirit is called holy, a catechism

⁸ *The Christian in Complete Armor* (Glasgow, 1864) p. 408.

from the time of the English Reformation answers,

Not only for his own holiness, but for that by Him are made holy the chosen of God, and members of Christ. And therefore have the Scriptures termed him the Spirit of sanctification, or making holy.⁹

Summarizing the work of regeneration in terms of the initiation of sanctification, John Owen writes, “*That in the sanctification of believers, the Holy Ghost doth work in them, in their whole souls, their minds, wills, and affections, a gracious, supernatural habit, principle, and disposition of living unto God; wherein the substance or essence, the life and being, of holiness doth consist*” (emphasis his).¹⁰ What we ordinarily consider the work of sanctification he describes as the “preservation, cherishing, and increase” of this principle.

This is the new nature, its formation by the Spirit is the actual way we become “partakers of the divine nature,” not by the ontological transformation of our humanity into divinity,” but by the repair, the metamorphosis of sin-deformed divine attributes communicated to human nature into grace-reformed ones; i.e., a human nature becoming what it was created to be--godlike. By His presence, power, and active, intelligent, personal, wise, individualized communion with the new man (through the persevering travail of the Christian minister, we might add!),¹¹ the Holy Spirit accomplishes the formation of Christ, i.e., Christ’s character, and nature (not his divine nature, but the human image of it) in the saint. This new nature is the object of further sanctifying influences as it is also the agent of the sanctified life.

⁹Liturgies of King Edward VI, quoted by Phillip E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965) 79.

¹⁰John Owen, *Complete Works*, Vol. III, p. 571.

In saying that this new nature is the object of further sanctifying influences we again assert that it's condition is dependent on the Spirit, under the Sovereign hand of the Spirit, and while also preserved by the Spirit, is peculiar to each believer in strength and other characteristics.¹² It is capable of increase or decrease and, as it is a person and not a stone, is also active and responsible in its growth.

The Spirit sanctifies the new man first by creating and then nurturing new dispositions in the soul. As Owen expresses it,

This disposition of heart and soul, which I place as the first property or effect of the principle of holiness ... is in the Scripture called *fear, love, delight*, and by the names of such other affections as express a constant regard and inclination unto their objects: for these things do not denote the principle of holiness itself, which is seated in the mind, or understanding and will, whereas they are the names of affections only; but they signify the first way whereby that principle doth act itself, in a holy inclination of the heart unto spiritual obedience. ... It is that which is intended in the promise of the covenant: Jeremiah 32:39, "I will give them one heart, that they may fear me;" which is the same with the "new spirit," Ezekiel 11:19. The new heart, as hath been declared, is the new nature, the new creature, the new, spiritual, supernatural principle of holiness. The first effect, the first fruit hereof, is the fear of God always, or a new spiritual bent and inclination of soul unto all the will and commands of God. And this new spirit, this fear of God, is still expressed as the inseparable consequent of the new heart, or the writing of the law of God in our hearts, which are the same. So it is called, "fearing the LORD and his goodness," Hosea 3:5.¹³

In addition to a holy fear, other theologians have expounded upon the disposition

¹¹ Galatians 4:19. Commenting on this text, Luther says, "The apostle also speaks of this form of Christ in Col. 3:10: 'Put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.' Therefore Paul wants to restore the image of God or of Christ in the Galatians. It had been deformed or distorted by the false apostles, and it consists in this, that they feel, think, and want exactly what God does, whose thought and will it is that we obtain the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus Christ, His Son, whom He sent into the world to be the expiation for our sins and for those of the whole world (1 John 2:2), so that through the Son we might acknowledge Him as our Father, who has been placated and is kindly disposed toward us. Those who believe this are like God; that is, they think of God altogether as He feels in His heart, and they have the same form in their mind that God or Christ has. This, according to Paul, is to 'be renewed in the spirit of your minds and to put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God' (Eph. 4:23–24)."

¹² See the author's previous RCF Conference paper "Hearts in the Hand of the Lord"

¹³ *III*: 589.

of *love*, as when Paul makes love the distinguishing mark of spirituality in First Corinthians thirteen, or of “delight,” the “joy unspeakable and full of glory,” spoken of by Peter. Jonathan Edwards will later argue at length that “true religion consists very much in the affections,” and then demonstrate that all true religious affections are the fruit of this very thing: the influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart made new in His gracious work of regeneration. These “fruit of the Spirit,” together with the others enumerated in Galatians 6:23, naturally, inexorably, arise in the Christian’s heart because they are, or arise in answer to, the nature of the Spirit who abides there, whose nature is Divine Love.

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Furthermore, it is argued by the authors of our confession that this is no idle inclination, but a *powerful* one, prevailing, at length, against all opposition. It is subject to a new law, “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.” “Law” here indicates a compelling, “regulating and actuating”¹⁵ power. As Owen expresses it,

That there is, in and by the grace of regeneration and sanctification, a power and ability given unto us of living unto God, or performing all the duties of acceptable obedience. This is the first act of that spiritual habit, arising out of it and inseparable from it. It is called “strength” or “power:” Isaiah 40:31, “They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength;” that is, for and unto obedience, or walking with God without weariness. Strength they have, and in their walking with God it is renewed or increased. By the same grace are we “strengthened with all might, according to the glorious power of God,” Colossians 1:11; or, “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man,” Ephesians 3:16; whereby “we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us,” Philippians 4:13. In our calling or conversion to God, “all things are given unto” us by his “divine power” which “pertain unto life and godliness,” 2 Peter 1:3, — everything that is needful to enable us unto a holy life. The habit and principle of grace that is wrought in believers gives them new power and spiritual strength unto all duties of obedience. The water of the Spirit

¹⁴ See Jonathan Edwards sermons on 1 Corinthians 13 entitled *Charity and its Fruits*, his *Treatise on the Religious Affections*, and his *Treatise on Grace*. Each of these works, while addressing the acts of godliness and righteousness show convincingly that the seat of true religion is the regenerated heart. See also, Owen on *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*. Also, along this line, consider D. M. Lloyd-Jones’ sermons on the Beatitudes in his *Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount*, where he shows that the beatitudes are not moralistic virtues, but traits of the work of the Holy Spirit in the regenerate man.

¹⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), commentary on Romans 8:2.

therein is not only a “well of water” abiding in them, but it “springeth up into everlasting life,” John 4:14, or enables us continually to such gracious actings as have a tendency thereunto. There is a sufficiency in the grace of God bestowed on them that believe, to enable them unto the obedience required of them, — so God told our apostle, when he was ready to faint under his temptation, that “his grace was sufficient for him,” 2 Corinthians 12:9, — or there is a power in all that are sanctified, whereby they are able to yield all holy obedience unto God. They are alive unto God, alive to righteousness and holiness. They have a principle of spiritual life; and where there is life, there is power in its kind and for its end. Whence there is in our sanctification not only a principle or inherent habit of grace bestowed on us, whereby we really and habitually, as to state and condition, differ from all unregenerate persons whatever, but there belongs moreover thereunto an active power, or an ability for and unto spiritual, holy obedience; which none are partakers of but those who are so sanctified.¹⁶

It is necessary to think further about this power before considering the role of the word in sanctification because of the relation between the two. For instance, the power of the spiritual mind consists in this, that it is able to “discern” the Law of God, and to understand spiritual things in a spiritual, non-carnal, non-worldly way. It is the same Christ seen by disciple and Pharisee, but the former can confess, “We know that you have the words of eternal life,” while the latter, beholding him “after the flesh” rather than “after the Spirit,” murmur among themselves, “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?”¹⁷ The change in the strength and direction of the affections, and a change in the valuation the soul has of God, give a new power to the will. This is illustrated by Paul who counted all his former treasure as trash for the surpassing treasure of knowing Christ, and then, to obtain that knowledge more perfectly, forgot the former things to press on to know Him better. The same is clear from the faithful of Hebrews 11, who esteeming the things of Christ superior to the best of the world, left all to follow Him. But it is a mark of every reborn person: he denies himself, takes up his cross and follows Christ.

¹⁶ *III*: 599

¹⁷ Compare John 6:68-69 vs. Luke 5:21

THE ENGRAFTED WORD

Sanctification proceeds as the Holy Spirit continues to *transform* the saint's newly sensitive heart, by *informing* his awakened and receptive mind, and so, not only moving his will, but continuing the development, i.e., strengthening and expanding the capacity of, his newly godward-oriented affections. So doing, the saint experiences a growth in grace conjoined with a growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is why the Word of God is both necessary and sufficient, for it is the Spirit's way of reproducing the character of the incarnate Word in the members of his mystical body. There is, first of all, a clear parallel to the original creation, when the creative word was conjoined with the hovering, brooding, shaking, Spirit of God, elsewhere called "the finger of God."¹⁸ There is, afterwards, the conjoining of the work of the Spirit and the Word in the work of regeneration of the sinner, when the words of Christ, these words which "are spirit and life,"-- this "seed" of spiritual life-- is received by the heart prepared for it by the Spirit. Herein the heart is "sanctified by the washing of regeneration," by the word of God.¹⁹

It is a great mistake to think of the word as effectual apart from the Holy Spirit. When the Scriptures describe the effectual attributes of the word, they are describing its characters as it is *when accompanied by the power of the Spirit*, and not merely the bare words. (Indeed, apart from the power of the Spirit, the reaction to the word by the sinner, or by the remaining sin in the saint, is just the very opposite of what its character warrants, as is clear from Romans 7.) Take, for example, the effects of the law of the Lord as described in Psalm 19: it "converts the soul," "makes wise the simple," "rejoices the heart," "enlightens the eyes." Or, as described in Psalm 119: it causes the turning of the eyes from worthless things, walking at liberty, comfort in affliction, gives good judgment, wisdom, knowledge, and peace. Yet in none of these things, nor in any other spiritual gain, does the effect come by the word operating *ex opere operato* nor by the unassisted running or willing of the hearer. Liberty, comfort, judgment, peace, joy, faith-

¹⁸ Compare Luke 11:20 with Matthew 12:28. Other uses of "the finger of God" which fit in perfectly with the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word are Exodus 8:19; Exodus 31: 18; Deut. 9:10; and Psalm 8:3.

¹⁹ John 6:63; 15:3; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:22.

fulness, self-control, etc., are all the effects of the Spirit bringing the truth to the understanding, and to the reception, and to the application, and ultimately to the reformation of the heart and life.

Hence, our writers rightly tell us that sanctification is through the “indwelling Word and Spirit.” The word must be indwelling also. It must be “eaten,” it must be “ingrafted,” it must be received into good soil where it becomes fruitful. This receptivity is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit may use it immediately, or once it is indwelling, at any time of his wise choosing, to affect sanctification.

How does He do it? Typically, this is done by causing the saint to realize the power of that word. First, as so vividly by the Spirit raising Ezekiel to his feet,²⁰ the Holy Spirit arrests our attention, so that, like Lydia at the first, we “attend to the word” that is spoken. The Spirit “opens the ears,” implying the removal of prejudice and resistance to the message. Likewise there is the opening the eyes of the understanding. This is absolutely necessary. The seed that fell on the pathway did not sink in because the hearer “understands it not.” Regardless of the obvious fact that some portions of it are obscure, the Spirit must act for even the simplest spiritual truths to be accurately understood. Again, as at the first with the Thessalonians, so often afterwards, even with very familiar scripture, the Spirit impresses us that this is the Word of God, not men. This word comes with divine authority, and is received as such. God is speaking to us concerning something that we are to believe, to feel, to change. You begin to react, maybe negatively because of indwelling sin, but then another divinely revealed consideration is brought to bear, and your convictions are strengthened, your fear is allayed, your perplexity is removed, and your love of God, your hope in God, your faith in God, your hatred of sin, your pity and compassion for your neighbor, your realization of the emptiness of the world and the surpassing value of things unseen,--these things are strengthened, they become more real, more a part of you.

As promised to the Apostles, the Spirit aids in the recall of his previously re-

²⁰ Ezekiel 2:1-2.

ceived revelation. Furthermore, the Spirit helps in the collaboration of the truths received so that relationships between them are observed, admitted, and the truth newly grasped is received also as from the Lord.²¹ After all this, due to the opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil, the Spirit strengthens the inner man to receive the truth, or even more, to “lay hold of”²² the truth which may be too good, or too terrible, to take in otherwise. The Spirit aids in the saint in the practical application of the word to the situation at hand. Finally, the Spirit strengthens the saint in the performance of the word. In other words you become changed toward God, toward yourself, toward your fellow man and God’s creation. You become more of what the work of regeneration initiated. It is for this reason that the early reformers spoke of regeneration and sanctification as one thing. They simply had not begun to dissect the process to the extent that later reformed orthodoxy would do.

What are the effects of the word upon the soul? Everything the word is said to do in the life of the saint has some sanctifying effect. Take the broad categories of its operations for example: “doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.”²³ The word is profitable for doctrine, but doctrine is profitable for every aspect of sanctification. The Spirit is said to enlighten the soul. “The entrance of your *word* gives light.” Here is the way that the path of the just is like the rising of the sun, growing brighter until the perfect day, i.e., by the increase of spiritual enlightenment. What is faith, but receiving and duly responding to the truth of God, generally most clearly and convincingly and appropriately communicated by the Word?²⁴ How do we know, savingly know, know so as to be humbled, so as to love, so as to trust and be emboldened to obey the God with whom we have to do? How shall we know the evil of our sin, which we are to hate and kill in mortification, or the sympathy of our great high priest or the efficacy of his blood for the cleansing of our sin, emboldening us to approach the throne of Grace, and serve

²¹ For example consider Acts 11:16 with Acts 15:14-18 and Acts 15: 28.

²² Ephesians 3:16-18; Hebrews 6:18.

²³ 2 Tim. 3:14-17.

²⁴ WCF 14:2

the living God with a clear conscience? How shall we know the things which make up the substance of our hope, those truths which will make us steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord? The Word. Moreover, the Spirit uses the Word to overcome resistance to the Word. For instance, in the Spirit breaks up the “fallow ground” with the iron plowshare of the Word. Against the temptation to be choked by the cares and pleasures of this life, the Spirit, through the word, causes us to realize those things which make for perseverance, and the vanity of earthly pleasures. To those who have grown sick in soul, through their foolish indolence he sends his word and heals them. It enables the troubled sinner to lay hold of the truth of the word which the word bears upon the particular point of discomfort. When one might stumble at the dispensations of Providence, the coming of the Word of the Lord, will bring about an acquiescence. The word of the Lord gives the “matter” of holiness, so that by reading the precepts, observing the examples, beholding the results of godliness and ungodliness in the sacred word, he can come to learn, and more than learn, can come to know the characters of the sanctified life with a due sense of its importance.

How about reproof? In the word we not only receive the material for reproof, but, again, we are by the Spirit impressed with the divine authority of the one reproofing, and with other motives to be moved to change, such as the gentleness and love of the King, not only the guilt, odiousness, and danger of sins, but also the evil that sin should remain within the body of one so redeemed and sealed and exalted by such a Lord. The initial work of the Spirit along this line was to “convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come.”²⁵ That is, to bring the sinner into a condition of poverty of spirit, and of more than mere “legal fears” into an evangelical, Christ-crucified-for-it conviction of sin’s exceeding sinfulness. This new “spiritual sense” of sin is carried onward, not taken away, in the soul of the spiritually minded in their sanctification. For example, in the Old Testament, Asaph, in the midst of his head long tumble into self-pity and envy of the wicked, enters the sanctuary: “Then I understood their latter end.” Job became increasingly self-justifying against the counsels of his fel-

²⁵ John 16:8; see vs. 7-15

low men. Then God speaks to him from the whirlwind “face to face” and righteous Job abhors himself and repents in dust and ashes. Paul, the self-righteous Pharisee, no stranger to the word of God, says the “Law came to me, sin revived,” i.e., my sinful flesh became aroused to sin by the holy law, and “I died,” leading him to know himself better thereafter and to carry on the life of sanctification, recognizing the sufficiency of Christ for him, walking in the Spirit, and “through the Spirit mortifying the flesh.” The virtue of the Word of God in mortification of sin is that the Spirit continues, through the word, to provide motives and means (including numerous great and precious promises for encouragement) to sin’s destruction, having already, destroyed its reign through Christ’s death.

Similarly, “correction” is not only described and exemplified in the Word, but it is accompanied with the most powerful motives and helps. Here is growth in grace and mortification. “Instruction in righteousness,” is not only the memorization of the pertinent bible verses, but the accompanying operation of the Spirit who gives the reader or hearer a hunger and thirst for that righteousness. Again, one might consider the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians five, and compare those graces with the effects of the word. In short, every thing that is conveyed by the word “holy” is delineated in the word-revelation of the character of God, as revealed in Christ, and everything delineated in that word is brought into existence by the Spirit. The Word teaches learns the “manner” of holiness—not only how to pray and react to the opposition of sinners, but how to think “Christianly,” how to use the word against temptation, unbelief, discouragement, and heresy, how to “comfort one another with these words.” The heart, open to being impressed further by the Lord is both directed and motivated in its affections, the conscience is quickened and informed. This is of inestimable importance to sanctification (cf. 1 Tim. 1:5-7, 18-20). The conscience is a moral judge, “accusing or excusing.” The problem with the unregenerate conscience is that it is not duly respected and it responds to a perverted standard of wrong and right, until it is recalibrated to the standard of God’s word and until the Spirit sets it free from its captivity to the lusts of the mind. Furthermore, it may fairly be argued that alongside the word, the other “wing,” or “leg” in the process of sanctification is *prayer*. Even here, the Spirit is the great helper (Ro-

mans 8:26-27), but the principal *means* of help in the “matter” and in the “manner” of prayer is through the word of truth.²⁶

It would, no doubt, be an interesting and profitable exercise to meditate further on this subject²⁷ and if one does so, it should not be very long before he realizes that the entire process makes an upward spiral, with every advancement in knowledge tending to encourage greater faith, love, hope and the entire spectrum of righteousness and godliness. What is really going on in this process is that the saint is beholding his Savior, beholding His image in the glass of the word, and the Spirit provides a spiritual energy that so impresses that image beheld in the word of truth into the consciousness of the saint, so directs, and strengthens his affections and trains their expression, that he becomes like Christ. This is the meaning of 2 Corinthians 2:12-16 and 3:16-18:

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

This “beholding the glory of the Lord” is, for Paul in this context, precisely to receive the Word of Truth, the gospel of Christ in the power of the liberating Spirit and the result is sanctification, i.e., transformation “into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” Thus, the objective in sanctification is conformity to our heavenly Father, as he is revealed to us most clearly in his Son. The operator in this objective is the Holy Spirit. The word supplies both the pattern and the principle tool (though not in isolation from others).

USE: RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD

One will not have to profit from the word very long, however, before he realizes

²⁶See Owen’s *Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer*, in Volume 4 of his *Complete Works*.

²⁷ A. W. Pink has elaborated brilliantly on this theme in *Profiting from the Word*. (Edinburgh,: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970). In what may well be his most underappreciated book, considering its value, Pink illustrates how the saint profits from the word with respect to ten areas: Sin, God, Christ, Prayer, Good Works, Obedience, the World, the Promises, Joy and Love.

the word itself teaches the importance of human effort in the process. Owen expressed it well: “we must labor after and endeavor to grow in this renovation of our natures by the Holy Ghost.”²⁸ Spiritual Mindedness is both a grace and a duty. Elsewhere, he describes our duties for growth in the renovation of our natures thus:

Have we *received* this principle of holiness and of spiritual life by the gracious operation of the Holy Ghost? — there are, among many others, *three duties* incumbent on us, whereof we ought to be as careful as of our souls. And the first is, carefully and diligently by all means to cherish and preserve it in our hearts. This sacred *depositum* of the new creature, of the divine nature, is intrusted with us to take care of, to cherish and improve. If we willingly, or through our neglect, suffer it to be wounded by temptations, weakened by corruptions, or not exercised in all known duties of obedience, our guilt is great, and our trouble will not be small. And then, secondly, it is equally incumbent on us to evince and manifest it by its fruits, in the mortification of corrupt lusts and affections, in all duties of holiness, righteousness, charity, and piety, in the world: for that God may be glorified hereby is one of the ends why he endues our natures with it; and without these visible fruits, we expose our entire profession of holiness to reproach. And in like manner is it required that we be *thankful* for what we have received.²⁹

What all this tells us is that any scheme for sanctification which contents itself with worship service or individual or group bible study, for example, rather than a full orbed Christian life and piety, is doomed to failure. The Spirit is not interested in making misshapen monsters but will fashion Christ’s members into every character of His image through the application of the Word in its full spectrum, as tested and developed in the experience of living in the fellowship of the saints and opposition from the world as men engaged in glorifying God in the body. This will not be done by those who obey in parts.

The indwelling Spirit and the holy character and privilege of the new man must be taken seriously. Hence we must individually and corporately “keep in step with the Spirit,” “not grieve the Spirit,” “keep on being filled with the Spirit,” “quench not the

²⁸ III: 533

²⁹ III: 587

Spirit,³⁰ all of which imply a conscious and careful, positive, realization of the need to recognize our dependence on the Spirit and maintaining of fellowship with Him, not in word only, but in deed and in truth with faith, and a faithful obedience to his leading by the word. Because of the centrality of the Word in the Spirit's operations, the saint must labor to take heed how he hears, to study, memorize, meditate, believe and obey and use the word, prizing it as gold, and wielding it as a sword. Consequently, we see the indispensable place of the truth, i.e., the word *rightly interpreted and applied*. Consequently, any scheme of sanctification which does not consist in the copious acquisition and due application of the Word of God cannot be expected to succeed in genuine godliness, no matter how popular it becomes, nor how "amazing" the results. As difficult as it may be to accomplish in this multi-cultural, "multi-theological" modern church, this may even require teaching of a so-called "negative" character to pull down the strongholds of error in the minds of genuine Christians.

On this last point of Owen, "thankfulness," let us close with this thought. Two most precious and potent sanctifiers and motives to sanctification are these: the fact and assured sense of our adoption and perseverance. Yet these are both the work of the Spirit through the Word as described above.³¹ If we know we are sons of God and going to dwell forever with Him in glory, if we know that we are "hidden in the Savior's side, by the Spirit sanctified," and hence, indwelt by Him who will quicken our mortal bodies and make us like Him, then we should be full of thanksgiving, and it will be a thanksgiving which will only motivate us strongly in one direction, ---- sanctification!

³⁰ Gal. 5:25; Eph. 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:19

³¹ Romans 8:12-17; 2 Cor. 1:20-22; Ephesians 1:3, 13-14; 4:30.